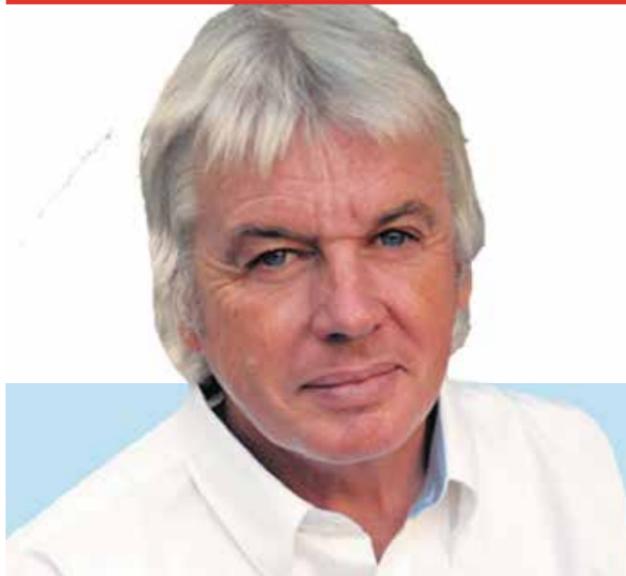


A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



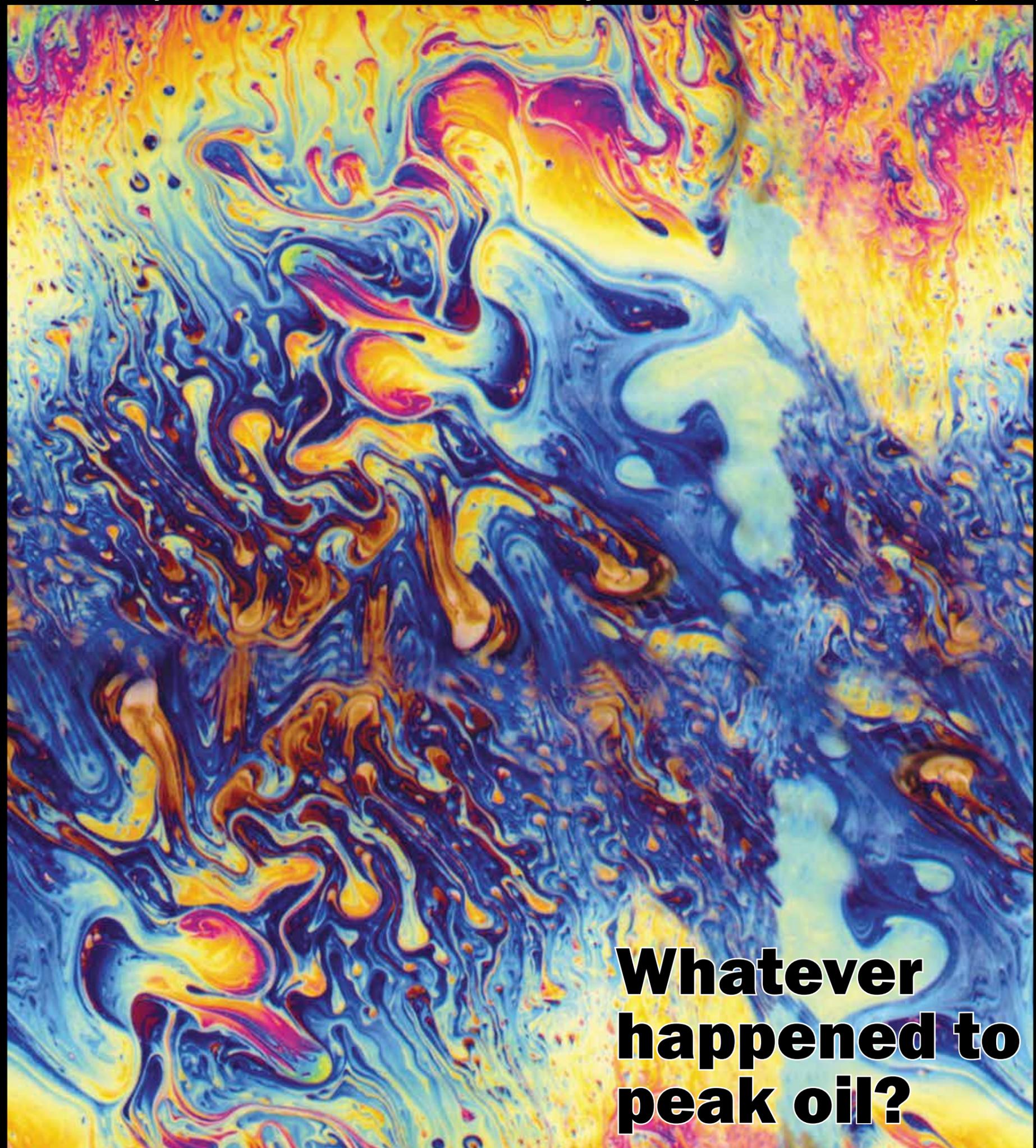
**Teamed up: Momentum
and JLM take on David
Icke. Why bother?**

- Letters and debate
- Islamophobia and IHRA
- Italy's divided left
- Elinor Ostrom review

No 1230 Thursday December 6 2018

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**Whatever
happened to
peak oil?**

LETTERS



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

Not the answer

Your article, 'Ignoring the problem', is headed: "Fighting for open borders means facing up to the reality of mass migration, argues Paul Demarty" (November 29).

While you are most probably right in saying that "illegal or legal, they will find their way", it seems illogical to me to deduce from this that calling for "open borders" is the answer. While I do not, of course, regard migrating with or without legal documents to be a 'crime', your argumentation appears to imply that it was wrong to forbid something which you can't erase. This, of course, goes for murder as well. At least since Cain and Abel, human beings have committed murder and no law has ever stopped this practice. However, all societies have regarded it as a crime and forbidden it.

'Open borders' is identical to no borders and thus to no state. The fact that most people in this world who have good reasons to leave their countries for economically better developed ones will never be able to do so does not mean that the slogan, 'open borders', is right. At least logically, it means that everybody who is poorer than the minority of the world's people in the imperialist countries could settle there. This would of necessity mean that there everybody's socio-economic level would drop at least near to the world-wide prevailing low level, so that, even for the migrants, migration would not pay off.

Putting forward such a slogan with the ulterior motive that anyway most of the folks in question won't ever make it to Europe seems to me to be particularly nasty. We ought to fight for different strategies to favour the wellbeing of the people in and outside the imperialist countries.

A Holberg
email

In Israeli eyes

From the very inception of the communist movement in mandate Palestine, the job of Jewish and Arab communists was twofold: their task was not just to convince the masses that the only way to liberate themselves is building a revolutionary party of the working class, one which will carry forward a proletarian revolution. It was also to persuade the Jewish and Arab workers that they must break the divisions which separate them and unite in an internationalist party, whose members are equal and undertake the task of revolutionising Palestine. The role played by the Jewish and Arab communists cannot be fully explained without emphasising the fact that their struggle for full national and class liberation of their peoples was based on sheer commitment to the binational nature of this very struggle.

Today, the communist movement in Israel/Palestine is weaker than it was. The Israeli communists, as well as their Palestinian counterparts, do not stress the need to build a revolutionary party of workers in the country and are satisfied with having two moribund parties that cannot win the hearts and minds of the workers and peasants. They still stick to the old and already dead two-state solution, refusing to think of Palestine as one political entity, which should be unified in one socialist republic. They stand for nationalist politics which is not working class-oriented and lack any influence in terms of organising workers and mobilising them. There is therefore a great need to start an honest discussion on the role of communists in Israel/Palestine, considering the crazy political situation that prevails in the country. However, there is no desire among

the existing socialist and communist militants in the country to carry forward this kind of debate. This examination of our past and present as communists, including the Soviet past, is greatly needed, but is unfortunately avoided.

I follow with great envy the *Weekly Worker* and the great amount of energy devoted in discussing and promoting class politics upon its pages, including the needed inquiry into the Soviet past. In my eyes, the *Weekly Worker* is a revolutionary paper oriented toward the toiling masses - a paper whose equivalent does not exist in Israel/Palestine - and there is a serious need to help the British comrades to spread the word and let people enjoy and be influenced by the communist press, authored by the successors of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

At the same time, I do believe that the *Weekly Worker* must serve as an instrument to rebuild the Communist International destroyed by Stalin - hence the need to publish on its pages some views, analyses and commentaries written by communists who live outside Britain and are terribly isolated, like myself. I hope that the British comrades appreciate how valuable their paper is; I can only wish that a day will come in which a Hebrew *Weekly Worker* will be published in my own country.

David Markovich
Israel

Labour policy

An interesting exchange took place at the November 30 general meeting of Eltham Constituency Labour Party in south London.

