

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly **worker**



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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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## May's numbers don't add up



# LETTERS



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

## Climate

Despite its length, Daniel Harvey's full-page response ('Environmental crisis is real', November 15) to my wee letter (November 8) essentially reinforces the point I am making: climate change - even dramatic climate change - is a natural process, which has occurred throughout the life of the Earth since its inception.

My point that Antarctica was ice-free, with tropical blue seas, was not to promote time travel to some idyllic, pre-human historic period. I am, of course, aware that the overall environmental conditions for existing humanity would be unsustainable. That wasn't the point: the point was to illustrate the cyclical nature of heat and cold on the planet. Ice caps are not some sort of indigenous feature of Earth - we neither invented climate change nor can we stop it, as the green lobby demands. Much of what Daniel says in his article is entirely complementary to what I said - except perhaps to state that 90% of all species which ever lived on the planet were extinct before we got here.

What we have to do is to minimise our contribution to climate change, which may be as high as 50% of the current effects. The other factor, of course, is the misdistribution of wealth and power. Why is it that the Netherlands can cope with rising sea levels, and indeed reclaim land from the sea, while third-world islands risk submersion? The answer is the lack of wealth, and of science and engineering capacity, in those impoverished countries. These are questions of class power, which are well within our human capacity to resolve.

Me and Daniel may disagree as to what the main human driver of climate change is, but let us agree that fossil fuel production of CO<sub>2</sub> is a principal factor. If the effects of coal, gas and oil in producing CO<sub>2</sub> is such a pivotal question, than the pivotal answer is carbon capture and storage (CCS) and other clean coal/gas systems.

Jim Cook suggests we will not be able to resolve this question without the overthrow of capitalism (Letters, November 15). I don't agree - sophisticated CCS systems have already been developed. The Don Valley scheme (based at my colliery, Hatfield Main, Doncaster) would have taken 100% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and 90% of all other emissions out of the process. Its by-product is hydrogen, which was planned to be given free to the council to operate trams and buses (hydrogen is an inert, non-polluting gas) and in turn could have produced virtually free public transport in the region.

The scheme would have been up and running within two years, producing the cheapest fuel in the country at something like £30 per megawatt hour. Under a 'free' market - and now free of the fossil fuel 'emissions' tax - there would have been a 'dash to coal', with the last-minute revival and rebirth of the National Union of Mineworkers.

The European Union called it "the best carbon reduction scheme in the world" and offered £1 billion to help fund it. A further £1 billion was raised from private funding and the government was supposed to match this. No-one can tell me it was anything other than politics and class spite which caused them to pull the plug and let the scheme fall.

But if the rising levels of CO<sub>2</sub> around the world is the critical element in climate change, CCS is the urgent and critical solution. No other scheme could virtually end fossil-fuel CO<sub>2</sub> emissions within a five-year period without killing the vital industries of massive developing countries like

China and India. That would not meet with the approval of the green lobby, of course, because it allows the coal and gas and oil industry to continue, while taking away the main stick to whack them with.

50% of the world's energy comes from coal, and we haven't scratched the surface in terms of reserves. It will be mined and, that being the case, we must ensure it is burned as productively and environmentally safely as possible. The elimination of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and continued coal, gas and oil extraction are perfectly compatible.

There is indeed a crisis, but one well within our capacity to manage and contain.

**David Douglass**  
South Shields

## IBT splits

On October 19 the world was stunned to learn the International Bolshevik Tendency had split. We realised the seriousness of this occurrence because the split statement was titled: 'A note on the world situation. Recent departures and line change on Russia'. The falling out of a few dozen, at the most, might seem to be a storm in a teacup to cynics, but these were the last living remainders of True Trotskyism and so contained the only hope of humanity for the world revolution and universal human liberation. Or so some, at least, believed.

The split came after a 10-year internal faction fight. The majority - 'Nimps' ('Russia is not imperialist'), followers of Tom Riley from Canada - walked out, and now the minority - 'Imps', followers of Bill Logan from New Zealand - took over with their new line. However, the mystery of why a majority should abandon ship was solved when the majority statement came out on October 24. This revealed that the majority was not the majority at all, because another faction, based in South Asia - IBT SA - existed, which correctly denounced both as pro-imperialist. Those who said Russia was not imperialist wanted to be neutral in the coups in the Maidan in February 2014, in Egypt in July 2013, in Turkey in July 2016 and also in the constitutional coup in Brazil in May 2016, because they were all bourgeois forces and it didn't matter what happened as a result.

This led to outright denial by the Nimps that there was any US/Israel involvement in the Egyptian coup - or at least that it did not benefit the US or Israel in any way, despite open boasting in the Zionist press of their victory. The slaughter of Egyptian workers was a matter of indifference, to which the SA comrades objected strongly. In Turkey it was merely a matter of degree of democracy, US involvement was denied and when proof was requested by the SA, reply came there none.

Previously the 'left' opposition Nimps had attacked Imp Barbara Dorn for formally taking a dual defeatist position on the 2014 Maidan coup and subsequent civil war, whilst demanding Russia hand over Crimea and Sevastopol, Russia's Black Sea naval base, to Ukraine: ie, to Nato and the USA. However, the Nimps took a neutral position in the US-funded and organised and fascist-led Maidan coup. The SA roundly denounce both:

"It has flinched from the struggle against imperialism, particularly the USA. The 'defenders of [IBT leader Joseph] Seymour's Marxism' ... are seeking the line of least resistance, revising Lenin and Trotsky's lessons. They are defending the treacherous position, especially for the colonial people, as 'tradition'. They have showed a cynical and bystander's attitude on the events of imperialist 'regime change' and national liberation. The persistent abstentionist arguments from both factions, covered by ultra-

radical phrases about 'dual defeatism' - from the argument that 'Russia was and is imperialist' just after the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 to the neutralist position on the coups in Egypt in 2013 and in Turkey in 2016 - were the result of the subordinating attitude before imperialist pressure. (This attitude is also related to Iran, Libya, Ukraine, Syria and Venezuela.)"

The remaining Sparts hang together because they all think the original 1963 split from the US Socialist Workers Party took with it the golden thread of the continuity of Trotskyism and this golden thread made in the only genuine Trotskyist group on the planet until the late 70s, when Tom and Bill began to go into opposition.

In the summer of 2017 there came a bolt from the blue - or, more specifically, from the mothership. *The struggle against the chauvinist hydra* - document of the Seventh International Conference of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), translated from French, told us the shocking news that the ICL had been wrong on the national question from at least 1974. They had degenerated into supporters of US imperialism (correct), but they were all right now that they had corrected these gross errors (incorrect). And they surely flagellated themselves massively in that document. But the golden thread had not been broken, fortunately, because it was all the fault of that scoundrel bogus Trotskyist 'theoretician', Joseph Seymour, who was accused of continually undermining and subverting Robertson's clear revolutionary line since 1974 - at least, when the first major capitulation to US chauvinism (that monstrous Hydra!) began to kick in. Seymour is Robertson's regular whipping boy and seems to like it. In fact, there is little change of line and it is all down to the need to recruit a group of French-speaking Quebec nationalists by giving ground on the national question and positively advocating the right of Quebec and Catalonia to secede from Canada and Spain and form their own (bourgeois) nations.

This turn led to difficulty for the IBT, because crucial to the whole Spart tradition is the theory of 'interpenetrated peoples'. As AG, who lives in Ireland, puts it:

"The position you critique is just the recognition that in situations where there are intermingled/interpenetrated populations of relatively similar sizes with different national self-identities then there is no simple application of the bourgeois democratic demand of right of self-determination, which can be implemented in a democratic fashion. It is only by establishment of a workers' republic that the national question can possibly be resolved democratically."

Demanding the withdrawal of British troops, whilst sanctifying a vile, racist, supremacist ideology as a legitimate culture, is shocking. Was Nazism the 'culture' of the Germans, and so be respected? Defending the rights of the Zionist oppressor and equating that racist ideology with the ideology and struggles of the Palestinians for basic democratic rights is contemptible. Likewise in Cyprus the imperialist forces were the EOKA and the invasion by Turkey was a legitimate defence of that population against the neo-fascist coup.

And, no, we are not seeking a 'democratic' solution to the division of Ireland, but a revolutionary one. That division was imposed by fascist terror in the months of July and August 1920 and it will have to be undone by revolutionary violence.

The Sparts had placed a big question mark over the theory of interpenetrated peoples, which contains the concomitant opposition to the forcible reunification of Ireland under capitalism. In Ireland

this involves the Spart family in a ridiculous reduction of the conflict to a Catholic v Protestant conflict and adopting Gerry Adams' loyalist veto on a united Ireland 21 years before the Good Friday agreement sold out the struggle against British imperialism. And that pernicious 1977 'Theses on Ireland' was actually a move to the left. Previously the IST had a 'For a socialist Ulster' position - a direct capitulation to the neo-fascist Progressive Unionist Party *et al.*

The Hydra document contains the following on Puerto Rico:

"However, it is false that colonial oppression can't be ended short of socialist revolution. And denouncing the possibility of Puerto Rican independence under capitalism as "neocolonial independence" is to deny Puerto Rico's right to self-determination: ie, it's chauvinist."

But the 'interpenetrated peoples' theory still allows *Workers Hammer*, the ICL British paper, to deny Ireland's right to self-determination that they have now grudgingly conceded to Puerto Rico:

"Northern Catholics, part of the Irish nation, remain oppressed. But they live within the same territory as the Protestants - a distinct community which largely defines itself against the Irish Catholic nation and which fears becoming an oppressed minority within a united Ireland. As Leninists, we oppose the Irish nationalist programme of reunifying the six counties of Northern Ireland with the southern Catholic Irish bourgeois state. An equitable solution to the conflicting claims of the interpenetrated peoples of the north requires the overthrow of capitalism throughout the British Isles."

Does this really mean that we cannot begin the struggle against British imperialism without the permission of the loyalists, Britain's most loyal agents in Ireland? Ah, but you see the Hydra document has thought of this condition too. Trotsky's permanent revolution applies only to colonial countries like Guadeloupe and Puerto Rica, which has no real interpenetrated peoples.

What about the Malvinas? Oops, that is a British colony with British settlers, like Gibraltar - definitively British, so no support for the 1982 invasion by that horrible Galtieri. The ICL did not seek the defeat of the British expeditionary, because they said the war was fought in the wrong place and did not threaten Argentine sovereignty.

The whole Spart family must support that imperialist position, because the golden thread depends on it. The socialist revolution requires anti-imperialists, not these apologists for the masters of life.

**Gerry Downing**  
Socialist Fight

## True or false?

Jack Conrad accuses me of giving a "standard", "familiar" and "well known" account of the events leading up to the publication of Trotsky's *Lessons of October* in 1924. He omits, however, to answer one critical question: does he think my account - based upon the works of Isaac Deutscher, Moshe Lewin and EH Carr - is accurate in the essentials?

If he thinks otherwise, I invite him to supply an alternative account. If not, he might explain why he portrayed *Lessons* in a way that readers - especially those less knowledgeable about Soviet history - were bound to interpret as an offensive move by Trotsky: an attack on the "revolutionary honour" of old Bolsheviks ("throwing down a political gauntlet"), written with the purpose of furthering his own political ambitions. In fact it was an attempt to defend himself and the historical record against a mounting wave of distortion and falsehood. This was concocted as part of an anti-Trotsky campaign, initiated and prosecuted by the ruling triumvir - Kamenev, Zinoviev and Stalin.

The 6,000 words it took me to recount the major episodes of this campaign up to 1924 were in my view necessary to correct a seriously misleading impression created by comrade Conrad in fewer than 150 words.

**Jim Creegan**  
New York

## Fighting fund

# End with a bang

Readers will not be surprised to learn that after last week's disappointingly low increase (a mere £182) to our November fighting fund, things have turned out rather differently over the last seven days.

As I said last time, the second week of every month is always the least productive, mainly due to the paucity of standing orders that land in our account at that time, but what immediately follows is always rather better in terms of SOs - they alone totalled £785! Thanks in particular go to BK, TR, KB, MM, TB, PM and SK.

On top of that, US reader AP sent us a rather handy donation - he added a mere £200 to his subscription cheque! Finally, comrades RN, ST and LD all made use of our PayPal facility - although the total of £20 they donated between them didn't quite match up to what came our way from over the Atlantic!

All that came to no less than £1,005 - the first time we have ever exceeded a grand in a single week, I believe. So suddenly we are right up there - within touching distance of our £1,750 monthly target at £1,570. Just

what the doctor ordered!

And it couldn't have come at a better time, with our printing arrangements still in a state of flux. Readers of the print version may have noticed the poor quality of last week's front-page image in terms of its darkness, but hopefully such imperfections can be put down to teething problems and things will now start to look up. Let's hope so, because I've been concerned that our printing bills might start rising a bit too much, but we could be near to a deal where that isn't the case - let's just make sure we iron out the initial difficulties with the change of printers.

Anyway, as things stand, we still need £180 in just over a week - and we could do with shooting over that target. No problem, you might be thinking, after the record amount we got this week - but remember: £180 was almost exactly the sum we got the week before. Who wants to help us end the month with a bang? ●

**Robbie Rix**

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

**OPINION**

# Theories that kill

Thomas Klikauer looks at the connection between 'fake news' and the far right

**O**n October 28, it was reported that within 72 hours three hate crimes killed two African-Americans in Kentucky, nail bombs were sent to Democrats and to people who criticised Donald Trump. Finally, a man shouting anti-Semitic slurs opened fire inside a Pittsburgh synagogue, killing 11 people attending Jewish services. The men who committed these acts had one thing in common: they believed in conspiracy theories.