The MP for Eltham is Clive Efford, who, although he was the prime mover behind the refounding of the Tribune group of Labour MPs in 2016, is more of a centrist than a leftwinger. When giving his usual parliamentary report, Efford focused mainly on Brexit and, referring to next week's crunch vote in the Commons, which Theresa May is expected to lose, asked, "What do we do next?"

Astonishingly he answered his own question by stating: "Labour's policy is for a People's Vote". That is totally untrue and a comrade immediately challenged this from the floor, pointing out that party policy was for a general election, not a second referendum - something that Efford insisted was now essential. The MP then admitted that the first priority was a general election, but, he said, once that had been rejected, as it certainly would be, "only then would we call for a second referendum".

When the comrade from the floor shook his head, Efford invited him to come back in to elaborate his disagreement. The comrade pointed out that the policy decided at conference was to leave things open in the event of no election - a second referendum was just one possibility. But Efford retorted that the "clear implication" of the conference motion was that in those circumstances there would indeed be a People's Vote. This "implication" demonstrates just why that motion won the overwhelming support of Labour 'remainers'.

As it happened, the main debate at the general meeting was precisely over Brexit and one of the CLP's most consistent rightwingers complained that the party as a whole had not campaigned for 'remain' during the 2016 referendum campaign, believing it was too divisive and might 'cost us votes' to put forward any position. But now a People's Vote was the "only way to try and resolve things" and we should do everything we could to reverse the Brexit decision.

A dozen or so comrades intervened in the debate, but not one was a supporter of 'leave' or even backed the official leadership line that 'the people have spoken'. The overwhelming majority agreed with Efford that the decision must be reversed.

It was left to the comrade who had

made the original challenge to break the consensus. The first referendum had been a farce, he said, and a second one would be exactly the same. Stating that referenda were the "most undemocratic form of so-called democracy", he pointed out that the first major statesman to employ the device was French dictator Napoleon Bonaparte. We should be "against referendums in principle", he said.

Surprisingly, this drew applause from a lot of those present and Efford himself also seemed to agree: we should indeed be "very wary" of referenda and Labour should not call one in future. However, although it was "absolutely right" that Labour policy was for a general election, as that isn't going to happen, how on earth can we reverse the disastrous Brexit decision?

He went on to respond to the comrade's point that the EU, like Britain itself, was in reality run by big business and the banks, and was undemocratic in many respects, by putting on his Tribune face: "What kind of Europe do we want? I want to be in it, so we can influence it." Yes, the EU was undemocratic and dominated by business and it was "no longer good enough for capital to say, 'We've got to do it for our shareholders'". We have to consider "what's best for the country and working people". And it's no use getting out of the EU "into the hands of international capital".

Looking at the comrade, he said, "You're absolutely right" about referenda, but, unfortunately, "if it's the only route ..." He ended by saying that Jeremy Corbyn had "done a great job" on Brexit - as had Keir Starmer!

Steve Williams
South London

Crunch time

In response to comrade Carla Roberts' article, 'No cross-class coalition' (November 29), I pose this multiplex of questions - equally directed to all others within Labour Party Marxists and the CPGB, who share her analyses and general direction of travel.

So what that a second referendum is being called for on Brexit? Just because both deluded and chronically manipulated populations vote for a particular set of capitalist nonsense in one of their 'democratic' elections or referendums, why should that preclude communist support for a next or subsequent opportunity in order to reverse the situation to some limited extent (or more accurately, so as to regain lost advantage as far as the working class element amongst that citizenry is concerned)?

Even more pertinently, so what that a truly distasteful melange of apologists for capitalism support the proposed 'People's Vote' (in the company of down-the-line reactionaries, including predatory financiers and whatever the hell else) - or, indeed, that they are holding hands so sickeningly in their desire for the UK to remain in the European Union?

Going by that wholly fallacious, strangely mechanical and linear (not to say simply daft) methodology, communists and all other permutations of real leftism would rampantly support such things as murder, rape and the abduction of children, simply because our power elites, as well as the bourgeoisie, oppose them!

By that same token, communists would decry essential welfare state benefits simply because neocon bastards manage successfully to create an impression of them as 'handouts' to 'job-shy scroungers'. In the same vein, surely communist occupants of notably more enlightened countries must make it their business vehemently and pro-actively to disallow more backward cultures their practice of female genital mutilation, despite the fact that to do so could be seen as aligning with disgustingly moralising 'neo-colonialists'?

Lying at the root of things, how can it ever be right to condemn or convict merely by association, merely on a basis of who we find ourselves sharing time and space with? (Not even bourgeois systems of justice permit that!) And surely opting to collaborate with your enemies is not only the right thing to do, but also an entirely sane move to make, when *together* you are being attacked by an even more noxious force?

Talk about mixing apples and pears! Talk about not being able to see the wood for the trees. Talk about losing sight of simple, down-to-earth or even just *Realpolitik*-based tactics (in distinction from core strategic considerations). Talk about abandoning common sense within a thick undergrowth of purist and impenetrable dogma - amidst a bizarre ideological blend of wilderness and swampland! All this could have suicidal consequences, given the current *Zeitgeist* together we live within, where the vast majority of young people fervently look toward freedom of movement within a progressively borderless globe, as conjoined with the resultant joys of multiculturalism/pluralism.

Even if only in their own naively 'limited' terms and sometimes stubbornly anti-revolutionary manner, it's a desire for egalitarianism - for the creation of a 'non-exploitative' internationalism to call their own. So why the devil would we communists deliberately and knowingly stick ourselves outside their parameters of decent-mindedness or even graciousness, so to speak? Why the devil place ourselves in contradiction to their energy - and thereby be perceived as nihilistically destructive of it?

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

Yellow Vests

France has been rocked for weeks by a series of mass protests, which are increasingly turning into violent riots. A spontaneous mass rebellion - called the 'Yellow Vests' movement because of their high-visibility vests which all motorists are required by law have in their vehicles - erupted on November 17 in protest against higher diesel taxes. Denouncing rising living costs and declining incomes, the movement increasingly also calls for the resignation of the country's president, Emmanuel Macron.

While Macron claims to be raising the tax for ecological reasons, it is in fact part of the government's neoliberal austerity policy attacking the working class and lower strata of the middle class. It is therefore not surprising that the movement has a focus on rural and peri-urban areas, where people strongly depend on their cars because public transport is poorly developed.

The Yellow Vests have become a massive movement, mobilising hundreds of thousands of people every week. According to polls, between 72% and 86% of the population supports its demands, while Macron's popularity has been driven to record lows. Protestors are blocking roads across France and impeding access to some shopping malls, fuel depots and airports. While making empty offers to hold talks, the neoliberal government is increasingly turning towards brutal repression. On December 1 police are reported to have arrested more than 400 people in Paris and 133 were injured. Some 10,000 tear gas canisters and stun grenades were fired, and water canons were deployed. After these clashes, government spokesman Benjamin Griveaux indicated that the Macron administration was considering imposing a state of emergency.

The Yellow Vests movement represents a spontaneous mass rebellion of workers and the lower strata of the middle class. It mobilises via social media and lacks organised local structures. Its leaders are not party

functionaries - mostly not even longstanding political activists - but rather people who seem to have been pushed accidentally to the forefront. Reflecting a widespread mistrust against established parties and trade unions, the movement rejects the presence of their banners at demonstrations (this is similar to phenomena like the libertarian sectors of the anti-globalisation movement in the early 2000 or the protest movement against the price increases for public transport in Brazil in 2013). On Réunion - a French colony in the Indian Ocean with a majority population of groups of African, Indian, Malagasy and Chinese descent, as well as a white minority - the protests have already been transformed into a semi-insurrection and the government has imposed a curfew.

While this is clearly a popular movement dominated by workers and the lower middle class, its politically confused character, its lack of local and national democratic structures and its rejection of the participation of trade unions and leftwing parties give it a rather raw, petty-bourgeois, populist character. However, it is a petty-bourgeois, populist mass movement driven by opposition to the neoliberal austerity policy of the government ("Macron is a president of the rich" is a popular slogan) and with legitimate, progressive goals like opposition to higher diesel taxes or the resignation of Macron.

Shamefully, the reformist leaderships of the main trade unions, the CGT (close to the 'Communist' Party) and the CFTD (close to the 'Socialist' Party), have refused to support the movement or even its demands! However, many local CGT branches, as well as another important trade union federation, the FO, support the protests. Important leftwing parties like La France Insoumise, led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon (who received nearly 20% of the vote at the last presidential elections), and Lutte Ouvrière also support the movement.

However, rightwing opposition parties, such as the conservative Les Républicains, together with racist parties like Le Pen's Rassemblement National, as well as fascists, have tried to infiltrate and exploit the widely popular mass movement. Many activists of the movement are disgusted by the infiltration attempts of these reactionary forces and there have been a number of cases where people have attacked such racists and thrown them out. Nevertheless, these attempts are ongoing and they represent a big danger for the movement! It shows how important it is to build democratic local and national structures and to lift the ban on the open participation of trade unions and parties (that would make it more difficult for rightwingers to secretly infiltrate the movement).

The liberal pro-government media try to present the movement as consisting of a bunch of backward blockheads who are manipulated by 'rightwing and leftwing extremists and hooligans'. Sectors of the academic left in Paris (as well as of the European 'left') share this sentiment. They denounce this popular movement as 'reactionary' and refuse to support it. Clearly, such academic 'leftists' are useless fools who treat the politically raw masses with contempt. They are no less criminal than the reformist CGT leadership. Instead of supporting the legitimate protest of the people against neoliberal austerity and fighting inside the raw and confused mass movement against rightwing forces, these reformist and centrist idiots prefer to arrogantly look down on the ordinary people and leave the field to reactionary forces!

Revolutionary Communist International Tendency
email

LAW

Civil war far from over

David Shearer of Labour Party Marxists reports on LAW's membership meeting

Around 20 comrades attended the December 1 membership meeting of Labour Against the Witchhunt, which saw a useful discussion on the anti-Corbyn witch-hunting campaign.

As Tina Werkmann pointed out in her opening remarks from the chair, with the replacement of Ian McNicol as Labour general secretary by Jennie Formby, a halt has been called to automatic suspensions and expulsions as soon as a charge of 'anti-Semitism' is made. Now an 'investigation' is conducted, whereby the member is asked questions such as 'Can you see how someone may be offended?' by remarks made on social media.

However, continued comrade Werkmann, the adoption by Labour of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance 'definition' of anti-Semitism has meant that the scope for targeting anti-Zionists has now been widened, since a number of specific criticisms of Israel have been outlawed. Other comrades pointed out, however, that what we are seeing is a mere "lull" in the witch-hunt or, as Tony Greenstein put it in his political opening, the "calm before the storm". As one comrade stated, once a general election campaign begins, for instance, the "shit will hit the fan" - the media will come up with a whole range of new accusations against both Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters.

Comrade Greenstein - himself expelled from Labour after being originally accused of pathetic charges of 'anti-Semitism' - pointed out that, despite the "lull", Paul Johnson had been suspended by Dudley council for a Facebook post stating that Israel is a "racist endeavour", while Peter Gregson - who was present at the meeting - has been suspended from his *union* for circulating a petition making the same claim.

Comrade Greenstein noted that Momentum has joined forces with the Zionist Jewish Labour Movement - one of the main forces in the anti-Corbyn witch-hunt! - to campaign against David Icke (who has, of course, been widely accused of anti-Semitism).

Also present was LAW secretary Stan Keable, who described how he had been expelled from Labour without a hearing simply for being secretary of Labour Party Marxists and earlier this year was dismissed by Hammersmith and Fulham council for engaging in a secretly recorded conversation with a Zionist on the 'Enough is enough' demonstration in March, when he merely noted that there had been collaboration between German Zionists and the Nazis in the 1930s.

A wide-ranging discussion took place on the use of the IHRA and the need to defend falsely accused comrades by going onto the counteroffensive - Corbyn himself should come out openly and make a stand against the targeting of the Labour left. One comrade stated that support for the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign against Israel could itself be deemed 'anti-Semitic', while another pointed out how some pro-Corbyn Labour members were advising people to 'keep their heads down' and wait for the fuss to die down.

But, in the meantime, as another speaker said, Labour's deputy leader, Tom Watson, has called for the dismissal of comrade Formby, because she is 'not doing enough' to



People are still being accused

combat the dreadful scourge of anti-Semitism that the right falsely claims has infected the party.

While LAW has strongly condemned the suspension from the GMB union of comrade Gregson, the meeting overwhelmingly rejected his motion calling for LAW to support his petition. While comrades recognised that comrade Gregson is in no way anti-Semitic, most were unhappy with the phrasing in the petition, including the notion that "Jewish leaders" - as opposed to Zionists like Binyamin Netanyahu - were against genuine democracy in Israel/Palestine.

His motion also claimed that before the adoption of the IHRA there had been "full freedom of speech on Israel" within Labour - despite the record of previous suspensions and expulsions that the meeting had already discussed. And it contained a plea to "keep the Labour Party united", when in fact what is happening is a full-blown civil war between the pro-capitalist right and the pro-working class left. As one comrade stated, "I'm sorry - I don't want to be 'united' with Tony Blair!"

Comrade Greenstein said he supported the *idea* of a petition, but definitely not comrade Gregson's version, and the meeting agreed that Tony would himself draft a proposal for LAW to adopt. To his credit, comrade Gregson declared in his response to the debate that we needed to launch a "full-frontal" counterattack against the witch-hunters - otherwise "they will pick us off one by one".

This sentiment met with comrades' approval, but his petition did not. However, we overwhelmingly approved the model motion he had drafted for trade unions and Labour branches to adopt. This opposed the disciplining of comrades in a way that breached our "free speech on Israel", and called for the reinstatement of comrades falsely charged. It also demanded the jettisoning of the IHRA in favour of a definition which simply states that anti-Semitism is "hostility to or prejudice against Jews".

The meeting went on to discuss proposals for LAW's first conference, which is scheduled to take place

in London on February 2. We had already rejected a couple of proposed updating amendments to our aims on the grounds that such changes should be made at the conference itself, but the main debate focused on the *nature* of that event.

Comrade Greenstein proposed that Chris Williamson, Ken Livingstone and George Galloway should all be given a platform to speak at the conference, as this would help attract a greater number of participants, who would be able to join LAW on the day. But comrades from LPM in particular were against transforming the conference into a "rally". What was needed was plenty of time for detailed discussion of our principles, as well as motions and amendments, followed by the election of the steering committee. It was argued that a rally would be a good idea, but it should be organised separately and not confused with the kind of in-depth and serious debate we need about the way forward, including discussing any differences.

In the end, the meeting rejected by a large majority invitations to Livingstone and Galloway (it was felt that they would not accept in any case), but agreed to invite comrade Williamson, who himself has been engaged in campaigning within Labour for democratisation and against the right. The possibility of a separate public meeting would be discussed by LAW's steering committee.

All in all, the meeting was, in the view of this writer, highly constructive, despite the absence of such prominent LAW members as Jackie Walker, our chair, and Moshé Machover, who both sent their apologies. These two are amongst the numerous comrades targeted in the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' campaign - comrade Machover was quickly reinstated following a powerful upsurge challenging the ludicrous charges made against him, but comrade Walker is still awaiting a hearing after being suspended for two years!

These examples amply demonstrate that the civil war is far from over and it is essential for LAW to step up its campaigning and organisation. Please mark February 2 in your diaries ●

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday December 9: No forum.

Sunday December 16, 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): 'Social democratic parliamentary work: lessons from elsewhere'.

Sunday December 23 and 30: No forum.

Sunday January 6, 5pm: Regular weekly forum resumes.

Sunday January 13, 5pm: 'The Labour Party and *The communist manifesto* in 1948'. Speaker: Lawrence Parker.

Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1.

Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk and

Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday December 11, 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: 'Spirits of the forest: self-government through polyphonic singing'. Speaker: Ingrid Lewis.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group:

<http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

Stop arming Saudi, stop bombing Yemen

Public meetings

Liverpool, Friday December 7, 1pm:

LTC A, Lecture Theatre Complex, Hope Park, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool L16.

Lewisham, Thursday December 13, 7:30pm:

New Cross Learning, 283-285 New Cross Road, London SE14.

Cambridge, Wednesday January 16, 7:30pm:

Friends Meeting House, Jesus Lane, Cambridge CB5.

Birmingham, Wednesday January 30, 7pm:

Committee Rooms 3-4, Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1.

Protest

Edinburgh, Saturday December 8, 12 noon:

Wellington Statue, east end of Princes Street, Edinburgh EH1.

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

Safe and secure housing for all

Saturday December 8, 11am to 5pm: National housing summit conference with workshops, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1.

Organised by Axe the Housing Act - secure homes for all:

www.facebook.com/events/2119289301721653.

Hands Off Venezuela

Saturday December 8, 2pm to 6pm: Conference, Birkbeck, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1.

£5 waged, £3 unwaged.

Organised by Hands Off Venezuela:

www.facebook.com/events/492687611223712.

Stop Tommy Robinson

Sunday December 9, 11am: Counterdemonstration.

Assemble BBC, Portland Place, London W1. March to Whitehall.

Organised by Stand Up To Racism:

www.facebook.com/events/323977288186837.

No to fascists

Sunday December 9, 9am: Protest against the 'Mersey Nationalists', Derby Square, Liverpool L2.

Called by Unite Against Fascism Merseyside and Stand Up To Racism:

www.facebook.com/events/2075893705832071.

The long 1960s

Thursday December 13, 6:30pm: Discussion, Daryll Forde Seminar Room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taverton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. Women and the unofficial 1970 Leeds clothing workers' strike. Speaker Liz Leicester.