It is in this context that Christian Alt and Christian Schiffer have published their German-language book, *Angela Merkel is Hitler's daughter* published by Carl Hanser Press. We have entered the age of "half-truths, fake news, paranoia, resentment and irrationality", they write - and the age of conspiracy theories. The hallucination that Germany's chancellor, Angela Merkel, is "Hitler's daughter" is one of the more laughable - albeit obscene and very dangerous - conspiracy theories. As a matter of fact, conspiracy theories are not really 'theories' at all. Neither are they scientific. They are not a confirmed type of explanation about nature and society made in a way consistent with scientific methods. Conspiracy theories do not produce provable knowledge. As a consequence, they would better be labelled 'conspiracy beliefs' - or, even better, 'conspiracy myths'. Their advantage, however, is that they appear to provide broad, internally consistent explanations that allow people to preserve beliefs in the face of uncertainty and contradictions.

With the rise of Facebook, etc, conspiracy myths seem to have developed their very own *digital* reality, which exists quite apart from *analogue* reality. Inside this digital space, a "large amount of bullshit" has been invented. In Germany it is no longer uncommon to hear conspiracy myths, such as "Secret forces created the refugee avalanche that is destroying our homeland". There never was an avalanche. There are no secret forces. And refugees will not destroy our homeland.

Still, these are more than just dangerous misbeliefs. They are early signs of a rising fascism. Historically, the Nazi hallucination of a Jewish world conspiracy paved the way to Auschwitz. Today, conspiracy myths are high currency for nearly all rightwing politicians - and perhaps a few leftwing politicians as well. A clear indication of their ascendancy is the current occupant of the White House. Donald Trump is known to be a 'birther': ie, someone who believes that president Barack Obama did not have an American birth certificate.

Slightly less nuts but equally dangerous was the 'Pizzagate' conspiracy. No, Hillary Clinton did not run a child pornography network in the back room of a pizza shop. Yet conspiracy mythologists claimed that 'CP stands for Cheese Pizza, but it also means child pornography'. Perhaps - as one of the world's key demagogues, Steve Bannon, says - "The story is more important than reality". Existing separate from the mainstream press, conspiratorial stories are distributed widely through the internet without fact-checking, counter-arguments, editing, etc. With quality journalism being increasingly eliminated, ever more people seem to believe what they read on Facebook.

Conceivably, every new authoritarian regime comes with a new form of communication. Hitler had a radio called *Volksempfänger*



**Confused, atomised, bludgeoned - people seek easy solutions**

(People's Receiver). His ideological successors - today's populists - have the internet (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc), via which "truthiness" (Stephen Colbert) is broadcast. One of the most hideous 'truthinesses' is the idea that 'Obama was born in Kenya'. Today, many Americans still believe that.

In many cases, conspiracy myths work particularly well when they target individuals and small groups: Obama, Hillary Clinton, 'witches who eat children, and Jews who poison wells and create Aids'. Conspiracy myths also mix well with romantic novels and sell millions of books. Today, many are created and broadcast by "bullshit factories". These result in some Facebook users only seeing 'truth' as "echo chambers" or "mirror" of their own world view.

This is largely the case inside Germany's crypto-Nazi party, the AfD (Alternative for Germany) - referred to by some as 'A Fucking Disgrace'. The party has "by far more Facebook fans than party members" - 400,000 of them, compared to just under 30,000 members. A relatively high usage of Facebook was also found in the case of so-called *Reichsbürger* (sovereign citizen) Wolfgang P, who shot dead a policeman in 2016. Wolfgang P believed that "World War III was on the way, civilisation was breaking down and he had to defend his home". His own particular conspiratorial hallucination had deadly consequences.

Here are a few other examples of conspiracy myths:

- Vaccination causes autism and smoke detectors listen to what we say.
- Che Guevara is the cousin of Ariel Sharon.
- Princess Diana only pretended to be dead.
- Michael Jackson had to die because he 'rejected those in power'.
- The World Trade Center was blown up on George W Bush's orders.
- 9/11 was a false flag attack organised by Dick Cheney.
- Israel and George Soros planned the war in Syria.
- Jews control the world.
- The holocaust never happened.
- The Rothschilds have already moved their gold to China.
- Anne Frank's diaries are fakes.

The authors claim:

... women are more likely to believe in conspiracies compared to men and religious people are more likely than non-religious people to believe in them. Secondly, an increase of income comes with a decrease in believing in conspiracy theories.

While conspiracy myths have existed since feudal times and most likely even

before that, one gets the impression that today, "whenever and wherever something exists, there is some sort of conspiracy myth" about it. Almost all conspiracy myths come with a hefty dose of paranoia as well as a circle-the-wagon feeling of "If you are with them, you cannot be with us". Already those who utter the slightest possibility of disbelief are assessed as being "with them".

What nearly all conspiracy myths have in common is their attempt to reduce complex social, economic and political issues to simple, black and white explanations. They explain them in a way that is easily understood. On the other hand, there are also some more elaborate conspiracy myths - and 'Angela Merkel is Hitler's daughter' is among the best examples of those. Here it is:

Adolf Hitler died in a plane crash in the 1950s. But before that Hitler donated his sperm to Gretl Braun, the sister of Eva Braun. Eva Braun was the lover of the Führer. The insemination was successful and Gretl Braun gave birth to a girl called Angela. Angela is named after Eva Braun's niece, Angela Maria 'Geli' Raubal.

This might sound laughable (actually it is), but, on the other hand, "more bullshit is always possible", enriching the world of conspiracy theories on a daily level. Much of this applies to the motto, "Whatever excites and is outrageous will lead to more clicks ... this is the  $e=mc^2$  of the internet." Secondly, "'True' is whatever is good for us and our group." A prime example was another particular conspiracy myth, one of the most hideous and dangerous examples: the infamous *Protocols of the elders of Zion*. Although shown to be a fake by the *New York Times* in 1921, its afterlife continued when Germany's "Nazis distributed it massively during the 1920s".

This conspiracy theory had extremely bitter consequences, ending in Auschwitz. Even today, "the protocols are still read and believed", as the recent case of an AfD parliamentary shows.

All this indicates that, as ridiculous as many such myths seem to be, "conspiracy theories have to be taken enormously seriously". Obviously, the people behind them never refer to themselves 'conspiracy theorists'. They call themselves "truth seekers dedicated to enlightenment". To be a conspiracy myth inventor, it is important to know that facts do not matter at all. What matters is the believability of a conspiracy.

Perhaps one of the true "masters of conspiracy theories was Adolf Hitler. He also believed in the protocols ... similar tendencies can be detected in Donald Trump" ●

**ACTION**

**London Communist Forum**

**Sunday November 25, 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: chapter 1 (continued): 'Steady progress'. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk); and Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk).

**Radical Anthropology Group**

**Tuesday November 27, 6.30pm:** Series of talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taverton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. This meeting: 'From music to language: a Bayaka perspective'. Speaker: Jerome Lewis. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

**Fighting austerity**

**Saturday November 24, 10am to 4pm:** Conference, Swarthmore Education Centre, 2-7 Woodhouse Square, Leeds LS3. Organised by Leeds TUC: <https://leedstuc.wordpress.com>.

**The gig economy and construction**

**Saturday November 24, 4pm:** Public meeting, Brent Trades and Labour Hall (Apollo Club), 375 High Road, Willesden, London NW10. Organised by Unite Grass Roots Left: [www.facebook.com/events/543498739431951](http://www.facebook.com/events/543498739431951).

**Remember John Maclean**

**Sunday November 25, 1pm:** Annual commemoration, Eastwood New Cemetery, Thornliebank Road, Glasgow G46. Orations, followed by march to Maclean Cairn, Shawbridge Arcade, and social, St Mary's church hall, 150 Shawhill Road, Glasgow G43 (admission £5). Organised by Scottish Republican Socialist Movement: <http://scottishrepublicans.myfreeforum.org>.

**Labour Against the Witchhunt**

**Tuesday November 27, 11am:** Lobby of Labour Party NEC meeting, Labour HQ, 105 Victoria Street, London SW1. Bring witch costumes and banners.

**Saturday December 1, 1pm to 4pm:** Members meeting, London Welsh Centre, 157-163 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1. Including plans for our forthcoming conference, updates on disciplinary cases, the speaking tour for Jackie Walker's film *The witchhunt*.

**Friday December 7, 5pm:** Silent protest, Dudley Library, St James's Road, Dudley DY1: Support free speech on Palestine and Paul Jonson - suspended from his job at Dudley council after attending a pro-Palestine lobby of Ian Austin MP's surgery.

**Saturday February 2, 10am to 5pm:** LAW conference, venue to be confirmed. Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt: <http://www.labouragainstthewitchhunt.org>.

**Stop arming Saudi, stop bombing Yemen**

**Public meetings**  
**King's Cross, Tuesday November 27, 7pm:** Mander Hall, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1.  
**Portsmouth, Tuesday November 27, 6.30pm:** Richmond LT2, University of Portsmouth, Portland Street, Portsmouth PO1.  
**Norwich, Friday November 30, 7pm:** Norwich Quaker Meeting House, Upper Goat Lane, Norwich NR2. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

**Britain is Broken**

**Wednesday November 28, 7pm:** Launch conference, London Irish centre, 50-52 Camden Square, London NW1. Organised by People's Assembly Against Austerity: [www.facebook.com/events/1451954454938495](http://www.facebook.com/events/1451954454938495).

**Keep the guard on the train**

**Thursday November 29, 6pm:** Public meeting, Britannia Adelphi Hotel, Ranelagh Place, Liverpool L3. Organised by RMT: [www.rmt.org.uk/home](http://www.rmt.org.uk/home).

**The long 1960s**

**Thursday November 29, 6.30pm:** Discussion, Marchmont Community Centre, Marchmont Street, London WC1. 'Revolution and counterrevolution in Iran'. Speaker: Torab Saleth. Organised by Social Histories of Revolution: <https://socialhistories.wordpress.com>.

**Latin America 2018**

**Saturday December 1, 10am to 6.30pm (registration 9.15am):** Conference, Congress House, 23-28 Great Russell Street, London WC1. Speakers include: Tariq Ali, Chris Williamson MP, Jon Lansman (Momentum), Lindsey German (Stop the War Coalition), Kate Hudson (CND), plus guests from Latin America. tickets £10 (£8). Organised by Latin America Conference: [www.latinamericainconference.co.uk](http://www.latinamericainconference.co.uk).

**Economics of Brexit**

**Tuesday December 4, 7pm:** Meeting, committee rooms 3-4, Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1. Speaker: Michael Roberts. Organised by Birmingham Socialist Discussion Group: [ser14@btinternet.com](mailto:ser14@btinternet.com).

**Build Stop the War**

**Wednesday December 5, 7pm:** Christmas fundraiser dinner, Urfa Ocakbasi Restaurant, 85 Stoke Newington Road, London N16. Special guest: Brian Eno. Tickets: £25-£40 - order at 020-7561 4830. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

**CPGB wills**

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

**BREXIT**

# May's numbers don't add up

Escape from a no-confidence vote in the Tory Party will not save Theresa May's Brexit plans, writes **Paul Demarty** - hence the renewed talk of a national government

It is a dangerous sort of thing for a writer in a weekly paper to say, but it seems as if Theresa May will survive the last week's rocky encounters.

Two cabinet resignations followed the much heralded crunch meeting on the latest transition deal agreed by May's long suffering factotum, Olly Robbins, with Michel Barnier's EU negotiators. It was always likely to go down like the proverbial shit sandwich with some people, whatever the deal's contents (although it should be said that the Brexit crowd have, on closer inspection, found this to be a particularly fragrant example of the species). So farewell then, Esther McVey and Dominic Raab, the occupants of the two least comfortable seats in the cabinet. McVey hands the universal credit omnishambles on to the long-suffering Amber Rudd, who only just fell on her sword over the Windrush fiasco, but is at least a May loyalist. Stephen Barclay steps in as Brexit secretary - a noble gesture of comradesly sacrifice from this old soldier, who will thereby take on the job of being undermined by Robbins until patience deserts him. (Perhaps it will be over by Christmas.)

On the back benches, things got a little more fractious, as could only be expected. We read that the water cannons Boris Johnson purchased as London mayor, but was never permitted to deploy, are to be sold off for scrap at a net loss to the taxpayer of £300,000. They might have come in handy to cool Jacob Rees-Mogg's ardour. The spirit of Agincourt bade him hand in his letter of no confidence, but it looks like his band of brothers, his happy few, are *too few* to get anywhere near the 48 required to trigger a vote. We note the silence of Boris Johnson himself, who is happy to benefit from Rees-Mogg and his comrades' enthusiastic spirit of patriotic sacrifice, while keeping his own powder dry.

Within the parameters of inner-party Tory politics, then, May has survived a test that she has put off again and again. Her trouble, of course, is that it is not enough. This deal - not *the* deal, remember, about the long-term future of Britain's relationship with the EU, but the details of the transition period - has not got a hope in hell of getting through parliament. But the problems do not end there. The Democratic Unionist Party is aghast at provisions it views as tententially separating Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK - the Scottish National Party positively *envies* the 'special treatment' of the Six Counties. To get over the line, May will need to keep hold of the 'moderate' Brexiteers (Michael Gove, Andrea Leadsom and co - 'moderates', indeed!) and win a large degree of support from Labour MPs.

The Labour leadership vows to vote down any deal that fails its 'six tests' - a vaguely worded, catch-all phrase for any conceivable deal to emanate from a Tory-occupied No10. The hope is to force a general election, and it would be foolish indeed to rule one out. Frankly, Theresa May could drop dead of a heart attack tomorrow and nobody would blame her; and whatever creature was left alive in the top job after the subsequent bloodletting would face an even greater crisis of legitimacy than she has since last June.