Organised by Social Histories of Revolution:

<https://socialhistories.wordpress.com>.

Bargain books

Saturday December 15, 11am to 3pm: Book sale, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1.

Organised by Marx Memorial Library:

www.marx-memorial-library.org.

Save jobs at Cammell Laird

Monday December 17, 6:30pm: Meeting, Birkenhead Town Hall, Hamilton Street, Birkenhead CH41. Support Cammell Laird workers striking to save jobs and to stop casualisation. Speakers from Unite and GMB.

Organised by Unite: www.facebook.com/events/928751540667214.

Labour Against the Witchhunt

Saturday February 2, 11am to 5pm: Conference, London.

Venue: Askew Road Church, Bassein Park Road, Hammersmith, W12.

Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt:

www.labouragaintthewitchhunt.org.

Robert Tressell memorial

Sunday February 3, 11am: March. Assemble Noonan Close,

Liverpool L9 next to Walton station. In commemoration of writer

Robert Noonan, better known as Robert Tressell, author of *The ragged trousered philanthropists*. Speakers include Dan Carden MP.

Organised by Liverpool Walton Labour:

www.facebook.com/events/1143258535837664.

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.

BANS

Islamophobia and free speech

The Muslim Council of Britain now wants its own version of the IHRA definition, which for Eddie Ford can only be bad for freedom of expression

As extensively reported in this publication, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's 'working definition' of anti-Semitism has had a chilling effect on free speech. This is exactly as intended, given that its supposed examples of anti-Semitism excessively focus on Israel, deliberately conflating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. According to the IHRA, therefore, calling Israel a "racist endeavour" is an expression of anti-Semitism - even though the origins of that state in a colonial-settler ideology is a straightforward historical fact. Bizarrely, opposing a form of racism (Zionism) is now proof that you are a racist. Anti-racists are racists and racists are anti-racists.

The outcome of the IRHA's definition is that people are being hounded out of the Labour Party or losing their job - such as Stan Keable, the secretary of Labour Party Marxists, who was sacked by Hammersmith and Fulham council for making "inappropriate comments" about Zionism, whilst talking to someone at the anti-Corbyn demonstration outside parliament back in March.¹ Regrettably, there are plenty of other examples of how the IHRA definition has led to an intolerant and anti-democratic culture of witch-hunting, suspensions and sacking.

Perhaps inspired by these events, the Muslim Council of Britain is now effectively saying that it wants its own version of the IRHA. If Zionists can be protected, then why not Muslims? - a demand that has a certain logic, it has to be said. The MCB, of course, is a significant organisation, being a national umbrella body with over 500 mosques, educational and charitable associations affiliated to it - its current secretary general, Harun Khan, is the first *British-born* Muslim to take up the post. The MCB has been described as the "best known and most powerful" of the many organisations that have been founded over the last two decades to represent Britain's Muslim population.² Therefore what it says matters, whether you agree with its views or not.

Anyhow, on November 27 the MCB released a statement "welcoming" the definition of Islamophobia released on that day by the All-Party Parliamentary Group following a year-long consultation - the first ever "working" definition of Islamophobia in Britain.³ Beginning to sound familiar? According to the APPG, Islamophobia is "rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness". The MCB explains that this definition "aligns" to the three "essential principles" that they had previously set out - which were that Islamophobia is a form of racism, Islamophobia is more than just anti-Muslim hatred or bigotry; and, while Islamophobia does not incorporate criticism of Islam as a faith, some people may hide behind "criticism of Islam" when engaging in Islamophobia. In the same way, presumably, that some people may hide behind 'criticism of Zionism' when engaging in anti-Semitism.

Interestingly, the APPG's 72-page *Report on the inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia/anti-Muslim hatred* alludes to the same point - observing:

... we know all too well from the anti-Semitism debate engulfing the Labour Party over the summer



The problem is when the state becomes involved

that both the process of defining - one which does not undermine or marginalise the viewpoints of the victim group itself - and the meaning attached to the word, exemplified through demonstrable examples, are necessary if bigotry directed at particular sections of our society are to be widely understood and challenged, using every available lever in government, politics, policymaking, media, society and education.

Making the point even more explicit in its conclusion, the report notes that it found the IHRA explanatory notes and examples "both helpful and informative", and it inspired much of the thinking of parliamentarians engaged in this process of proposing a definition of Islamophobia. It added that the IHRA's explanatory notes "could, in all fairness, be adopted in their entirety to Islamophobia". It is hard not to deduce that the APPG's Islamophobia report is the son of IHRA.

The MCB goes on to tell us that the APPG's proposed definition has "strong support" amongst academics in the field, and support from many Muslims across Britain. It wants Muslim communities to "embrace the definition" and "welcome the APPG's road show across the UK to share their work in this area". Khan said the publication of the report was a "significant moment" and hoped that the British government will "listen to Muslim communities and adopt this definition in the coming days and weeks". To this end, the MCB has co-signed a letter with other Muslim organisations like Muslim Aid and Muslim Charities Forum, urging "all" political party leaders to sign up to the APPG definition, as it was "vital that the definition encapsulated the racialised reality of Islamophobia and its many manifestations over and above mere anti-Muslim hatred". Additionally, "we believed it was important that the definition provided space for criticism of Islam that did not use the language of racism to target expressions of Muslimness". So far, over 70 academics have publicly endorsed the APPG definition.

Naturally, the Muslim Association of Britain (essentially the UK wing of the Muslim Brotherhood) has also welcomed the "landmark" report as a "step in the right direction", but argues more work has to be done.⁴ The working definition "should only lay the groundwork for further discussion", states the MAB, as "comparing Islamophobia to racism - while providing an easy margin of understanding - does not tackle the issue in its entirety". By which the MAB means that "alluding to only racial and cultural aspects of Islam, rather than the religious and symbolic elements, is problematic" - and must be "developed through an ongoing broad and extensive discussion".

The MAB wants, it seems, the APPG definition-plus: something that protects Islam as a religion from 'hate crime' or ferocious criticism. Many readers of this paper may recall that our Socialist Workers Party comrades were very close to the MAB in the Stop the War Coalition and Respect - not uttering a word of criticism when the MAB issued a stern press release in 2006 condemning the BBC for screening *Jerry Springer - the opera*. It will be interesting to see what the SWP says about the APPG's definition of Islamophobia (if anything).

Even after taking into account the vast difference in population numbers, in terms of hates crimes - accepting the definition for now - Muslims are far more likely to be victims than Jews, who despite that apparently face an "existential threat", according to Zionist papers like the *Jewish Chronicle*. If we are to believe the statistics supplied by the home office, religiously motivated hate crime has risen by 40% in England and Wales, with more than half (52%) of offences directed at Muslims. Recently, the Equality and Human Rights Commission released results of the first national survey of prejudice for over a decade, which that showed 70% of Muslims surveyed had experienced religion-based prejudice.

Yet whilst deploring any acts of violence or intimidation against members of the Muslim population, and anti-Muslim bigotry in general, communists stand implacably by the

principle of freedom of speech. Of course, advocates of an IHRA-type Islamophobic law say that it would not affect the right to criticise religion or theological doctrine - but we all know it would. Councils would start sacking workers on bogus charges of Islamophobia, like the trumped-up charges of anti-Semitism. No, communists support free speech, which obviously does not mean it is acceptable to incite someone to murder - an entirely different thing.

On a broader point, communists fight for the complete separation of church and state. This means the democratic right to practise whatever religion you like and the democratic right to criticise religion, but we do not aim to gratuitously insult or offend someone's religious beliefs or

necessarily approve of those that seek to do so. After all, at the end of the day religion is "the sigh of the oppressed" - why would communists want to ridicule or mock those who take to "opium" for pain relief? Communists, as militant secularists, are against *privileges* for one religious faith, denomination or cult over another. There should be a strict equality of belief and non-belief ●

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Notes

1. 'In defence of Stan Keable' *Weekly Worker* March 29.
2. P Morey and A Yaqin *Framing Muslims* Cambridge MA 2011, p82.
3. <https://appgbritishmuslims.org/publications>.
4. www.mabonline.net/press-release-mab-welcomes-appg-definition-of-islamophobia.

Fighting fund

High note

Our November fighting fund ended with a surplus of £110 after an extra £35 came in over the last two days (thanks to VP, JC, RL and PO), taking the total for the month to £1,860.

That's good news, but we could really do with ending the year on a high note too. And we've got off to a good start - thanks mainly, of course, to all those standing orders that come our way at the beginning of each month. There were 18 of them in the first five days, ranging from £5 to £40. Two comrades paid the higher amount (MS and EW), while another four (SW, AC, ST and CG) forked out £30.

In total the SOs came to £325, while we also received two cheques - an excellent £50 from comrade CT and the £40 that LC added to his subscription. Finally US comrade PM paid his usual £15 by PayPal, while occasional donor Hassan handed a £10 note to a London comrade.

So after just five days we already have £440 towards our £1,750 target. Obviously, if things continued at the same rate, we would end up with well over two grand, but unfortunately that's not the way things work. As I said, a large proportion of our standing orders arrive during the first week, which means that the running total rises much more slowly after that.

So what we rely on to keep us above target - failing a sudden influx of new donors, of course - is a few substantial gifts like those two cheques this week. The only weekly paper that campaigns for a single, democratic-centralist Marxist party in Britain, united on a principled basis, could do with your help! ●

Robbie Rix

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

LABOUR

Zionists in the Labour Party, unite!

Momentum and the JLM have teamed up to take on David Icke, why bother says Carla Roberts

Who would have thought that the mad ideas of David Icke would be the thing that forges unity between Jon Lansman's Momentum, the rightwing Jewish Labour Movement and the 'centrist' Open Labour. Together they have attempted to organise joint protests outside the venues hosting Icke's latest speaking tour. Labour First is supporting the protests too. Maybe Progress was busy when Lansman called.

Earlier this year Lansman, a self-confessed Zionist, raised eyebrows when he attended a conference organised by the JLM. But this joint campaign is clearly going a step further. The JLM is an openly Zionist grouping, affiliated to the World Zionist Organisation and the sister party of the Labor Party of Israel. Its leaders (among them Ella Rose, Louise Ellman, Mike Katz and, until recently, the disgraced Jeremy Newmark) are virulently anti-Corbyn and helped to organise the March 26 'Enough is enough' demonstration outside parliament.

In other words, they are very much part of the campaign that is orchestrating the ongoing coup against Jeremy Corbyn. At the anti-Icke protest in Crewe on December 3, former Momentum employee Navendu Mishra proudly posted a selfie posing in front of the JLM's banner. Thanks to Jon Lansman having put this political no-name on the 'left list' pushed by the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance, Mishra is now one of the new members on Labour's national executive committee. No wonder things in the party are not improving at a great speed.

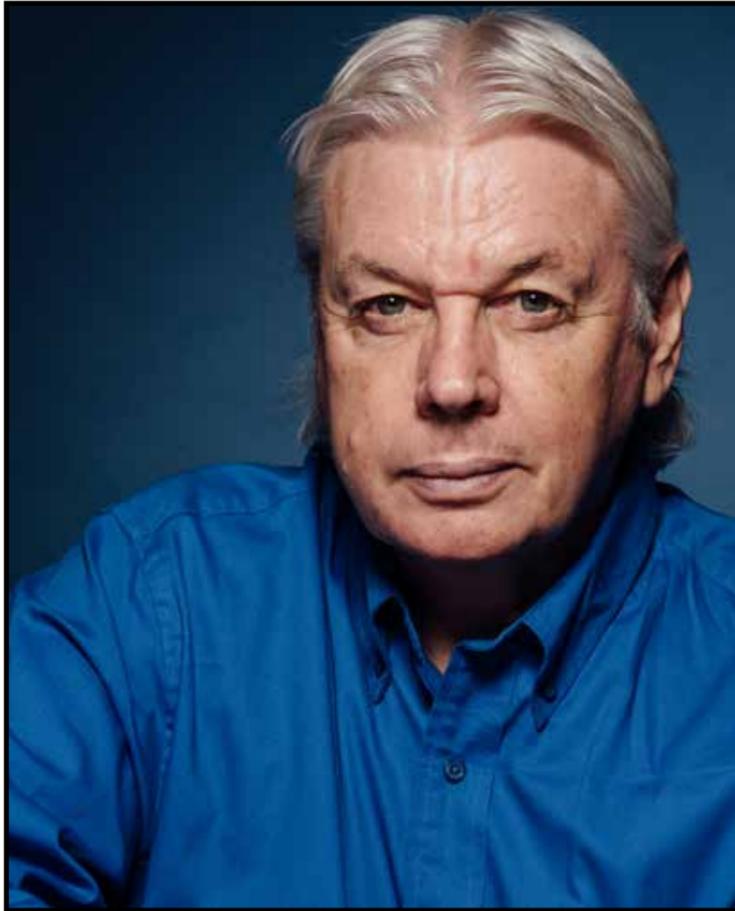
As if that were not bad enough, it looks like Lansman had (at least) a helping hand in the setting up of a new Facebook page called 'Socialists Against Anti-Semitism' - another sponsor of the protests. Momentum's campaign video on Icke shows Yannis Gourtsoyannis (a Lansman ally on Momentum's national coordinating group) holding an SAAS banner.¹ In an article on Labour List, he describes how he attended the event "called by a new Labour grouping called Socialists Against Anti-Semitism, and supported by groups including Momentum and the Jewish Labour Movement".²

Officially set up by Barnaby Marder, a previous vice-chair of Red Labour (which makes sometimes amusing online memes), SAAS claims to want to occupy the political space between the Jewish Labour Movement and Jewish Voice for Labour. Its Facebook mission statement states:

We think that there are anti-Semites in the Labour Party, or people who have (sometimes unknowingly) said anti-Semitic things, or who have given comfort to anti-Semites. But we also think that the issue has been magnified, by those who want to get rid of Jeremy Corbyn as the leader of the Labour Party, and used cynically to that end.³

Yes, it has been "magnified", but it is still a very real problem, according to SAAS. At first glance, the page looks like it could have been set up by the social-imperialists of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, who claim still to be part of the socialist left, while accusing all and sundry of being anti-Semitic.

But incredibly, the 'Socialists Against Anti-Semitism' are actually worse. They accuse Chris Williamson MP of "enabling anti-Semitism through promotion of people with anti-Semitic views, and then remaining silent when confronted with their anti-Semitism" (they specify that they mean, of course, anti-Zionists Jackie Walker and Tony



David Icke: there are many people with strange ideas

Greenstein). Plus: "Williamson has been a key mobiliser for Labour Against the Witchhunt, and we in Socialists Against Anti-Semitism find this problematic."⁴ I am sure that LAW feels the same about SAAS.

Exposé

SAAS have also published an 'exposé' featuring a Labour councillor, who has already been "reprimanded by the compliance unit of the Labour Party for some pretty nasty tweets, and told to tone down his social media outbursts". But that is not enough for our witchfinders, who "sadly [!] have to report that some rather more serious tweets and comments have come to light, which we reproduce for you here". Their screenshots, with their neat yellow highlighter, look suspiciously identical to those we have seen anonymously submitted as 'evidence' in many disciplinary cases.⁵

With denunciations like this, these 'socialists' are happily doing the dirty work of the compliance unit. In the name of defending the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, they are actively cooperating with those who will stop at nothing to get rid of him.

SAAS states on its Facebook page: "We are not at present an organisation, although that is likely to change in the future." Hmm. The left in the Labour Party - and Jeremy Corbyn - need these 'useful idiots' like a hole in the head.

Meanwhile, inside the Crewe Lyceum, David Icke was telling the 200 or so people in the audience that there had been numerous threats against his tour venues. 'No-platforming' is nothing new, of course. For as long as I can remember the Socialist Workers Party has been engaged in campaigns to disinvite those it deems to be unacceptable speakers and organising protests outside venues featuring said speakers. What is relatively new, however - and has become increasingly popular with the growth of the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' smear campaign - are organised attempts to cancel events by making anonymous threats against venues that feature 'anti-Semites' like Chris Williamson

or, as in the case of an attempt to screen a documentary about Jackie Walker at Labour Party conference, bomb hoaxes.

Marxists oppose attempts to restrict free speech. For that right to make any sense at all, it *must* include the right of those you vigorously disagree with. We instead favour open debate to expose dangerous ideas and prejudice - that is the only way you will actually convince somebody to change their mind.

Marxists also have no truck with calling on the state to ban certain groups or ideas - after all, we are likely to be next on the list of those deemed to be spouting 'dangerous' ideas, especially when the working class once again becomes a force that can seriously threaten the status quo.

Lastly, shutting down - or even just attempting to shut down - the events of those we disagree with is bound to help make them into martyrs. Thanks to Momentum, hundreds - maybe thousands - of people have looked into the crackpot ideas of David Icke in the last couple of weeks. Judging by online comments, quite a few of them seem to think that he 'has a point' - for example, when it comes to his rants against the elites.

Any half-decent conspiracy theorist knows that it is of utmost importance to have at the heart of your ideas a reasonably large kernel of truth. Otherwise, people will not connect with your theories, will not buy your books, come to your events, donate their life savings, etc. Former footballer, sports presenter and Green Party spokesperson David Icke's 'truth' is that he rails against "the elite" that is manipulating world events to keep themselves in power, spread fear and keep most of us down in the gutter, while moving towards a "global fascist state".