John McDonnell suggests that



**Labour would stay in the customs union ... but the establishment does not trust Corbyn**

the monarch should invite Labour to form a minority government in the event of a defeat for May's Brexit deal. What Labour offers on the EU is, in fact, more than acceptable for the capitalist class: permanent membership of the customs union, a "relationship" to the single market and a promise to stay aligned to EU laws on issues such as employment and the environment. But it is far from clear that the SNP or the Lib Dems would give their support to a Labour government in a vote of confidence. Let alone the DUP.

Despite that, Labour held official talks with Nicola Sturgeon. Such talks should be opposed by the left. The Labour Party should not seek the support of bourgeois parties. Better to be a strong opposition party than a weak party of government that is in thrall to the SNP and Lib Dems.

A minority Labour government could, however, be the gateway to the general election that Jeremy Corbyn has been calling for. Tory MPs are unlikely to vote for a general election at the moment. That would be like turkeys voting for Christmas. Note, under the Fixed-Term Parliament Act an *early* general election can only be called if two-thirds of MPs vote for it. However, if May suffered a defeat for her Brexit deal and then suffered a defeat in a confidence vote ... it is possible, though highly unlikely, that Elizabeth Windsor would call upon Corbyn to form a government. He would have 14 days to give it a go. If he too could not win a vote of confidence in the Commons, then a general election would follow.

A Labour victory might well come, with the promise of putting things right with Europe and running capitalism in a way that is 'fair to all'. But for key sections of the establishment Corbyn is completely unacceptable. He is anti-war, pro-trade union ... and under the terms of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition an anti-Semite (read 'opposed to Israel and the Zionist colonial-settler project'). More than that - a Corbyn-led government could very well trigger a crisis of expectations, as people seek to make up for lost income, bad housing and loss of trade union rights, using their own -

if necessary, illegal - methods. That terrifies the ruling class *more* than a no-deal Brexit.

## Straws in the wind

We are left, then, with a comprehensively disastrous situation for the British bourgeoisie. The main option on offer is not a flier, plainly; the leader of the opposition offers nothing of substance, and is in any case comprehensively distrusted. Remainer politicians place all their faith in a second referendum, which they hope will allow them, by means of various deceits and threats, a way back to the *status quo ante*. But their real motives are transparent and their cynicism is detested in wider society, making it unattractive to many of those MPs prepared to rebel against their respective whips, who have only their constituents to fall back on. The cliff-edge Brexit is eminently achievable, but obviously a disaster for British capital.

There is a need, then, for a game-changing step outside the existing political arithmetic, and there are certainly those who would provide it. Straws in the wind: first of all, Gordon Brown, in the *Financial Times*, lays out much the same sort of doomy disaster landscape that we have developed here. The underlying problem, so far as he is concerned, is the need to "reunite a now bitterly divided country". The immediate political hopes of remainers and Brexiteers merely defer the issue to a later date, when "parliament could again be in stalemate - in exactly the same way as today".<sup>1</sup>

There is a need instead to heal the underlying divisions. Brown has a wizard wheeze to do so, which he calls a "platform", presumably in deference to the prevailing social media jargon. Regional committees of lay citizens are to be formed to interact in dialogue with various experts. This, it is hoped, will lead to an outbreak of sanity all round. He writes:

Such deliberative hearings need to be credible, authoritative and impartial. That is why I suggest creating a new kind of royal commission. If the government is unable or unwilling to sponsor

such a platform, then perhaps a bipartisan advisory group, representing respected national institutions, can lead such a unique consultation.

The government is possibly unable and certainly unwilling, which moves us onto the idea of a "bipartisan advisory group". And that is the nub of it - that little word, *bipartisan*. Here we have a proposal that would get elected representatives prepared to rise above "the same old party bickering and incestuous power games", and a ready-made *demos* in the form of these committees urging them on to get together and 'sort things out, for Britain' ... A second straw in the wind - a *Daily Telegraph* report that "senior Tories" are sounding out other MPs on a 'Norway solution', whereby Britain will be fully economically integrated into Europe, but without political rights, and finding that perhaps those numbers do add up.<sup>2</sup>

These roads lead to a government of national unity. The numbers in parliament - even as it exists! - certainly add up for *that*. Pro-imperialist, pro-capitalist Labour MPs; self-serving sectional nationalists; Tories with their 'national interest' hats on; even DUP members prepared to pay more attention to the funds they disburse to their clients than the angry shade of Ian Paisley telling them *no! no! no!*

Such an outcome is hardly inevitable - there is little inevitable these days, when it comes to concerted and effective action on the part of the ruling class and its diverse castes of paid agents to secure its interests. It is, however, the only reasonable way out, starting from where we are.

The left is woefully underprepared for such an outcome. Those who have hurled themselves with gay abandon into remainer activism have in practice gotten far too close to the establishment figures they platonically oppose in their 'socialist' moments. Standard issue Corbynistas shackle themselves to the leadership line, which is, after all, that we must get the right deal for Britain and May's deal is not that deal at all; only a Labour government can deliver

that. The problem arises exactly when there is a concrete available alternative. The extra-Labour left looks hardly capable of raising the alarm; we note that all the Socialist Workers Party's national secretary Charlie 'Mr Kimble' Kimber could think to say about May's travails last week was that it made it all the more important to turn out on Saturday's demonstration against racism.<sup>3</sup>

There is an assumption that the cobbling-together of a national government in this way will lead to protests of a size and scale unseen for decades. Perhaps that assumption is true; but the sad reality of such governments - in the absence of a critique of 'bipartisan' initiatives and national unity as such, understood and accepted by broad masses - is that they tend initially to be very popular. Gordon Brown is not wrong to say that people despise bickering, or to draw the link with the present global drift towards Bonapartism. However, he is wrong - culpably wrong - to imagine that his little scheme is an *alternative* to Bonapartism, rather than merely a Bonapartism of the centre after the fashion of Emmanuel Macron; and so would be a government of national unity.

As in Macron's case, such popularity is typically short-lived: when the reality of the business of government dawns, compromises are made, leaks and malicious briefings resume, and so on. It will only be replaced by something better, however, if its motivating myths are confronted directly. The Labour leadership and its loyal servants directly repeat the myth; the likes of the SWP imagine that monomaniacal focus on street demonstrations absolve them from even admitting it exists. Both are setting themselves up for a rude awakening - if, that is, the capitalist class can ever get its act together ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

1. [www.ft.com/content/ce2ed1ce-e902-11e8-94da-a6478f64c783](http://www.ft.com/content/ce2ed1ce-e902-11e8-94da-a6478f64c783).
2. [www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/11/17/senior-tories-talks-opposition-mps-fallback-brex-it-plan](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/11/17/senior-tories-talks-opposition-mps-fallback-brex-it-plan).
3. <https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/47502/As+May+clings+on+call+for+protests+and+demand+a+general+election>.



**AWL**

# Free-trade tailism

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty has enlisted a clipped version of Marx and Engels to serve its political agenda. In the first of two articles **Mike Macnair** looks at the claims of free trade and protectionism

A couple of months ago I wrote critically about the second document proposed by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty for its conference, which was about Brexit ('Liberal playthings' *Weekly Worker* September 27). I said then that it "argues, with caveats, for the defence of the existing free-trade regime against Trumpism, Brexiteering, and other forms of nationalism. In doing so it makes dodgy claims about the history of the issue."

I promised a future article on the issue, with the intention of arguing that "the AWL's 'free-tradism' tails the neoliberals' ideological claims and fails to recognise necessary dynamics of capitalism at work in the shifts between liberal free-trade ideology and party-of-order nationalisms".

The AWL's conference is next weekend, but there has been no apparent public discussion in *Solidarity* (and, indeed, the Brexit document is not easy to find on its website). The issue is still, however, a fundamental one: because the AWL's free-trade advocacy is not unique, but channels the ideas of the bulk of the 'centre-left' in both Europe and America.

What has happened is that AWL leader Martin Thomas has recognised that 'Another Europe is Possible' has become an exercise in 'astroturfing', through AEIP taking money for top-down NGO-style politics. Initially the critique appeared online, but Thomas has developed the point in an interview with Michael Chessum - mostly friendly - in the November 14 issue of *Solidarity*. He says: "Up to now AEIP has essentially been an NGO - it gets money from grants and philanthropists and such to pay an office staff to do activities, which people out in the field may then support."

Collaboration with liberals for limited specific purposes is not in itself wrong. The problem is the combination of making yourselves dependent on the liberals by taking money from them and toning down your arguments for the sake of unity with them - or, for that matter, of what is supposed to be a 'more effective focus' on the subject of the common campaign. Thomas points to unclarity in AEIP's project:

We'd want some points agreed. That AEIP should campaign for free movement upfront, including at its times of maximum visibility: there was no mention of free movement in the AEIP model motions for Labour Party conference, or in the AEIP model motion after conference. That AEIP should explicitly campaign to change Labour policy to opposing Brexit. And that AEIP should explain that the "other Europe" in its name means a socialist Europe, not just a Europe much like now but with better policy advisors, which seemed to be the line from the Europe For The Many conference [October 26-27].

This is a case of people in glasshouses throwing stones. As I pointed out in my September 27 article, the AWL's own version of 'left remain' is exceedingly imprecise about what "other Europe" it means, and shows a strong tendency to downplay the constitutionally entrenched



**Tory poster: 'The radical "free trade" slaves' (1910)**

'ordoliberal' or 'neoliberal' rules of the EU, as well as the institution's anti-democratic structures. This imprecision and softness remains present in the conclusion to the lead article in the November 14 *Solidarity*:

Labour must vote solidly against any Tory Brexit deal. It must spell out the conclusion from two and a half years' experience since June 2016: 'Remain and rebel' - meaning, remain and stir up a cross-Europe working class movement for democracy and social standards across the EU - is the only answer that can serve working class interests.

"Democracy" is not rendered at all precise; and "social standards" is a long way from the "socialist Europe" that Thomas proposes for AEIP.

## Issues

Behind this problem lie two issues. The first is that the AWL is, as much as the large majority of the far left, committed to Georgi Dimitrov's (popular frontist) conception of the united front from the Seventh Congress of the Comintern:

'The communists attack us,' say others. But listen, we have repeatedly declared, we shall not attack anyone, whether persons, organisations or parties, standing for the united front of the working class against the class enemy. But at the same time it is our duty, in the interests of the proletariat and its cause, to criticise those persons, organisations and parties that hinder unity of action by the workers.

That is, the idea is that unity is conditional on a degree of self-censorship.

The high-period Stalinist origin of this idea has not hindered its adoption by the modern Trotskyists.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the 'transitional programme' idea, because it is grounded on trying to lead the workers by the nose to socialism on the basis of 'moderate demands and militant action', promotes the self-

censorship model of the 'united front'.

The second issue is that the AWL has since the 1980s been committed to what is in substance preference for liberal-model imperialism against both Stalinist bureaucratic 'socialism' and left-talking forms of third-world nationalism. In origin this seems to have been a matter of simply placing a minus sign where 'official communism' placed a plus, and vice versa; but it also became framed by a theory in which the Leninist account of imperialism was true for its own time, but had since World War II been replaced by an international imperialist cartel - more like the mid-19th century British 'imperialism of free trade' or Karl Kautsky's 1914 idea of an "ultra-imperialism", in which the imperialists avoided conflict and war, and the world became 'flat', apart from the activities of 'paleo-imperialists' like the Argentinian junta, the Iraqi Ba'athists and, most recently, the Putin administration in Russia.

I wrote about this AWL theory in 2004 and will not repeat the arguments against it here.<sup>2</sup> The present point is that the AWL's belief that there was a permanent secular transition from 'old imperialism' to a new, flatter world of 'imperialism of free trade' is sharply challenged by what has happened since the early 2000s: that is, there has been a global shift towards right-populist nationalism.

This admittedly started in 'third world' countries (like the ascendancy of Hindutva in India; indeed, rightist Islamist politics, starting earlier, could be seen as the first exemplar of what has turned out to be a general trend). And in a sense the Putin administration and the rise of far-right politics in eastern Europe could until recently have been seen as similar, and as responses to economic backwardness. But it has reached the 'advanced capitalist countries' too. The rise of overt war-guilt revisionism in Japan round the Yasukuni shrine, and so on, began with Junichiro Koizumi in 2001 and has only continued with Shinzo Abe.<sup>3</sup> At the same period we have seen the rise to prominence of the Front National in France, and since then of the Allianz

für Deutschland in Germany, although neither has yet attained government office. In Italy, the fascists are in office in coalition with the right-populist Five Star Movement.

But the real 'shock to the system' for Anglophone liberals - and hence for the AWL's theory of a secular or irreversible transition to the 'imperialism of free trade' - has been the successive victories of the Brexiteers in the 2016 referendum, and of Donald Trump in the same year's US presidential election, with his 'America First' ideology - and his Brexit support and willingness to tear up treaties and to embark on tariff wars since he took office.

## Bourgeois ameliorations?

It is then unsurprising that the AWL document's response to this situation is to argue for defence of free trade as a limited gain, which the capitalists will fail to defend:

Against a determined push by the new rightwing nationalists, the liberal bourgeoisie will not safeguard the moderate extensions of formal equality, the modest opening of opportunities to ethnic minorities, the relative freedom of movement for some across some borders, the halfway secularism, the mild cosmopolitanism, on which it prides itself.

Having already let so many civil rights be swallowed by the 'war on terror' and the drive for 'labour flexibility', it will be no bulwark for the rest. The liberal bourgeoisie may not even safeguard the achievement of which it boasts most: the reduction of economic barriers between countries ...

It falls to the labour movement to defend even the limited bourgeois ameliorations.

In support of this approach, the AWL document calls on the authority of Marx and Engels. Rather extensive quotation is unfortunately unavoidable:

Socialists do not endorse capitalist

free trade. We are not for the unfettered rule of markets. We are for fettering market forces through social-provision and worker-protection policies, as international as possible. As the working class gains political strength, we aim to make democratically decided social solidarity the chief regulator of economic affairs.

We are not necessarily opposed, even, to all bourgeois protectionist policies. "Nursery tariffs", allowing new industries to make a start in weaker countries, are not our way of doing things, but they have a rationale, and we would not condemn them in favour of undiluted free trade.

In general, however, our approach is as Marx outlined in 1847:

"Do not imagine, gentlemen, that in criticising freedom of trade we have the least intention of defending the system of protection. One may declare oneself an enemy of the constitutional regime without declaring oneself a friend of the ancient [ie, autocratic or aristocratic] regime ...

"In general, the protective system of our day is conservative, while the free trade system is destructive. It breaks up old nationalities and pushes the antagonism of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the extreme point. In a word, the free trade system hastens the social revolution. It is in this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, that I vote in favour of free trade."

Frederick Engels explained further, when republishing Marx's text from 1847:

The question of free trade or protection moves entirely within the bounds of the present system of capitalist production and has, therefore, no direct interest for us socialists, who want to do away with that system. Indirectly, however, it interests us, inasmuch as we must desire the present system of production to develop and expand as freely and as quickly as possible ... From this point of view, Marx pronounced, in principle, in favour of free trade as the more progressive plan ...<sup>4</sup>

There are two problems with this line of argument. The first is that this is violently selective quotation. While Engels' 1888 preface to Marx's 1848 speech does follow the line stated here, Marx's speech was in fact mainly directed against the liberal free-traders.

Secondly, supposing that the line the AWL has adopted was indeed that of Marx and Engels, we should bear in mind that they were developing this in the 19th century, at a period where it looked as if free trade was the 'wave of the future'. They were doing so without reference to the earlier debates about Dutch free-trading and English protectionism. Marx's 1848 speech was largely directed against the hypocrisy, and so on, of the free-traders. Engels' 1888 'Preface' was directed polemically against a new rise of protectionism and nationalism (beginning in Germany and the USA), which continued to ascend up to the 1940s. What followed - the Bretton Woods and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT 1) regime of the 1950s-70s - was not one of

free trade, but of *managed* trade (and controls on capital movement). Full-dress free-trade ideology like that of the 19th century 'Manchesterites' only returned in the 1980s.

Hence, working up any sort of Marxist theory on the question will not be achieved by selective citation-grazing in Marx and Engels of the sort found in the AWL document. There is, at least, some sort of long cycle between free-tradism and protectionism, and a connection to geopolitical hierarchies of states. Further, it is not entirely clear how far either free-tradism or protectionism actually describes state behaviour, as opposed to both functioning as political ideologies to generate consent in the subordinate classes for policies actually adopted in state-bureaucratic interests and those of *particular* capitalist groups.

What is involved is a subject which, if it had been addressed as part of Marx's critique of political economy, would have belonged in books 4-6 of the "six book plan" Marx was working with in the 1850s - (1) Capital, (2) landed property, (3) wage-labour, (4) the state, (5) foreign trade, (6) the world market. The (perfectly defensible) arguments that Marx abandoned this plan in favour of the four books - (1) the process of production of capital, (2) the process of circulation of capital, (3) the structure of the process as a whole, (4) the history of the theory (*Capital* volumes 1-3 and *Theories of surplus value*)<sup>5</sup> - do not alter the point that theorising the political economy of free-tradism and protectionism requires as a prerequisite a political economy of the state; and that Marx (and Engels) never achieved such a thing.<sup>6</sup>

It follows that I am not going to attempt to do this sort of theoretical work here. What I will do will be a two-part series. *First*, in this article, I will enlarge on what the AWL has selected from Marx and Engels, in order to illustrate that its use of them is misleading.

*Second*, in a subsequent article, I will discuss briefly some historical literature on the issue, which 'interrogates' the standard narrative of a teleology from mercantilist protectionism towards free trade; and, *third*, to make a single observation about why capitalist states cannot avoid discrimination against non-national capitals, and to this extent *must* be mercantilist - even if, for some states, free trade may be a successful mercantilist policy (that is, one which operates at the expense of other states). This will enable a final return to the underlying political question. We stand at the cusp of a decline of the free-trade ideology in favour of rightwing nationalist and/or religious populism. How can we respond to this?

## Marx and Engels 1840s-50s

As Engels tells us in his 1888 preface, the victory of the 'free-traders' in the repeal of the British Corn Laws (agricultural protection) in 1846 led to efforts to expand the free-trade campaign to the continent. As a result there was a free-trade congress in Brussels in 1847. Marx prepared a speech in an attempt to intervene in this congress, but did not in the event get called to speak. His intended speech was then given to a January 1848 meeting of the Brussels Democratic Association, and in February of that year published in French as a pamphlet.

The AWL document quotes the last paragraph of this text, and two single-sentence paragraphs before the penultimate one. The penultimate one argues that protectionism in a country which has not yet got large-scale industry serves to develop this industry, and to develop free trade *within the country*; it is therefore adopted by a rising bourgeoisie, as in Germany.

The paragraphs quoted are in fact

the *only* paragraphs which can be read as favouring free trade. The large bulk of the pamphlet argues that free trade will worsen the immediate condition of the workers. Thus, for example,

This law of commodity labour, of the minimum of wages, will be confirmed in proportion, as the supposition of the economists, free trade, becomes an actual fact. Thus, of two things one: either we must reject all political economy based on the assumption of free trade, or we must admit that under this free trade the whole severity of the economic laws will fall upon the workers.

And similarly:

We have shown what sort of brotherhood free trade begets between the different classes of one and the same nation. The brotherhood which free trade would establish between the nations of the Earth would hardly be more fraternal. To call cosmopolitan exploitation universal brotherhood is an idea that could only be engendered in the brain of the bourgeoisie. All the destructive phenomena which unlimited competition gives rise to within one country are reproduced in more gigantic proportions on the world market.

Marx's argument in this text is in substance that of 'absolute immiseration', for which he has been condemned as a false prophet by capitalist ideologues - and which he had clearly abandoned by the 1860s.<sup>7</sup> It is this argument which is the ground, and the *sole* ground, he offers for supporting free trade: that is, that free trade, by pushing down wages, "pushes the antagonism of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the extreme point" and hence "hastens the social revolution".

This was, of course, not all that Marx or Engels wrote about the free trade issue at this period. Marx's intended speech, as summarised by Engels for the *Northern Star* of October 9 1847, also included a (shorter) polemic against the protectionists.<sup>8</sup> This was directed against German authors, and seems to have been separately published in German.<sup>9</sup> The argument is, in substance, that Friedrich List's call for protection is openly anti-working class, while Gustav von Gülich, who wanted to protect artisan production by a total ban on imports, was a plain utopian. Those who tried to argue that List-style protectionism would in fact benefit workers failed to notice that strengthening capital against foreign rivals would *ipso facto* also strengthen capital against labour.

Engels had a bit earlier in the year written about German protectionism; here, as in the penultimate paragraph, which the AWL cut out of the Marx speech, he argues that in Germany protection can be supported as tending to promote industrial development and clear away the pre-capitalist classes, thus bringing to the fore the fundamental antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat.<sup>10</sup>

There is a certain amount of material in the Marx-Engels correspondence of the 1850s which illuminates their views on the issue. Mostly this is commentary on English politics - commonly attacking the free-traders for political weakness and hypocrisy.<sup>11</sup> There is a little more substance in Engels' comment to Marx on American politics:

As for protectionism, it does no harm. American Whigs are all industrial protectionists, but this by no means implies that they belong to the landed aristocracy, Derby variety. Nor are they so stupid not to know just as well as does

List that *free trade* suits English industry better than anything else.<sup>12</sup>

Marx also offered sarcastic comment on American economist Henry Carey's combination of pro-marketism with advocacy of protection.<sup>13</sup>

An 1855 letter of Marx to Lassalle reaffirms the argument that free trade tends to depress wages: "As for wages in the factories ..., it can be proved beyond doubt that the repeal of the Corn Laws (1) has had no influence whatever on absolute wages; (2) has contributed to depress relat[ive] wages."<sup>14</sup>

## Engels 1880s

The issue resurfaces a good deal later, in the 1880s. Marx's 1848 speech and much of the 1850s correspondence targeted mainly the radical pretensions of the free-traders. A little of this continued: a letter of Engels to Marx in August 1881 and a related letter breaking off Engels' relationship with George Shipton's *Labour Standard* both attack the influence of free-trader 'radicalism' in the British labour movement.<sup>15</sup> But Engels' letters in the same period to Bernstein (March 12 1881) and Bebel (May 16 1882) show a new political opponent being addressed: the influence of the nationalist-statist *Kathedersozialisten* ('professorial socialists') on elements of the German socialists leading to inappropriate upvaluing of state interventions and protection.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the letter to Bebel criticises Paul Singer:

He belongs to those who regard the nationalisation of anything as a semi-, or at all events pre-, socialist measure and are therefore secret devotees of protective tariffs, tobacco monopoly, nationalised railways, etc. These prevarications are the legacy of the unduly one-sided fight against Manchesterism and, because they facilitate debate in a middle-class and 'edicated' environment, enjoy a considerable following, particularly among those bourgeois and academic elements who have come over to us.

The continuing debates of this sort form the plain political context of Engels' 1888 preface to the translation of Marx's 1848 speech.<sup>17</sup> Here, as I said, Engels' fire is more strongly concentrated on the protectionists than on the free-traders. Indeed, he 'spins' the 1848 speech in this direction:

While recognising that protection may still, under certain circumstances - for instance, in the Germany of 1847 - be of advantage to the manufacturing capitalists; while proving that that free trade was not the panacea for all the evils under which the working class suffered, and might even aggravate them; he pronounces, ultimately and on principle, in favour of free trade.

To him, free trade is the normal condition of modern capitalist production ...

This is hardly the Marx who argues in the 1847 speech that "All the destructive phenomena which unlimited competition gives rise to within one country are reproduced in more gigantic proportions on the world market".

Engels does, in fact, argue that protectionism is justified for developing countries and infant industries. His case against it is that it is difficult to get rid of it when there is a need to do so; and he argues that Germany, the United States and France have passed beyond the need for protection to the need for free trade, in order to press their industries to become more efficient. After a good deal of concrete discussion of this sort, he returns, towards the end, to Marx's 1848 argument that free trade will

exacerbate capitalist contradictions, and therefore bring on the revolution. The AWL document reproduces this passage (quoted above), but without its sting:

The question of free trade or protection moves entirely within the bounds of the present system of capitalist production, and has, therefore, no direct interest for us socialists who want to do away with that system.

Indirectly, however, it interests us, inasmuch as we must desire the present system of production to develop and expand as freely and as quickly as possible [here the AWL quote ends]; because along with it will develop also those economic phenomena which are its necessary consequences, and which must destroy the whole system: misery of the great mass of the people, in consequence of overproduction. This overproduction engendering either periodical gluts and revulsions, accompanied by panic, or else a chronic stagnation of trade; division of society into a small class of large capitalists, and a large one of practically hereditary wage-slaves - proletarians, who, while their numbers increase constantly, are at the same time constantly being superseded by new labour-saving machinery; in short, society brought to a deadlock, out of which there is no escaping but by a complete remodelling of the economic structure which forms its basis.

Nor is this in fact the conclusion of the article. Engels goes on to ask, "If free trade is stated to be revolutionary, must not all good citizens vote for protection as a conservative plan?" And he answers:

If a country ... should reject free trade and stick to protection, in order to cheat the socialists out of the expected social catastrophe, that will not hurt the prospects of socialism in the least. Protection is a plan for artificially manufacturing manufacturers, and therefore also a plan for artificially manufacturing wage-labourers. You cannot breed the one without breeding the other.

The wage-labourer everywhere follows in the footsteps of the manufacturer; he is like the 'gloomy care' of Horace, that sits behind the rider, and that he cannot shake off wherever he goes. You cannot escape fate; in other words, you cannot escape the necessary consequences of your own actions. A system of production based upon the exploitation of wage-labour, in which wealth increases in proportion to the number of labourers employed and exploited, such a system is bound to increase the class of wage-labourers: that is to say, the class which is fated one day to destroy the system itself ...

This conclusion effectively calls into question the prior argument. If it is true that both protection and free trade would equally tend to undermine capitalism - the first by producing social polarisation and absolute immiseration, leading to radicalisation, the second by strengthening the numbers of the workers along with the activity of industrial capital - it is at the very least not obvious that the right choice for the labour movement is to go for free trade.

## Questionable

The result is that Engels' arguments in favour of free trade (and, following him, those of the German Social Democratic Party and the Second International) turn out actually to depend on the *concrete* claim that, after full industrial development, free trade

will strengthen the relative economic position of the country which practises it. This claim is an empirical one, testable against economic-historical evidence, and is in the highest degree questionable. I will return to the issue in the next article.

I do not mean by these points to say that the labour movement should advocate protectionism. There are, on the contrary, arguments for us to advocate common action of the working class on an international scale, and so on. There are also arguments for us to follow Marx and Engels by paying attention to exposing both free-trader ideologies and scams, and protectionist ideologies and scams - and, again like Marx and Engels, to shift the weight of the polemic, depending on the degree of influence of one or another side in the labour movement. I will return to these issues in the second article.