Obviously, this is not a particularly unique 'truth' and one that is shared by many successful sects and preachers. They connect to the sense of alienation and powerlessness that people often experience in the soulless and heartless system of capitalism. However, where Marxists try to provide answers based on science, historical materialism and

a realistic political programme, those sects and oddballs often feed off and perpetuate this sense of alienation by providing 'answers' that rely on interpretation/channelling through the preacher, the sect leader and, in our case, David Icke.

In 1991, shortly after his much-ridiculed TV interview with Terry Wogan, he really found his conspiracy feet, resigned as press officer of the Green Party and announced that he was the "son of Godhead", who had been told that the world was coming to an end in 1997. Clearly not put off too much by the lack of any world-ending events in that year, he developed his theory of "different dimensions" and that UFOs and ghosts are signs of crafts and people "shifting between frequencies". He went on to claim that the usual events that conspiracists like to harp on about (the assassination of JFK, the death of princess Diana, the attacks of 9/11, 7/7 etc) were the work of the elite, which - and this certainly was a new take on things - is made up of "inter-dimensional reptilians" called Archons, who have hijacked the earth and formed the "Babylonian Brotherhood" or "illuminati". Oh, and they can shape-shift.

Lizards

Famous members of this brotherhood apparently include the whole royal family (especially the queen mother, who he described as "very reptilian"), various US presidents, Ted Heath ("both of his eyes, including the whites, turned jet black and I seemed to be looking into two black holes")⁶ and, as you would expect, a fair chunk of prominent Jews - ie, those with money and power. Like many conspiracy theorists, he strays into common anti-Semitic tropes. For example, he likes to label members of the elite "Rothschild Zionists" - though, contrary to the claims of SAAS that he uses the term as a "code word for Jews", he clearly includes *all* members of the "elite", including many non-Jews.⁷ In his book *The robot's rebellion*, he makes numerous references to the forged *Protocols of the elders of Zion* (which purported to detail secret plans for Jewish global domination), describing them as the "illuminati protocols", which, he says, were produced by "Zionists".

There is, however, very little evidence to back up the claim that he is a "holocaust denier". I have found many references that describe him as such because he argues that *actual* holocaust deniers should have the right to free speech - clearly that is something quite different.

Contrary to Momentum's claims, anti-Semitism is not at the "sinister core" of Icke's theories - although the cleverly edited short campaign video very much gives that impression. Clearly, those theories are characterised chiefly by his, shall we say, rather fragile state of mind. Or, as the entry on his RationalWiki puts it rather neatly: "He also has been flirting with holocaust denial, but in Icke's case it's less likely a sign of anti-Semitism than yet another manifestation of all-round insanity".⁸

Why then?

That does beg the question as to *why* Momentum would prioritise a campaign against Icke's new UK tour - while, for example, leaving it up to the Socialist Workers Party to call a demonstration against Tommy Robinson's mass mobilisation on December 9? Surely, if you are serious about fighting racism (including anti-Semitism), a scumbag like Robinson should be your chief

target? Icke gets a few hundred people coming to his events, while Robinson has tens of thousands of followers - many of them wannabe neo-Nazis. But, of course, Robinson is now a staunch Friend of Israel and self-declared "Zionist"?⁹

Icke is a very easy, if not outright lazy, target. It is not difficult to take some of his weirdo lizard claims, edit in a comment about Zionism, a funny look by comedian Larry David and - hey presto - you prove that you are really serious about fighting anti-Semitism. A bit too easy, actually. There is a certain unpleasantness about Momentum's video - a bit like laughing at a disabled person.

Perhaps this bizarre campaign is Lansman's attempt to finally stop simply *following* the smear campaign - but take a *leading* role in it. He seems to have swallowed the lie that the Labour Party is riddled with anti-Semitism and has long supported the campaign to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. This started way back in 2016, when he dumped Jackie Walker as vice-chair of Momentum, after she was first suspended from the Labour Party. He has since campaigned successfully for the Labour NEC to adopt the misleading 'working definition on anti-Semitism' published by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, which labels criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic.

His Momentum constitution (imposed on the organisation without any debate in his January 10 2017 coup) declares that anybody expelled by the Labour Party is also expelled from Momentum - which, of course, includes anti-Zionists like Tony Greenstein, Cyril Chilson, Marc Wadsworth and possibly soon Jackie Walker. He dumped Pete Willsman, his comrade in the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy of over 30 years, from Momentum's list of recommended NEC candidates, after he was falsely accused of anti-Semitism. Lansman has long given up the fight for mandatory reselection (even if he briefly and opportunistically jumped on the bandwagon just before conference 2018) - which would have been the obvious way to get rid of some of the most violently anti-Corbyn and rightwing MPs, who will do anything in their power to stop Corbyn becoming the next prime minister.

We hear that ever since the Willsman affair Jeremy Corbyn has not been on speaking terms with Lansman (apparently, he personally told him twice to add Willsman back onto the NEC slate, but Lansman refused). He has also burned all bridges with the Unite union, when he thought it was a good idea to stand against Jennie Formby for general secretary of the Labour Party. Perhaps Jon Lansman is trying to build a future political career as somebody who can be relied upon to appeal to both the right and the soft left.

His ambitions and self-belief clearly know no bounds, however misguided ●

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G20

Trade, tariffs and financial stability

According to the Federal Reserve, writes **Michael Roberts**, the risk of another recession is no longer 'negligible'

Last week's G20 summit in Buenos Aires, Argentina ended with an agreement to disagree. They agreed to disagree about maintaining multilateral trade rules and they agreed to disagree about the need to combat global warming by reducing carbon emissions and greenhouse gases. Finally they also agreed to disagree on dealing with the major world problem of migration.

The Trump administration claimed that the US was being scammed by China and other countries over trade, because multilateral bodies like the World Trade Organisation were allowing America's trade competitors to take advantage of US technical know-how and subsidising their industries at America's expense. And Trump was determined to avoid having US energy industries and resources restricted by any caps on fossil fuels and the resulting carbon emissions. So the US will stay out of the Paris climate agreement, while the others will stick to it (although only in words, not action).

The hyped-up meeting between Trump and China's supreme leader, Xi Jinping, turned out to be a ceasefire. The US agreed not to impose its planned hike in tariffs on Chinese exports for three months, while the Chinese agreed to buy more US agro goods (which it would do anyway). As for controlling China's supposedly 'unfair' exports to the US or reducing its restrictions on US corporate capital in China, everything was put on pause for negotiation. The trade war may well resume in spring 2019.

The G20 itself showed that there will be no pause in the increased rivalry between a hegemonic economic power in relative decline (the US) and the rising technological and trading might of China (and other Asian economies). As long as the world economy crawls along at no more than a 3% pace (in terms of real gross domestic product) and world trade growth slows to a trickle, this will be just the first chapter in the new 21st century economic battle.

The International Monetary Fund, supposedly providing an objective view on behalf of global capitalism (and not any one nation or group of nations), is clearly worried. IMF director Christine Lagarde expressed her concerns:

I emphasised that global growth remains strong, but that it is moderating and becoming more uneven. Pressures on emerging markets have been rising and trade tensions have begun to have a negative impact, increasing downside risks. Choosing the right policy is therefore critical for individual economies, the global economy and for people everywhere.

What to do? Lagarde said:

... the choice is especially stark regarding trade. We estimate that, if recently raised and threatened tariffs were to remain in place and announced tariffs were implemented, about three-quarters of a percent of global GDP could be lost by 2020. If, instead, trade restrictions in services were reduced by 15%, global GDP could be higher by one-half of a percent. The choice is clear: there is an urgent need to de-escalate trade tensions, reverse recent tariff increases and modernise the rules-



Masters of the world, servants of capital

based multilateral trade system.

The G20 summit showed that these aims stand little chance of happening. For Trump, modernising "the rules-based multilateral trade system" means getting rid of the WTO and making only bilateral trade deals, where the US is not outnumbered. For the others, it means just that: outvoting the US. So the US tariff increases are not going to be 'reversed' - on the contrary, it is very likely that Trump will block any role for the WTO in future trade deals.

So the end of 'globalisation' and 'free trade' is in sight, as Trump's America looks to reverse its loss of trade share and - even more important - its diminishing returns from international capital flows. As I stated in July, it was "a threshold day" for the global economy when Trump first imposed his tariffs on China's exports and the retaliation from China began.¹

And the impact of these measures is already being felt. If energy (oil) exports are excluded, the world trade in goods has ground to a halt. As the researchers of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and G20 put it, "Excluding large oil exporters, such as Russia and Saudi Arabia, G20 trade was flat, suggesting that the steady expansion seen over the last two years may have stalled, as recent protectionist measures begin to bite."² In the United States, exports contracted by 1.7%. Although they grew in China (by 2.4%) - partly reflecting the exceptional sale of an oil platform to Brazil, which helped push up Brazilian imports by 18% - this only partially offset the significant contraction of Chinese exports (down 4.9%) in the previous quarter. Exports also contracted in the European Union as a whole (-0.8%), for the second straight quarter, as it did in Australia (-2.0%), Japan (-2.0%), South Africa (-0.8%), Turkey (-0.6%) and India (-0.3%).