My point is at this stage merely that, in the first place, the statements of Marx and Engels on the issue *do not support* the argument they are made to support by the AWL. Secondly, that these particular arguments are in any case very unsatisfactory, since they are arguments for absolute immiseration leading to radicalisation and revolution, and for the workers' movement seeking to intensify capitalist contradictions and thereby tending to produce an early *Zusammenbruch* or *Kladderadatsch* (general breakdown of capitalism). Neither looks like a workable strategic line for working class power.

It is for this reason that we will need, in the second article, to look in extreme outline at the history of free trade and protectionism and at what this sort of outline can tell us about the political economy of both, before returning to the question of a political responses to the global nationalist turn ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

1. The alternative, for (for example) the Spartacists, is the refusal of united action on the basis that this will inevitably compromise political independence. This still *assumes* Dimitrov's conception that united action depends on self-censorship, merely using it as a ground to reject united action.
2. 'AWL, Iraq and "new imperialism"' *Weekly Worker* July 29 2004; 'Imperialism lives on', August 5 2004; 'Imperialism versus internationalism', August 12 2004; 'Imperialism and method', September 23 2004. Compare also my introduction to B Lewis and M Zurowski (translators) *Karl Kautsky on colonialism* November 2013, and 'Rethinking imperialism' *Weekly Worker* October 3 2013.
3. See, for example, 'Japan's rising nationalism enrages Asia' *The Guardian* July 15 2001; 'Abe's revisionism and Japan's divided war memories' *Japan Times* August 22 2015.
4. The text continues with a quotation from Lenin in 1902, describing the free-trade agitation of the German Social Democratic Party. Since this is merely about the nature of campaigning activity, it adds little to the Marx and Engels quotes.
5. There is a useful discussion by Rick Kuhn at [https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/11077/1/Kuhn\\_IntroductionGrossman2013.pdf](https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/11077/1/Kuhn_IntroductionGrossman2013.pdf).
6. I have argued this further in 'Law and state as holes in Marxist theory' *Critique* Vol 34 (2006), pp211-36.
7. Eg, the discussion by WJ Baumol: 'Marx and the iron law of wages' *American Economic Review* No73 (1983), pp303-08.
8. *CW* Vol 6, pp287-88.
9. *Ibid* pp279-81.
10. 'Protective tariffs or free trade system' *CW* Vol 6, pp92-95.
11. Eg, Engels to Marx, March 2 1852 *CW* Vol 39, p57, on the Derby government; Marx to Engels, March 5 1852, p59, on Mazzini's enthusiasm for the British free traders; Engels to Marx, November 29 1852, pp252-53, on Cobden's disappointed hopes of office; Marx to Engels, January 29 1853, p275, on the *Economist's* hypocrisy in supporting measures against the export of money. *CW* Vol 40 at pp104, 113, 115-116, 127 has similar jibes at the English free-traders and protectionists.
12. Engels to Marx, August 6 1852 *CW* Vol 39, p147.
13. Marx to Engels, June 14 1853 *CW* Vol 39, pp345-46. The point resurfaces in the fragment, 'Bastiat and Carey', in the *Grundrisse* ([www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch17.htm#bastiat](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch17.htm#bastiat)).
14. January 23 1855 *CW* Vol 39, p514.
15. Engels to Marx, August 11 1881 *CW* Vol 46, p121; Engels to Shipton, August 15, pp122-23.
16. *CW* Vol 46, pp260-61.
17. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1888/free-trade/index.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1888/free-trade/index.htm).

**POLEMIC****Sophistry in the service of Zionism**Brian Klug, the Oxford academic, cannot see the wood for the trees, writes **Tony Greenstein**

**B**rian Klug's article in the *Jewish Quarterly*, 'The left and the Jews', is depressing and disappointing.<sup>1</sup> How can such a talented academic succumb so easily to the Zionist campaign of defamation and denigration? It is not as if Brian has not himself been the subject of a similar campaign.

Brian was invited to address a November 2013 conference on anti-Semitism,<sup>2</sup> for which a dossier of "international scholars and authors" was drawn up by the so-called Berlin International Center for the Study of Anti-Semitism.<sup>3</sup> According to Dr Clemens Henri, Brian "uses his Jewishness to endanger other Jews in Israel", while professor Mordechai Kedar, an advocate of rape in war,<sup>4</sup> described Brian as a "court Jew", intent on making himself "acceptable to Jew-haters", and professor Ephraim Karsh found it "mind-boggling" that a "proponent of anti-Semitism" (sic) should be invited at all.

However, the false anti-Semitism juggernaut seems to have impaired Brian's critical faculties. His article is badly written, poorly argued, contradictory and at times incoherent. This is not the Brian Klug I got to know and like for over a decade. It represents blind intellectual panic in the face of a powerful political campaign.

November 11 was Polish Independence Day and president Andrzej Duda of the rightwing Law and Justice Party (PiS) marched, together with 200,000 other Poles, through the centre of Warsaw. The march was organised by the government and the neo-Nazi National Radical Camp (ONR). Amongst the slogans was "Poland, white and Catholic". Still this was probably an improvement over last year, when "Pray for Islamic holocaust" competed with "Remove Jewry from power".

None of this prevents Tory MEPs from being part of the European Conservative Reform (ECR) group in the European Parliament alongside the PiS. Surely this should be a *cause célèbre* for those doughty fighters against 'anti-Semitism in the Labour Party' at the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Yet Brian's article simply ignores this wider dimension.

The Israeli government is such good friends with Poland's government that it has endorsed a new holocaust law which makes it an offence to say that some Poles took part in the holocaust. Netanyahu agreed to drop Israel's opposition to the law in return for minor concessions. The headline in YNet was 'Holocaust survivors feel betrayed by Polish-Israeli statement'.<sup>5</sup> Poland's prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, is on record as saying that the Jews themselves were in part responsible for the holocaust, yet the leader of the Israeli Labor Party, Avi Gabbay, claims to be more worried about Jeremy Corbyn's 'anti-Semitism'.

One of the main protagonists in the 'anti-Semitism' campaign against Corbyn, *Jewish Chronicle* editor Stephen Pollard, defended Michał Kamiński of the PiS - the former chair of the ECR group, who had excused those who burnt alive 1,600 Jews at Jedwabne in 1941 - calling him "one of the greatest friends to the Jews".<sup>6</sup>

This is the background to Brian Klug's recent essay, which is a good example of TS Elliot's aphorism that most of the evil in the world is done by those with the best of intentions. Brian is an Oxford academic specialising in the study of anti-Semitism. He is not evil and he has the best of intentions. Nonetheless his essay in

*Jewish Quarterly* gives comfort to those who do not. Even the title of his article, 'The left and the Jews', is misleading, implying that Jews are not part of the left - what it should be called is something like 'The left and Zionism'. The subtitle, 'Labour's summer of discontent', is little better.

Nowhere does Brian contextualise this "discontent". In a phrase reminiscent of the *Communist manifesto*, Brian states that "the spectre of anti-Semitism has haunted Labour ever since Corbyn's election as leader of the party".<sup>7</sup> But has it? If that were true, why would the *Daily Mail* be so concerned about this "spectre"? The same paper employed Katie Hopkins, who advocated a "final solution" for refugees,<sup>8</sup> and was itself accused of waging an anti-Semitic campaign against Ed Miliband in 2013.<sup>9</sup>

**Cross-purposes**

It is not necessary to possess the gift of foresight in order to display some imagination. How will the period we are now living through be seen in 20-30 years? Does Brian really think that history will look on what is happening today as the recrudescence of anti-Semitism?

To ask the question is to answer it. All the fake anti-Semitism allegations and the microscopic examination of conversations from years past will evaporate. Eventually evidence will accumulate of a determined attempt by a combination of the American, Israeli and British states to overthrow a man who was seen as a threat to the western alliance. Corbyn stood for the Labour leadership on an anti-nuclear, anti-Nato platform and is simply unacceptable to the security establishment. It is a mark of the poverty of Brian's analysis that not only does he fail to consider these questions, but does not even ask them. Instead he is trapped in the tired minutiae of Zionist accusations.

I first came across Brian at the founding meeting of Independent Jewish Voices in February 2007. We met each other occasionally for dinner until about two years ago, when the pro-Zionist 'anti-Semitism' campaign caused him to drift away from his analysis of how Zionism has used anti-Semitism as a false metonym.

Theoretically his understanding of anti-Semitism is second to none. The lecture he gave in 2013, on the 75th anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, at the Jewish Museum in Berlin - 'What do we mean when we say anti-Semitism? Echoes of shattering glass'<sup>10</sup> - is a wonderful exposition of what anti-Semitism is and is not. And his definition - "a form of hostility to Jews as Jews, where Jews are perceived as something other than what they are" - is infinitely superior to that of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.<sup>11</sup> Brian's opening statement was prescient:

What do we mean when we say 'anti-Semitism'? Do we know what we mean? Does it matter? ... The word matters because the thing matters. It matters because, unless we use the same word in the same way, we will be talking at cross-purposes.

That has been the problem for the past three years. When Corbyn was accused of anti-Semitism he denied it, but this had no effect, because the 'anti-Semitism' he was being accused of was a different creature from that which he denied. His critics claimed that they were not really concerned about Israel, but they would, wouldn't they? That this was a lie is evidenced

by their insistence that Labour should accept a definition of anti-Semitism which conflated anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism.

The IHRA's author, Kenneth Stern, explained how the idea for a common definition was first articulated by Dina Porat in April 2004. Porat is the principal historian at Israel's Yad Vashem - an institution that distorts the holocaust through a Zionist prism. She recently gave her blessing to prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu's agreement with Poland's government.<sup>12</sup>

Brian is living proof of Marx's warning that "philosophers have only interpreted the world ... The point, however, is to change it."<sup>13</sup> The unrelenting 'anti-Semitism' campaign of the past three years has also demonstrated the truth of another of Marx's observations: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: ie, the class which is at the same time its ruling intellectual force."<sup>14</sup>

We see this in the way in which the IHRA definition has been imposed despite it lacking even a shred of intellectual justification. It has been savaged by academic and legal scholars alike: it has been called "bewilderingly imprecise",<sup>15</sup> "not a definition: it is indefinite",<sup>16</sup> and likely to "chill or ban criticism of Israeli policy ..."<sup>17</sup> In reality, anti-Semitism is not difficult to define at all. The *Oxford English Dictionary* needs only six words: "Hostility to or prejudice against Jews".

Brian has accepted that the IHRA definition is "vague and rambling", "not fit for purpose" and a "flawed initiative, based on a document itself deeply flawed", yet Labour's stillborn anti-Semitism code, which incorporated 95% of the IHRA, was nonetheless attacked by the *Jewish Chronicle* as "a cynical exercise [sic] in Jew hatred".<sup>18</sup> The *JC* was one of three Zionist papers that rejected this code of conduct in a joint front page. Brian asks:

What is this really about? Why the absence of measured criticism and reasoned debate? Why the blanket rejection of the NEC code ... and insistence upon the IHRA definition *tout court*? Did it signify an alliance of forces with an anti-Corbyn and anti-left agenda? Or did it express a profound disquiet that Jewish people feel?

Brian chooses both answers! Yet Pollard, who branded Labour as "institutionally anti-Semitic", was quite open. The problem was that "Labour has excised the parts [of the IHRA] which relate to Israel and how criticism of Israel can be anti-Semitic". Despite this Brian prefers to give credence to this alliance of forces armed with an

anti-Corbyn and anti-left agenda.<sup>19</sup>

Brian suggests that "A legitimate grievance has sunk in so deep that it is impossible to accept that ... this grievance has at last been taken on board by the party ..."<sup>20</sup> In other words, the attacks on Corbyn and the Labour Party over the past three years were part of a "legitimate grievance".

So when BOD president Jonathan Arkush welcomed Donald Trump to power,<sup>21</sup> whilst condemning Jewdas (the Jewish group with whom Corbyn spent a Seder) as a "source of virulent anti-Semitism", Brian sees no reason to challenge the bona fides of Corbyn's accusers.<sup>22</sup>

You might have thought that after Pittsburgh - the product of Trump's campaign against refugees - Brian might have rethought the notion that Zionism is concerned about anti-Semitism. Israel immediately sent the uber-racist, Naftali Bennett, to defend Trump before American Jewry<sup>23</sup> despite his overt anti-Semitism. Or perhaps Brian has been persuaded that Trump cannot be anti-Semitic because 'some of my best friends are Jewish'? Was the decision of the Zionist Organisation of America to invite Steve Bannon and neo-Nazi Sebastian Gorka to its annual gala dinner an aberration? Has Brian forgotten what the founder of Zionism, Theodor Herzl, wrote?

In Paris ... I achieved a freer attitude towards anti-Semitism, which I now began to understand historically and to pardon. Above all, recognise the emptiness and futility of trying to 'combat' anti-Semitism.<sup>24</sup>

**Bogus allegations**

The Zionist movement has never been concerned with opposing anti-Semitism, which it sees as inherent in the non-Jew and ineradicable. It has been a shock to American Jewry to learn, with the advent of Trump, that anti-Semites can be ardent Zionists. Naomi Zeveloff declared that, "though it would seem impossible to hate Jews but love the Jewish state, these two viewpoints are not as contradictory as they appear".<sup>25</sup> The love affair between Zionism and anti-Semitism is a long, if not beautiful, one. If Brian has any doubts, then he should consult Chaim Weizmann's autobiography and his praise for William Evans-Gordon, the founder of the British Brothers

League, which was the precursor of Oswald Moseley's British Union of Fascists. Arthur Balfour, the author of the Aliens Act 1905, is another hero to the Zionist movement.<sup>26</sup> Although Marx wrote that "It is not the

consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness",<sup>27</sup> we have seen an ideological and political offensive which has in itself become a material force. The 'debate' on the IHRA has been one in which logic and argument are irrelevant.