The WTO announced after the G20 meeting that world trade growth would slow even further. China's export growth has diminished and its economic activity, as measured by

the so-called purchasing managers index (PMI), is static (ie, the PMI in November was 50).

Everywhere the PMIs are dropping and Germany - a key industrial trading nation and the main European exporter to China - suffered a fall in real GDP in the third quarter (Q3) of 2018. Indeed, real GDP growth over Q3 2017 plunged to just 1%. In Italy - another G7 economy where exports are also very important - the situation is even more dismal. Real GDP fell in Q3 and the growth over the same quarter last year dropped to just 0.7%. In contrast, the US economy expanded by 0.6% in Q3, while year-on-year growth in real GDP was 3%, but Q3 growth slowed from Q2, and Q4 is most likely to show a further reduction. So, with global real GDP growth set to slow going into 2019 and world trade no longer expanding at all, the rivalry between competing capitalist economies, and between the US and China, will intensify.

Excessive debt

And trade is not the only worry for the world capitalist economy. Only last month, the IMF expressed its concerns about the risks of 'excessive debt', particularly in the corporate sector globally.³ And then, just before the G20 meeting, US Federal Reserve chair Jay Powell, in his speech to the Economic Club of New York, seemed to suggest that he might not hike the Fed policy interest rate as much as he and the market expected in 2019. What is he worried about, given that US real GDP growth is sliding along at 3% a year (latest Q3 2018 data) and corporate profits are up 20% after tax (thanks to Trump's corporate tax cuts)? The answer appears to lie in the Fed's new Financial Stability Report.⁴

The report cites four indicators to be monitored for a financial crash and concludes that the current risk is only "moderate". But it notes that that "debt owed by businesses is historically high, and risky debt issuance has picked up recently". Furthermore, "credit standards for some business loans appear to have deteriorated further", while "leverage of some firms is near its highest level seen over the past two decades". On top of that, "Brexit and euro-area fiscal

challenges pose risks for US markets and institutions" and "problems in China and other emerging market economies could spill over to the United States". It seems that the risk of a new recession is not "negligible", but indeed "moderate".

The risk of a corporate debt bust was also echoed in Financial Stability Reports of the Bank of England and the European Central Bank, also released this week. The European Central Bank put it this way:

A large stock of legacy debt continues to weigh on the euro-area non-financial private sector. On aggregate, the indebtedness of euro-area [non-financial corporations - NFCs] remains high by both historical and international standards. The falling trend observed since early 2016 appears to have come to an end, with the consolidated NFC debt-to-GDP ratio stabilising at 82% for the euro area aggregate - a level that is still above thresholds associated with a debt overhang.⁵

But things are OK, because (1) "debt-to-total assets and debt-to-equity ratios for euro-area NFCs point to more favourable developments though, having approached or even fallen below the levels observed at the start of [the Economic and Monetary Union], given higher share prices and the related positive denominator effect", while (2) debt servicing costs remain very low. In other words, as long as interest rates do not rise too much, stock markets stay high and corporate profits continue to rise, then there will be no crisis. But "A sudden deterioration in economic growth prospects or a cost shock could ... undermine corporate profitability, while rising trade protectionism may hamper the profit-generating capacity of export-oriented firms." Exactly.

It was the same story in the Bank of England Financial Stability Report.⁶ Corporate debt relative to profits is back to the pre-global crash levels of 2008, in non-real estate sectors. The Bank of England concluded: "Higher corporate leverage could amplify economic downturns."

The huge rise in corporate debt in the so-called emerging economies

is well documented. And I have previously shown several times that this debt creates conditions for a sharp downturn in investment and growth in emerging economies - when the dollar strengthens⁷ or the Fed hikes its interest rate (Turkey, Argentina).⁸

The underlying basis for economic growth in capitalist economies is the profitability of capital. Using the EU annual macro-economic database, we can measure the net return on capital stock (NRC) for many economies. The G7 weighted average NRC peaked in 2005, well before the 2008-09 great recession. The G7 rate of profit only got back to the 2007 level 10 years later in 2017 - and only because of improved profitability in the US and Japan. The other five economies still have lower rates of profit.

Indeed, it has been a long depression in global profits growth since the great recession. Between 1997 and 2007, global profits growth averaged 15% year over year. Since 2008, it has averaged only 6.3% and from 2011 only 4% a year.

After the great recession, global profits recovered sharply before falling back in the euro debt crisis of 2011-12. Another modest recovery took place until oil prices and energy profits collapsed in 2015. Then energy prices recovered, along with energy investment.

As long as global profits continue to rise, a new slump in global investment and production will not emerge. But in the last few months oil prices have slumped again and, with trade in the doldrums, the prospects for profit growth in 2019 are dimming fast ●

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

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ITALY

Little cause for optimism

Italy's left is fragmented, directionless and in total disarray, writes Toby Abse

The state of the Italian left over the last nine months has been singularly depressing. Not only has the centre-left Partito Democratico (PD) so far failed to break with the neoliberal legacy of Matteo Renzi to any significant extent, but forces to the left of the PD are also in complete disarray.

I will start with Liberi ed Uguali (LeU), the left social democratic cartel, which seemed to offer some hope of serious opposition to the country's rightward drift. LeU, instead of moving towards a cohesive mass movement party, has now split into three principal components. These are essentially the three original groupings that appeared to be moving towards fusion during the 2018 general election campaign: namely the MDP (Movimento dei Democratici e Progressisti), Sinistra Italiana and Possibile.

The first of these, the MDP, led by Roberto Speranza and Pier Luigi Bersani, originating from the left of the PD, had split from it just before the 2017 primary contest, culminating in Matteo Renzi's re-election as PD secretary. It is therefore no surprise that the MDP sees the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, to which the PD now adheres, as its reference point.

The other major grouping is Sinistra Italiana, led by Nicola Fratoianni, largely composed of the left wing of the old Sinistra, Ecologia e Libertà (SEL). This organisation looks towards the United European Left in the European parliament, the most leftwing of the transnational alliances in that body. Stefano Fassina - who broke with the PD some time before the MDP group - has now quit Sinistra Italiana and set up a 'left sovereigntist' (ie, nationalist) grouping, Patria e Costituzione (Fatherland and Constitution). This alignment roughly corresponds to Jean-Luc Mélenchon's France Insoumise and the increasingly nationalist and anti-migrant right wing of Die Linke. Before the recent split between the MDP and Sinistra Italiana, LeU had already been weakened by the exit of Possibile, now led by Beatrice Brignone rather than by its founder, Pippo Civati.

Whilst Pietro Grasso - the speaker of the Senate in the 2013-18 legislature and the nominal leader of LeU as a whole for the purpose of the 2018 general election - has done his best to slow down the disintegration of his electoral cartel, setting up local rank-and-file *comitati di base* to increase pressure for unity on quarrelsome factional leaders, this now seems a doomed project. Although Grasso has made forlorn efforts to maintain the unity of LeU, the same cannot be said of Laura Boldrini, the speaker of the Chamber of Deputies in the 2013-18 parliament. She has joined yet another grouping, called Futura.

The MDP is hoping that Nicola Zingaretti, the most leftwing of the three main candidates in the latest PD primary, will be elected secretary, opening the way for the MDP to either re-enter the PD or form a close electoral alliance with it. In complete contrast, Sinistra Italiana is hoping to reach a deal with Luigi De Magistris, the left-populist mayor of Naples, who is detested by the Campagna regional PD. He called a national assembly of his supporters in Rome on December



Marginalised and divided

1, with the idea of forming a new list for the European elections in May 2019.

Smaller groups

If relative electoral success (eg, overcoming the 3% threshold for parliamentary elections with a score of 3.4% and achieving representation in both houses) failed to turn LeU into a viable party, the fate of Potere al Popolo, the more radical left electoral cartel - which with a mere 1.1% failed to gain any parliamentary representation - has been equally dismal. The largest force within it - Rifondazione Comunista - has abandoned it after falling out with its nominal leader, Viola Carofalo, her Neapolitan Social Centre, Ex OPG, and her allies in a group called Eurostop, which includes part of the small, but militant, semi-syndicalist, trade union, the USB. The soft Trotskyist Sinistra Anti-Capitalista, led by Franco Turigliatto,¹ and the soft Stalinist Partito Comunista Italiano (the main heir of Armando Cossutta's Comunisti Italiani, who split from Rifondazione 20 years ago) have also abandoned the attempt to work with Carofalo and groups with a syndicalist and/or autonomist background.

The remaining supporters of Potere al Popolo have approved an online statute for the organisation (about 4,000 votes were cast), but whether such disparate elements will cohere is another matter. Rifondazione, like Sinistra Italiana, seems attracted by De Magistris's project of a broad radical left cartel for the European elections next May. Given Potere al Popolo's largely Neapolitan following, it is still possible that the two factions may regroup within such a broader cartel by the time of the European elections.