When the Zionists insisted that the 'Jewish community' had the right to 'self-define' anti-Semitism, what they were really saying was that the IHRA was indefensible through reasoned and rational argument. All that mattered was the subjective - namely who supported the IHRA - although most Jews will never have read this definition drawn up at the instigation of the Israeli state. This is a specious argument.

What if another community were to argue that female genital mutilation is acceptable or that the burka should be made compulsory because their community supported it? Would Brian reach back into history for a justification? If the so-called Jewish right to self-determination conflicts with the rights of another group, the Palestinians, then it is illegitimate.

The false anti-Semitism campaign waged against the Labour Party for the past three years has rested on bogus and contrived allegations,<sup>28</sup> yet Brian ignores all of this when he speaks of a "community of concern" about "anti-Semitism on the left". These are weasel words. This "community of concern" stretches from those well-known anti-racist papers, *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*, through to the BOD - a body which historically has opposed any mobilisation against anti-Semitism. In 1936 it called on Jews to stay at home when Moseley's BUF tried to march through the East End in what became known as the Battle of Cable Street.<sup>29</sup> In the late 1970s it opposed the formation of the Anti-Nazi League.

Brian's "spectre of anti-Semitism" reshapes all the tired and familiar allegations. Brian refers to the "drip-drip of toxic posts" on social media. No-one has died from or been deported because of a Facebook post. There is no evidence that anti-Semitism in Britain is increasing. Incidents of Islamophobia are four times more frequent and anti-Roma racism is over six times as high, yet we hear little about these forms of racism.<sup>30</sup> Indeed it is Muslims and black people who have borne the brunt of the false anti-Semitism campaign.

It is depressing that Brian uses as examples of 'anti-Semitism' Corbyn's description of Hamas and Hezbollah as "friends". Hamas is virtually the creation of the Israeli state.<sup>31</sup> It is a conservative Palestinian resistance group, but it is not anti-Semitic. It has always made a distinction between Jews as a religion and Zionism - which is remarkable, since Israeli soldiers kill Palestinian children in the name of 'the Jews'. Hamas condemned the recent Pittsburgh murders.<sup>32</sup> Hezbollah is the only military force to have successfully driven Israel out of Arab territory, but the fight of both these groups has never been against Israelis as Jews, but as occupiers. Neither organisation has ever attacked Jewish people outside Israel and the accusation of anti-Semitism against them is groundless.

Brian refers to a six-year-old mural brought out of the closet by Luciana Berger MP in time for the local elections last May. Opinions differ as to whether it was anti-Semitic, but it was defended by Corbyn on free speech grounds. Brian describes the bankers in it of having "huge noses",



**Brian Klug: giving succour**

although most of the criticism referred to “hooked noses”.<sup>33</sup>

Echoing Jonathan Sacks’ nonsense, Brian describes as “very troubling” a remark made by Corbyn five years ago, when he said a group of Zionists lacked a sense of “English irony”, even though they had been living here all their lives - unlike the Palestinian ambassador, who certainly knew how to use irony. The fact that Brian gives credence to the alleged anti-Semitism in this remark suggests that he himself has lost all sense of irony.

Having agreed that the IHRA definition was “not fit for purpose”, Brian alights on a quite novel explanation for the controversy around it. He accepts that it was about Zionism, but “the grounds for disquiet go deep and they go back a long way”. In fact they go back 42 years to UN resolution 3379, which declared that “Zionism is a form of racism”. Brian declares that this rendered Zionism “evil”.

Zionism, like South African apartheid and Nazism, did not originate with the devil, but is a product of human society. To the residents of Khan al-Ahmar, who are waiting for bulldozers to destroy their school, Zionism is indeed evil. It is Zionism, the ideology of Jewish supremacy, which dictates that the homes of the native population of Palestine must be destroyed to make way for Jewish settlers.

The inhabitants of the Negev village of Umm al-Hiran saw their homes demolished and their schoolteacher murdered, because they were not of the right race, yet Brian Klug, sitting in his Oxford college, sees Zionism as an ideology of liberation.

## Anti-Zionist Jews

Brian’s attempt to rehabilitate Zionism began with a talk he gave<sup>34</sup> to the Socialist Workers Party’s Marxism festival in July 2017.<sup>35</sup> He based his critique on an article by Aurora Levins Morales - an Ashkenazi Puerto Rican feminist - in a book *On anti-Semitism* produced by Jewish Voice for Peace. Aurora refers to “a three-cornered argument” between orthodox Jews, Zionists and socialists/communists in her grandmother’s *shtetl* about the pogroms. Brian uses this to suggest that Zionism is Janus-faced - an ideology of emancipation as well as oppression.

It is true that there were debates amongst the Jews in Russia’s ‘Pale of Settlement’, but they were won decisively by the left. Most Jews supported the Bund or the revolutionaries, not the Zionists. Zionism was discredited because of its uncritical attitude towards the tsarist regime.

When the Bolsheviks overthrew the tsar, Poale Zion splintered and its left abandoned Zionism. The same thing happened in Poland. If there had been no colonisation in Palestine, then Zionism would have been just another utopian and messianic movement - not dissimilar to Marcus Garvey’s Back to Africa, which in effect was arguing for the self-deportation of American blacks. However, Zionism did colonise Palestine. Some 2.5 million Jews emigrated from Russia (although 98% of whom chose to go to the USA or Britain, not Palestine).

Brian plunders Aurora’s article selectively, but fails to mention her comment that “the three-cornered debate turned lopsided under the weight of despair, and the Zionist minority of my father’s childhood has grown to dominate all debate, aggressively silencing debate”, which is relevant to what is happening now. The Zionist ‘anti-Semitism’ campaign in the Labour Party is about silencing black and Jewish anti-racists like Marc Wadsworth, Jackie Walker and myself. What it is not about is anti-Semitism.

Brian also omits Aurora’s own personal experience of Zionists, “who

write to tell me that I should have died in a Nazi concentration camp before living to denounce the crimes of Israel ...” This is what Brian’s ‘emancipatory’ Zionism has turned into. Aurora’s essay is a very moving one, which she concludes by stating: “When I speak out for the humanity of Palestine, I am defending the humanity of everyone, including all Jews.”

Instead of looking for the obvious explanation of what has been happening - ie, the weaponisation of ‘anti-Semitism’ - Brian reaches for his very own conspiracy theory. UN resolution 3379, passed in 1975, “flattened a national movement”, he says. This is total nonsense. There is no evidence that a UN resolution which no-one remembers has had any impact on the debates. In any event, Zionism has never been a Jewish national movement, since the Jews are not a nation.

The Zionist movement was a very distinct minority in pre-holocaust Europe. In 1938, in the last free elections in Poland before the Nazi occupation, the anti-Zionist Bund won 17 out of the 20 Jewish Council seats in Warsaw, with 61.7% of the vote, compared to one seat for the Zionists. In the second city, Łódź, they won 57.4% of the vote and 11 out of 17 seats.

Zionism in Poland and Russia was a movement of collaboration with anti-Semitism. Theodor Herzl visited Count von Plehve, the tsarist interior minister, in 1903, barely four months after the Kishinev pogrom which von Plehve organised. Herzl promised that the Jews would not oppose the tsarist regime if Zionism was a legal movement. As Isaac Deutscher wrote,

... the great majority of east European Jews were, up to the outbreak of the second World War, opposed to Zionism ... the most fanatical enemies of Zionism were precisely the workers - those who spoke Yiddish ... they were the most determined opponents of the idea of an emigration from east Europe to Palestine, ... of an exodus from the countries in which they had their homes and in which their ancestors had lived for centuries [in which] the anti-Zionists saw an abdication of their rights, a surrender to anti-Semitism. To them anti-Semitism seemed to triumph in Zionism, which recognised the legitimacy and the validity of the old cry: ‘Jews, get out!’ The Zionists were agreeing to ‘get out’.<sup>36</sup>

Brian argued in his talk to the SWP that Zionism “belongs to two opposite histories at one and the same time”. It is, on the one hand, “part of the story of British imperialism” and, on the other, “the exodus from Europe of a persecuted people”. Zionism “spoke the language of colonisation, but it was colonisation for the sake of emancipation”.

Zionism was based on a rejection of emancipation. Herzl wrote in *The Jewish state* that “In the principal countries where anti-Semitism prevails, it does so as a result of the emancipation of the Jews.”<sup>37</sup> Max Nordau, Herzl’s deputy, similarly attacked emancipation in his address to the first Zionist Congress in 1897.<sup>38</sup>

Zionism saw its future in an alliance with one or other of the imperialist powers. Herzl spent his life trying to persuade various European rulers, as well as the pope, of the merits of Zionism. When he met the Grand Duke of Baden, uncle of the kaiser, “His chief misgiving was that if he supported the [Zionist] cause, people would misinterpret this as anti-Semitism on his part.”<sup>39</sup>

The idea that Zionism was “colonisation for the sake of emancipation” is a contradiction in terms. Colonisation is no more emancipatory than rape or genocide

(and often involves both). Brian writes that “the radical left places Zionism ... among the rich and powerful, two classic anti-Semitic tropes: the capitalist class with its imperialist ambitions”. Elsewhere he speaks about a “demonising discourse about Zionism”. This is dishonest and lazy.

From its inception Zionism sought an alliance with the rich and powerful - not least Jewish magnates, such as the Rothschilds, although Herzl was none too successful: “I consider the house of Rothschild a national misfortune for the Jews.”<sup>40</sup> *The Jewish state* was written in response to the failure of his meeting with Baron Maurice de Hirsch, a railroad magnate - the George Soros of his time.<sup>41</sup> In 1917, when the Balfour declaration was issued, the British empire was the richest and the most powerful in the world. It sponsored Zionism in the same way as US imperialism does today. Brian himself admits that “Zionism is indeed implicated, in more ways than one, in the history of European imperialism and colonialism”.<sup>42</sup> Is this too anti-Semitic or just incoherent?

Brian refers to “sinister talk of a Jewish or Zionist lobby that wields ... influence out of all proportion to its small size”. Perhaps, but the Zionist lobby certainly claims it is powerful and is perceived as such. There is absolutely no doubt that the Zionist lobby groups, both in the United States and now in this country, often in alliance with the far/alt-right, are attacking basic freedoms of speech and assembly via the IHRA. Kenneth Stern, who drew up the IHRA, in his testimony to the House of Representatives in November 2017, warned that the IHRA was “being employed in an attempt to restrict academic freedom and punish political speech”.

## Useful fool

Brian Klug is playing the part of Zionism’s useful fool by giving today’s McCarthyism his blessing. What is sinister is the gathering of personal information on Palestine solidarity activists by Canary Mission<sup>43</sup> and allied groups in order to compile blacklists and prevent them gaining future employment. Either Brian is out of the loop or being tenured and does not quite appreciate what this means. As the newly released Al Jazeera films show, Canary Mission has been funded by a number of Jewish federations and charities.<sup>44</sup>

The clincher in Brian’s argument about ‘left’ anti-Semitism is the story of ‘Daphne’. Brian likes it so much that he included it in his SWP talk as well as his article. Daphne is a “Jewish anti-Zionist, fiercely opposed to Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and the siege of Gaza (as, incidentally, many self-described Zionists are too).”

Just stop there, Brian. That is not true. Very few Zionists are opposed to the siege of Gaza. Who? I have not heard them condemn the barbarous treatment meted out, which is best typified by the careful calculation of the daily intake of calories needed to keep Gaza ‘on a diet’. Perhaps Brian is unaware that in the siege of the Warsaw Ghetto the Nazis also calculated the daily intake of calories it granted the inmates. Admittedly the Israeli calculation allows for a bare existence, but the principle is still the same.

At her local Labour Party meeting Daphne proposed a motion criticising Ken Livingstone for “linking Hitler and Zionism”. Daphne explained that her motion had nothing to do with Livingstone’s views on Israel, but people did not agree. Everyone who spoke against the motion “suggested that it was part of a plot by Israel or that it was an attempt to prevent discussion of Israel”. Daphne felt like “an agent of the Israeli state”.

Leaving aside that this is all hearsay, Daphne was wrong. The

attacks on Livingstone had everything to do with Israel. Why else did the Jewish Labour Movement turn it into a major campaign? Why did the Zionist movement single out Livingstone for vitriol? It was not because he kept newts. The JLM gathered like vultures outside his disciplinary hearing.<sup>45</sup>

Daphne objected to “linking Hitler and Zionism” because “the holocaust is part of the identity of all Jews, whatever they may feel about Israel”. The holocaust is part of Jewish identity, but it is also instrumentalised by Zionism, as Israeli historians Tom Segev and Edith Zirtal have documented, as justification for Zionism’s colonising project. As Brian knows, it was wielded against Aurora in the most disgusting of fashions. She was accused of “betraying the Jews who died at the hands of the Nazis”, because she believed that “Jewish safety lay in solidarity with other working people”. If Daphne seriously believes that we must preserve the holocaust in aspic, then she is living on another planet. As for Livingstone’s statement that the Nazis supported Zionism, it is a fact easily provable historically.

Brian argues that “the word ‘Zionist’ has a life of its own, independently of anyone’s intentions”. Even if that were true, it would be meaningless. Clearly the far right uses ‘Zionist’ to mean ‘Jew’, but then so do Zionists themselves. Zionism is as Zionism does. It is the ideology of the current Israeli state. Israel is the most racist state in the world and Zionism is called in evidence, whenever it wants to justify its most appalling deeds. When a plurality of Israeli Jews want to expel Israel’s Palestinian citizens, they do so as Zionists.<sup>46</sup>

When Netanyahu argued that illegal African immigrants threaten the identity of the Jewish state<sup>47</sup> and the Israeli Labour Party supported him in this, they did it in the name of Zionism and a demographic Jewish majority.<sup>48</sup> Zionism is not a ghost in a long-forgotten Jewish *shtetl*. It is an apartheid, nuclear state - militaristic and on the far right politically. When supporters of Israel defend Jewish-only towns, segregated and unequal education, the imprisonment of Palestinian children, they do this by crying ‘anti-Semitism’ in response to criticism.

It would seem that Brian Klug has now crossed the border and is endorsing these blasphemers. It has been a tough three years and when the going gets tough academics are often the first to cave in. Brian, with all his erudition and sophistication, has abandoned those of us who are not willing to throw in the towel. He has abandoned the most oppressed for the sake of Jewish chauvinism, dressed up as a concern about ‘anti-Semitism’.

Perhaps the last word should be that of Avi Shlaim, an Israeli and professor of international relations at St Anthony’s College, Oxford University:

Anti-Semitism is not a real phenomenon within the Labour Party or any of the other major political parties. There are anti-Semitic incidents, but they are usually related to Israel’s behaviour, Israeli brutality. So every time there is an Israeli attack on Gaza - and there have been three in the last seven years - there is a rise in anti-Semitic episodes and incidents in Britain.

Fundamentally Israel and the Israeli propaganda machine and Israel’s friends in England and the Israel lobby in Britain deliberately confuse or conflate - and I stress they do it deliberately - anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism. Anti-Semitism is hatred of the Jews as Jews. Anti-Zionism is opposition to Israel as a colonial power and as an exclusive Jewish state<sup>49</sup> ●

## Notes

- https://jewishquarterly.org/2018/10/the-left-and-the-jews.
- ‘Anti-Semitism in Europe today: the phenomena, the conflicts’ (see www.hsozkult.de/event/id/termin-23374).
- http://bicsa.org/wp-content/uploads/BICSA-International-Scholars-criticize-Brian-Klug-ZFA-EVZ-Jewish-museum-Berlin-Nov-20133.pdf.
- www.haaretz.com/premium-prof-s-words-on-stopping-terror-draws-ire-1.5256331.
- www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5304851,00.html.
- www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/oct/09/michal-kaminski-antisemitism.
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**SCIENCE**

# Quantum computing has arrived

**Yassamine Mather** explains why the next generation of computers offers both huge opportunities and huge dangers



**Y**ou know a scientific subject is coming of age once business papers such as the *Financial Times* and *Wall Street Journal* start following its progress. Although we are still far from seeing the general use of quantum computers, regular reports of this technology remind us that the advent of this type of powerful next generation is not as distant as we might once have thought.

The following are examples of the *Financial Times* reporting on quantum computing: "As attacks on infrastructure become more likely, scientists hope that quantum computing will offer the best chance of defence; in the nearer term, quantum navigation could relieve militaries of reliance on GPS satellites and space."<sup>1</sup> And then there is the US professor of radiology telling the paper that, after experimenting with quantum technology, he has "seen a computer come up with MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) results that have exceeded those of his own expert 'feel'".<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that quantum computers have revolutionised many scientific areas - in particular computational chemistry, where there are already dramatic improvements in our

understanding of existing materials. The predictions are that future scientific advances will pave the way for the discovery of new materials, revolutionising every aspect of our lives from medicine to travel, from solving the mystery of black holes to re-imagining Schrödinger's cat. This is a reference to the physicist, Erwin

**IBM's Q-5 super computer can be accessed over the web by anyone who has enough money and can write a quantum algorithm**

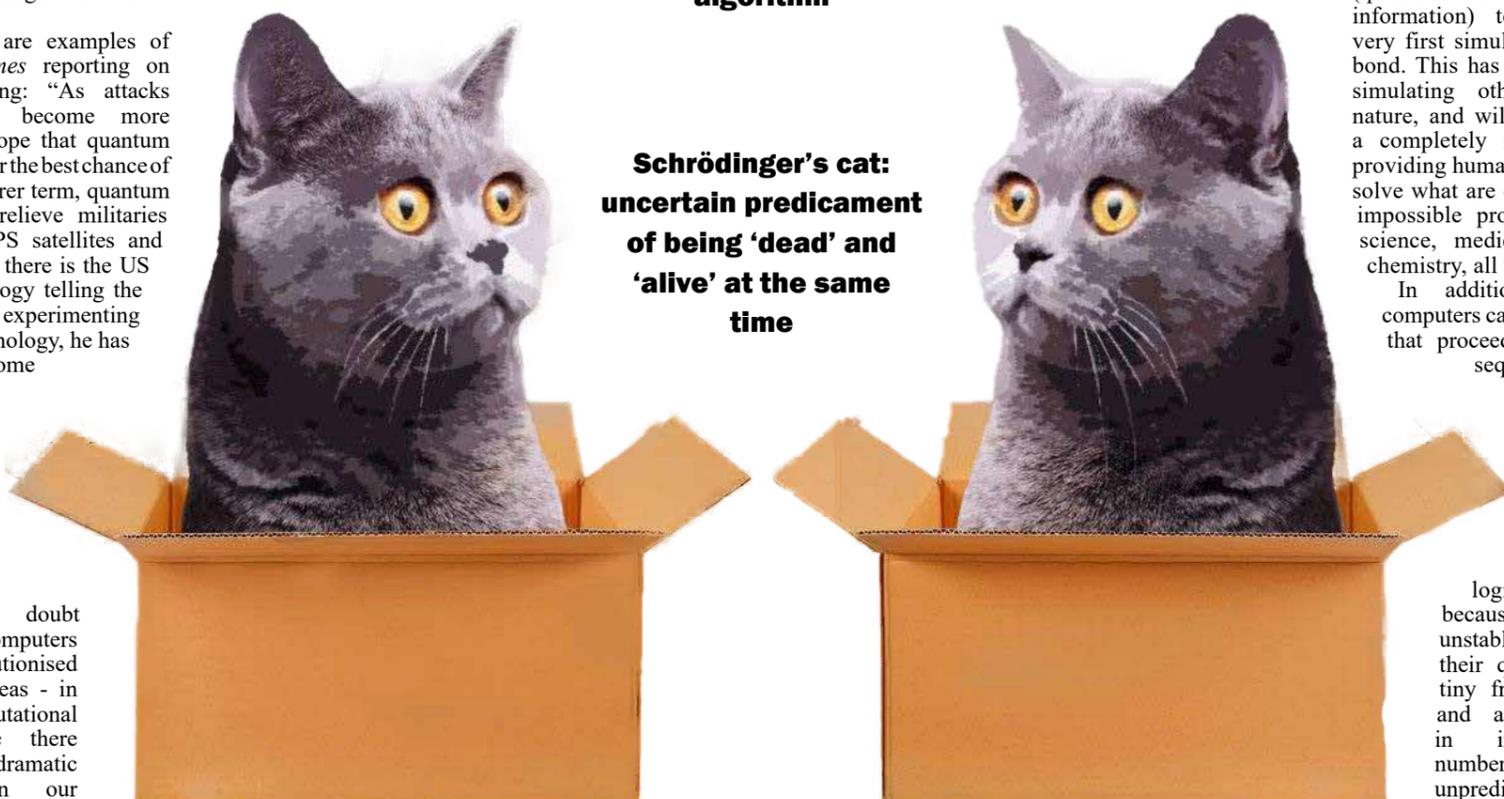
Schrödinger, who in 1935 described how a cat in a box could be in an uncertain predicament - the rules of quantum theory meant that it could be both dead and alive!<sup>3</sup> Quantum objects, such as electrons, live in a cloud of uncertainty, mathematically encoded in a 'wave function' that changes shape smoothly, much like

ordinary waves in the sea.

Traditional computers would not have been able to deal with such problems. Going back to computational chemistry, the study of simulated chemical bonds and reactions is probably one of the most exciting areas where quantum computers will make a difference. Here physicists use trapped ion qubits (quantum bits or units of quantum information) to demonstrate the very first simulation of a chemical bond. This has opened the way for simulating other phenomena in nature, and will lead eventually to a completely new understanding, providing humans with the ability to solve what are currently considered impossible problems in materials science, medicine and industrial chemistry, all using simulation.

In addition, while current computers can deal with problems that proceed through a logical sequence of steps, quantum machines can deal with probabilistic algorithms - calculations that do not follow such predictable logical steps. However, because qubits are unstable, they only hold their quantum state for a tiny fraction of a second and are linked together in increasingly large numbers. Because they are unpredictable, interactions

**Schrödinger's cat: uncertain predicament of being 'dead' and 'alive' at the same time**



# What we fight for

between them lead to high error rates. Learning how to control results out of these complicated and 'noisy' systems (systems full of disturbance) is already a huge challenge, and scaling them up to computers is far beyond today's capabilities.

None of this has diminished enthusiasm and funding for quantum computers and, of course, beyond science there are hundreds of other uses, including finance. We are told in the *Wall Street Journal* that future 'quants' on Wall Street will "map financial problems to similar problems in physics and then map them back".<sup>4</sup>

Major banks are already experimenting with this, creating and simulating models of financial markets, improving operational efficiencies in areas such as clearing and trade reconciliation, which are considered difficult to simulate.

And, as always with science, the military has better funding, access to new research and we already know of plans for using quantum computing in 'defence' and 'security'. Scientists in 'Darpa' (Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency) in the USA are working on quantum science as part of plans to secure the cryptography breakthroughs of the future.

In Darpa they have also built the world's first perceptron implemented on a quantum computer and have used it for simple image processing tasks. The perceptron takes what is called a vector input - basically a set of numbers - and multiplies it by a weighting vector to produce a single-number output. If this number is above a certain threshold, the output is 1, and if it is below the threshold the output is 0.

The work was originally started by Frank Rosenblatt (1928-71), an artificial intelligence expert, who devised an electronic device built in accordance with biological principles and showed an ability to learn - a perceptron. This device was capable of picking up the image of a triangle held before it and send it along a random succession of lines to the response units, where the image was reproduced. His work was also summarised in a book published in 1961: *Principles of neurodynamics: perceptrons and the theory of brain mechanisms*. That work has now been repeated on a quantum computer. The technology behind the new development is IBM's Q-5 'Tenerife' superconducting quantum processor. This is capable of processing five qubits and programmable over the web by anyone who can write a quantum algorithm, using a classical vector (like an image) as an input, combining it with a quantum weighting vector, and then producing a 0 or 1 output.

The big advantage of any quantum computer is that it allows an exponential increase in the number of dimensions it can process.

In very basic terms, 'autumn physics' deals with very small particles, atoms and electrons, where the laws of classical mechanics (also known as Newtonian mechanics) are no longer valid. Since the early 1900s mathematical advances allowed physicists to look at relativistic mechanics in relation to very high speeds, and quantum mechanics describes nature at the smallest scales of energy levels of atoms and subatomic particles and their wave-particle duality. The dual nature of light was explained by Albert Einstein in 1905, when he described it in terms of photons, with properties of particles. This was followed by his paper on special relativity, in which light acted as a field of waves.

Quantum computing uses this strange ability of subatomic particles to exist in more than one state at any time. Due to the way in which the tiniest of particles behave, operations

can be done much more quickly and use less energy than classical computers. Another quantum property these machines draw on is entanglement: two quantum bits can influence each other, even when they are not physically connected - something Einstein called "spooky action at a distance".

## Traditional computers

For more than 50 years, scientists have worked to reduce the size of transistors. Moore's law - which states that roughly every two years the number of transistors in a dense, integrated circuit doubles, allowing a steady decline in both the size and cost of computers - has been upheld.

Today, however, transistors and other electronic components are so small (nanometer size) that soon the standard laws of physics will no longer be valid. There is no doubt that the limits of semiconductor physics mean that CPU (central processor unit) performance now only grows by 10% a year. As transistor size shrinks to such a degree, the laws of quantum physics come into play, essentially dictating that they will be of little use.

To understand this we have to look at how the most basic component of a computer, the transistor, works. This component functions as a voltage switch. It exists in one of two states - 1 or 0. State 1 allows electrons to flow through it (high voltage), while 0 stops electrons flowing, acting as a barrier or gate (low voltage = 0).

When the size of the transistor is reduced to below 5nm, quantum mechanics dictates that the transistor is no longer capable of working as a gate/valve/barrier to the electrons. This is because of a phenomenon known as quantum tunnelling, where electrons can essentially bypass a previously impenetrable barrier as if they were tunnelling or warping through them.

Traditional computers process binary information - this means that something is either on or off, or, in shorthand, 1 or 0. Mathematician Alan Turing proved that you can do any calculation if you have enough switches that you can turn on or off. If you had a dimmer switch you could achieve many more options, including 'on', 'off' and a range of states between that are experienced as degrees of brightness and darkness. In fact with a dimmer switch, a light bulb can be either on or off - or a combination of both.

Quantum computers are heralded as the super-computers of the future, because they allow us to go beyond the binary and are capable of dealing with far more complicated calculations. Quantum computers rely on components that can be both 'on' and 'off' at the same time - a so-called 'superposition' of states.

However, the standard CPU is facing other challenges - notably from the Nvidia Corporation's GPU (graphical processing unit), which provides a parallel path, with a projection of a 1,000-times speed-up by 2025. Nvidia is behind the world's fastest supercomputers, such as the US-based Summit, which is considered the world's most powerful supercomputer. The CPU has often been called the brains of the PC, but increasingly that brain is being enhanced by another part of the PC - the GPU.

So as far as personal computing is concerned, apart from transistor count and size, there are other factors like GPUs, RAM and multi-core processors that can be developed to keep increasing the computing power in computers we use daily.

All PCs have chips that render the display images to monitors. However, all these chips are not the same. The GPU can do far more than

rendering basic graphics controller functions: it can accelerate computational workloads in areas as varied as cutting-edge scientific research, as well as rather less beneficial financial modelling.

The limitations of GPUs comes into effect when you consider high-performance super-computing. This is where quantum computers will make a difference. These machines are expected to be able to overcome size limitation by changing the way transistors work at a fundamental level. This is important because of the way capitalism expects 'deep learning' to pave the way for the increasing dominance of artificial intelligence.

In higher education the buzz word in social sciences, humanities, economics and political science - even in classics and philosophy - is 'machine learning' and currently GPUs play an important role in this area. Machine learning (ML) or deep learning (DL) is primarily based on the availability of immense stores of data, the invention of deep learning algorithms and the intense performance of GPU computing.

Its current usage is diverse: in healthcare, for example, medical data in the form of millions of scanned images and corresponding data are used to create neural networks trained to find clues in MRIs that until recently were only detectable through invasive surgical biopsies. Computers are taught through repetition and correction to gain skills such as the capability to read handwriting, recognise objects, respond to human or machine-generated audio commands. In the case of self-driving cars, deep learning is used to teach the vehicle how to recognise the space where it is operating, as well as the obstacles it should avoid.

Of course, there are many limitations to machine learning. It relies on correlation and prediction, but in real life human behaviour is unpredictable in many circumstances and so predicted scenarios fail, even when it comes to simple automated devices, such as supermarket tills. However, quantitative social science research deals with causality (ie, predictive reaction) and that is where ML/DL works well. In this field we encounter attempts to reframe machine learning in terms of causal inference or to detect groups of unobserved heterogeneity, using unsupervised machine learning.

## Social impact

There can be no doubt that progress in AI has already impacted on white-collar jobs and, as machine learning progresses, we will see its impact on many professions, from journalism to accountancy law and banking, leading to rising unemployment in advanced capitalist countries. Under capitalism we are not going to witness a future of leisure and creativity, while machines and robots take care of boring routine tasks. Instead we will witness fierce competition for low-paid jobs, in particular in countries where the service sector is the main employer. We are still a long way from that situation, but it is important to note the fundamental differences between the current deployment of artificial intelligence and previous industrial and technical advances.

According to Bernard Marr:

Previous large-scale changes to the way we work (past industrial revolutions) may have been disruptive in the short term. However, in the long term what happened was a transfer of labour from countryside to cities, and no lasting downfall of society.

Previous industrial revolutions involved replacing human

mechanical skills with tools and machinery. This time it is our mental functions which are being replaced - particularly our ability to make predictions and decisions. This is something which has never happened before in human history, and no-one exactly knows what to expect.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, while business and capital has become aware of what our future could hold, Karl Marx predicted most of this more than 150 years ago. Scientists are paying attention to a section of the *Grundrisse* named 'Fragment on machine'. Those familiar with the labour theory of value will not be surprised that in this section Marx poses one of the most fundamental questions that AI raises: how do we define value, when the human labour required to create commodities rapidly approaches zero?

In what was unbelievably prophetic for the time, Marx predicted that automation can change the relation between labour and capital and the means of labour/production:

Once adopted into the production process of capital, the means of labour passes through different metamorphoses, whose culmination is the ... automatic system of machinery ... set in motion by an automaton - a moving power that moves itself; this automaton consisting of numerous mechanical and intellectual organs, so that the workers themselves are cast merely as its conscious linkages.<sup>6</sup>

There are different interpretations of this. For Marx, automation of production would not automatically lead to the end of capital accumulation, but he could foresee all this as a driving force for alienation. In such circumstances, class emancipation could only be achieved when the working class gained control of production. This is in complete contrast to the 'inevitable' collapse of the capitalist system, as advanced automation progressed.

So does all this foresee the end of current computers? Of course not. One reason quantum computers are not a replacement for classical computers is the physical conditions required for their operation. Quantum computers need extremely cold temperatures - near to absolute zero. For example, much of D-Wave's input/output system must function at 15 millikelvin (-273.135° Celsius)! The classical computers most individuals own have built-in fans, and they may include heat sinks to dissipate heat. But supercomputers tend to be cooled with circulated water and stored in air-conditioned rooms. In other words, the ambient operating environments required by quantum computers makes them very expensive and difficult to build. And, of course, currently prices start at around \$12 million - although scientists and researchers can buy time on such computers from the likes of IBM, who offer quantum computing as a cloud service ●

yassamine.mather@weeklyworker.co.uk

## NOTES

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■ 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

**Tories in denial over poverty**

## Disappearing the welfare state

Even that den of thieves, the United Nations, recognises the suffering imposed on the working class by the politics of austerity, writes **Eddie Ford**

**R**uffling a lot of Tory feathers, the United Nations' rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, last week published a damning report on how British governments - the Con-Dem coalition and then the Cons minus the Dems - have inflicted poverty on large sections of the British people through their deliberate political policy of austerity.<sup>1</sup> He particularly attacked the levels of child poverty, which are "not just a disgrace, but a social calamity and an economic disaster", and also savaged the government's flagship policy of universal credit (UC) - a chaotic mess that is only adding to the misery.

Following a two-week 'fact finding' tour of the country - no doubt a joyless task - Alston issued his short, but comprehensive, 24-page document: 'Statement on visit to the United Kingdom'. In this study, he especially exposes the "mentality" responsible for austerity and benefit reforms - or *deforms*, to be more exact. These policies have torn the social fabric asunder, in his view - 'compassion', or concern for those suffering extreme hardship, has been "replaced by a punitive, mean-spirited and callous approach", with UC being a supreme example. It is a system designed to punish the 'undeserving poor' and save money at their expense - as made obvious by George Osborne three years ago, when he robbed UC of billions in order to pay for an increase in income-tax personal allowance. The former chancellor knew where his priorities lay.

Surprising even this writer, according to Alston about 14 million people (a fifth of the population) live in poverty - with four million of these more than 50% below the 'official' poverty line and 1.5 million in a state of destitution or *absolute* poverty, since they are unable to afford basic essentials (he cites figures from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and elsewhere). Each year the UK government publishes a survey of "income poverty", called Households Below Average Income (HBAI), setting the poverty line at 60% of the median UK household income. The HBAI provides two types of household data: before and after housing costs are deducted (BHC and after AHC).<sup>2</sup>

Problematically, many official poverty statistics use the BHC information, even though it seems fairly obvious that a more accurate measure of the real income available for a household is AHC - ie, the *actual* amount of money families and individuals have at their disposal. The 2015-16 HBAI poverty line, excluding housing costs, was £15,444 a year for a couple and £20,852 for a lone parent with two children.

Of course, there are numerous ways of measuring and assessing poverty. For instance, in 2014 the Poverty and Social Exclusion project at Bristol University found that the proportion of households lacking three items deemed necessary for life in the UK (such as fresh fruit and vegetables) had

increased from 14% in 1983 to 33% in 2012. Many poor people, needless to say, live in areas where there is no large supermarket nearby and, lacking transport, must rely on corner shops, where food is less healthy and more expensive. Food prices increased by 7.7% from 2002 to 2016, while the poorest families' incomes fell by 7.1% - meaning that more than a million live in "food deserts", according to a recent study by the Social Market Foundation and Kellogg's.<sup>3</sup>

### Iniquities

Alston picked out various other iniquities in today's Britain, including the limit on benefit payments to only the first two children in a family - it is "in the same ballpark" as China's one-child policy, because it punishes people who have a third child. Whatever happened to family values? Then there are the cuts of up to 50% to council budgets, slashing away at Britain's "culture of local concern" and "damaging the fabric" of society. He highlighted predictions that child poverty could rise by at least 7% between 2015 and 2022, possibly up to a rate of 40% - a staggering statistic. After visiting towns and cities throughout Britain, Alston thought it was "obvious to anyone who opens their eyes" that there has been a rapid rise in food banks, people sleeping rough in the streets, homelessness of all sorts, and a general sense of "deep despair". The latter has led even the Tory government to appoint the world's first ever minister for suicide prevention (Jackie Doyle-Price) - 4,500 people take their own lives in England each year due to "unheard-of levels of loneliness and isolation".

Targeting UC, the rapporteur called for the scrapping of the five-week delay in receiving benefits, which has plunged many into desperate hardship, vagabondage, homelessness and worse. Fundamental flaws in the design and implementation of UC, notes Alston, have caused untold harm to claimants' mental health, finances and work prospects, with the benefits sanctions being "harsh and arbitrary". Vulnerable claimants "struggled to survive", he said - in fact, the entire system was "Orwellian", "cruel and inhuman" and "fast falling into universal discredit".

Alston said he had met people who did not have a safe place for their children to sleep, others who had sold sex for money or shelter, young people who felt joining a gang was about the



**Becoming normal**

only way to survive, and people with disabilities who were being told they needed to go back to work or lose support, against their doctors' orders. Meanwhile, he said, town hall budgets in England had been "gutted" - inevitably resulting in a record sell-off of libraries and parks, and the closure of youth centres, leading to yet further isolation and loneliness, with charities attempting to "fill holes in government services". As for food banks, their organisation "resembled the sort of activity you might expect for a natural disaster or health epidemic". Tellingly, Alston observed that the government's embrace of digital technology and automation, especially in regards to UC, had the effect of excluding people with no internet access or skills - all leading to the gradual disappearance of the post-war British welfare state "behind a webpage and an algorithm".

Alston called for the "legislative recognition of social rights" - something that has long been the norm in countries like Sweden and Germany. If any of his recommendations or findings were incorporated into UK law, it would require a radical rebalancing of public service finance, not least in favour of more taxes and higher spending.

But, of course, Alston is realistic enough to know that there is no chance of that happening, at least with the present government and its ideology. Therefore, he felt he had no choice but to conclude that Britain was in "breach" of four UN human rights agreements relating to women, children, disabled people and economic and social rights. He acidly remarked: "If you got a group of misogynists in a room and said, 'How can we make this system work for men and not for women?', they would not have come up with too many ideas

that are not already in place." Without doubt, Alston argued, poverty in the UK is a conscious "political choice" - he will be formally presenting his report to the UN human rights council in Geneva next year. Various UK charities welcomed his study, saying it was a "wake-up call for government".

### Denial

Neatly proving Philip Alston's point that the British government is in a "state of denial" about poverty in the UK, and the political imperatives behind such denials, the government said it "completely disagreed" with his analysis. Stop interfering in our affairs. A Downing Street spokesperson robotically declared that household incomes were at a "record high", income inequality had fallen and that UC - far from being a disaster on every level - was "supporting" people into work faster, thus "helping people" improve their lives. The statement about household incomes having never been higher is an obvious nonsense, as it fails to take into account inflation.

Then we have the comments from Amber Rudd - now back from purdah after resigning as home secretary in April for "inadvertently misleading" MPs over targets for removing illegal immigrants as part of the Windrush scandal. She now replaces Esther McVey as work and pensions secretary, the latter resigning in protest last week over Theresa May's Brexit deal. When questioned by her Labour shadow counterpart, Margaret Greenwood, about Alston's specific criticisms of UC, Rudd sighed and said she was "disappointed, to say the least, by the extraordinary political nature of his language" - how unfair of him. This discourse was "wholly inappropriate", tut-tutted Rudd, adding that "we look

forward to working with experts in the area to make sure we get the right outcome for the people who we want to look after" - like the capitalist class and millionaires, Amber?

Philip Alston's report follows similar audits of extreme poverty in China, Saudi Arabia, Ghana, Mauritania and, of course, the United States - which was accused, accurately enough, of pursuing policies that deliberately forced millions of Americans into financial ruin, while lavishing vast riches on the super-wealthy, and concluding that 40 million Americans live in poverty and 18.5 million are in "extreme poverty".<sup>4</sup> Alston reported a lot of other uncomfortable truths about America, such as the fact that there are many fewer doctors and hospital beds per person than the OECD average; US infant mortality rates in 2013 were the highest in the developed world; Americans can expect to live shorter and sicker lives, compared to people living in other advanced capitalist countries; US inequality levels are far higher than those in most European countries. In terms of access to water and sanitation the US ranks 36th in the world; it has the highest incarceration rate in the world; its youth poverty rate is the highest across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, with one quarter of young people in poverty, compared to less than 14% across the OECD, etc. etc.

In a manner similar to the official British response, the Donald Trump administration launched a furious assault on Alston. The charmless US ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, decried the report as "politically motivated", fulminating about how it is "patently ridiculous for the UN to examine poverty in America" - she absurdly declared that 'only' 250,000 Americans are in extreme poverty. A separate study by Princeton University economist Angus Deaton - cited in the UN report - found, however, that about 5.3 million Americans live on less than \$4 a day, including government pay-outs ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

### Notes

1. www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23881&LangID=E.
2. www.cpag.org.uk/content/uk-poverty-line.
3. www.theguardian.com/society/2018/oct/12/more-than-a-million-uk-residents-live-in-food-deserts-says-study.
4. www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/15/extreme-poverty-america-un-special-monitor-report.

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