It is worth noting that Rifondazione, Sinistra Italiana and the Partito Comunista Italiano appear to have agreed to field a joint list for the Sardinian regional elections in February - perhaps a small sign of a renewed willingness to set aside

minor differences.

Angelo Bonelli's Federazione dei Verdi (Federation of Greens), enthused by the success of its German sister party in recent regional elections, has abandoned its alliance with the Partito Socialista and Area Civica - an opportunist, centre-left lash-up, whose other components had little interest in environmental issues. It gained a mere 0.58% in the March general election and the Greens now hope to contest the European elections in their own right. Veteran Alfonso Pecoraro Scanio tried to persuade them to join up with the Five Star Movement (M5S) in return for a place for himself high up on the M5S list,² but a national gathering during the weekend of December 1-2 decisively rejected a motion to that effect.

The smaller far-left groupings that refuse to ally with either LeU or Potere al Popolo, but were stubbornly determined to stand in the March 2018 general election under their own colours, did even worse. Marco Rizzo's hard-line Stalinists of the Partito Comunista³ clocked up 0.33% - probably gaining most of these votes because of their name rather than their bizarre politics.⁴ The list, Per una Sinistra Rivoluzionaria, consisting of Marco Ferrando's hard Trotskyist Partito Comunista dei Lavoratori⁵ and the group formerly known as Falce e Martello (Granite Trotskyists who remained in Rifondazione for some time after the other Trotskyist factions had left) scraped the barrel with 0.09%.

PD primary

The PD has finally begun the 'primary' process that will eventually lead it to elect a new secretary (ie, party leader) some time in early March. The initial phase involves voting in the PD's *circoli* (local branches) and the top three candidates in this vote by members then go forward into the next - public - round, the 'primary', when anybody claiming to be a PD sympathiser can vote. There are currently seven declared candidates

- six men and a woman. However, given that all commentators seem certain about which three are likely to be in the final round, there seems little point in discussing the minor candidates.

As one might expect, the three main candidates represent the right, left and centre of the PD spectrum. The first to declare himself, some months ago, was Nicola Zingaretti, the president of the Lazio region, who is regarded as the 'left' candidate. Zingaretti succeeded in being re-elected in his region on March 4 - the very same day as the PD did so disastrously in the general election nationally. His regional coalition was broader than the PD's national one, and included some figures a little further to the left. Although some dispute exists as to precisely when Zingaretti started to distance himself from Matteo Renzi, he is being regarded - and regards himself - as the anti-Renzi candidate, and is the most aware of the major candidates of the need to move away from Blairite neoliberalism and back to a more traditional social democratic position if working class voters are to be won back to the PD.

Whilst some might suggest that support from former premier Paolo Gentiloni and former PD leader Dario Franceschini - both former Christian Democrats rather than ex-communists, and both complicit in all Renzi's neoliberal measures - show Zingaretti is not as 'left' as all that, it is also an indication of how unpopular the insufferably arrogant and self-centred Renzi has become among his own former allies, who now see the urgent need to 'de-Renzi' the PD if it is to survive.

The 'centre' candidate is Maurizio Martina, who has been acting leader since Renzi very reluctantly stepped down in the wake of the March 4 defeat. Martina had been minister of agriculture in the PD-led government, and was Renzi's seemingly obedient and pliable vice-secretary before March. However, inevitably, Renzi's

refusal to genuinely take a step back after leading the party to total disaster brought him into conflict with Martina, who sought to keep the deeply divided party from disintegrating (eg, by organising a 70,000-strong national demonstration in Rome on September 30 against the policies of the right-populist coalition - something which raised PD members' morale, even if it did not get much external support). Martina had no interest in Renzi's recurring fantasies of emulating Emanuel Macron's *En Marche*.

Predictably, the hitherto obscure Martina enjoyed being acting leader rather more than he was at first willing to admit, and after much hesitation and equivocation belatedly threw himself into the ring as the 'unity candidate', who will allegedly prevent the primary from becoming a divisive fight to the death between Renzians and anti-Renzians. Conversely, some might see the intervention of a third serious candidate as increasing division by making a clear winner (with over 50% of the vote in the primary) less probable, and thus reducing the chances of members uniting behind the winner after the 'congress'.⁶

Renzi had some difficulty in finding anybody willing to stand as his puppet, and in the end the party's right wing rallied around Marco Minniti, the former interior minister, whose racist attitude towards migrants and protective stance towards fascist marches paved the way for Matteo Salvini, the current Lega deputy prime minister. Minniti has publicly distanced himself from Renzi. (Ironically, the man Renzi had desperately wanted to be his candidate against Zingaretti, former infrastructure minister Graziano Delrio, has come out in favour of Martina.) Needless to say, Minniti has emphasised the need to address the concerns of working class voters about immigration and crime, rather than showing any willingness to change the PD's policies on economic issues.

Whilst Renzi will presumably fall in behind Minniti, it is far from certain that he will remain in the PD if Zingaretti wins; Renzi's formation of a network of *comitati civici* (civic committees) - a name last used by the *Christian Democrats* for anti-communist purposes in the crucial 1948 general election - suggests otherwise. The committees are a structure outside the PD, not a current within it, and might well be conceived as the embryo of an Italian *En Marche*.

A PD without Renzi might have more chance of survival, and perhaps revival, but the overall state of both the centre-left and far left in Salvini's Italy provides little cause for optimism in the short term ●

Notes

1. Sinistra Anti-Capitalista emerged from a split in Sinistra Critica and, as far as I am aware, is now the official Italian section of the Mandeliste Fourth International, represented in Britain by Socialist Resistance.
2. Interestingly, M5S did originally stress its interest in environmental issues, but its record in both local and, more recently, national government casts a great deal of doubt on its ecological commitments - most notably in relation to the Taranto steelworks and the trans-Adriatic pipeline, which will bring gas from Azerbaijan into Italy.
3. This grouping split from the Comunisti Italiani some years ago and has links with various eastern European Stalinist-nostalgic parties.
4. Its rivals in the Partito Comunista Italiano were standing as part of Potere al Popolo, so Rizzo's organisation was the only 'communist' one listed on the ballot papers.
5. This group split from Rifondazione Comunista over a decade ago.
6. The PD's 'congresses' are only a culmination of the primary to anoint the winner and are not forums for serious policy discussions in the way the PCI ones were - at least in the latter years of the old party.

REVIEW

Competition and cooperation

Derek Wall Elinor Ostrom's rules for radicals Pluto Press, 2017, pp160, £16.99

Elinor Ostrom is the only woman to have won the Nobel Prize for economics. She analysed 'the commons' - ie, that which is held in common - distinguishing between common-pool resources and common-pool property.

Ostrom had attended a lecture by Garret Hardin in the 1970s. In his 1967 book, *Tragedy of the commons*, he argued that individuals overuse commons, degrading resources. His argument is based on 'the prisoner's dilemma' theory, but that actually demonstrates the need for cooperation, common ownership and control. Hardin proposed population control, including compulsory sterilisation after the first child, and strong government to impose control over resource usage. Ostrom rejected Hardin's totalitarian conclusions from her observation of real-world examples.

The question of the commons and the development of cooperative structures is wider than environmental issues. Primary is the property question: ie, who owns the means of production, and what structures exist to exercise control over their use.

Ostrom was prevented from studying economics at university, since she was deemed not to have studied enough mathematics. She had been told at school that there was no need to study further maths, and was asked "what use trigonometry would be when she was 'barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen'" (p4). So she did a PhD in politics.

Eight rules

Ostrom proposed eight rules for successful commons management.

1. Firstly, there must be boundaries - collective owners can use the resource within agreed rules. I agree with author Derek Wall's comment, "While seen as an engine of injustice, it is easily forgotten that the corporation is a commons - a view echoed by the autonomist Marxist theorists, Hardt and Negri" (p55). But I do not agree with his conclusion that "corporations could be owned by a whole society." A corporation is a legal entity: it can only be controlled rationally by the associated producers within it.

Orthodox economics views allocation as determined by the market, the state or a mixed economy of the two. But Ostrom shows in her Nobel lecture, 'Beyond markets and states', that there are other options. Marx promoted worker-owned cooperatives as the form in which democratic control over socialised capital was most readily achieved. The state is a bureaucratic, inefficient alternative to the market. Corporations have the advantages of the state, in terms of planned production, but control is exercised by shareholders, who protect their short-term interest above that of the corporation. Shareholders should be placed in the same position as other creditors.

Ostrom's husband, Vincent, noted that Californian citrus farmers had established a system of land and water rights to protect their common interests and advised her to study the West Basin water source underlying Los Angeles, where citrus growers utilised that resource to the advantage of all. Elinor found this was true with the West Basin.

Competition and cooperation are strategies for maximising utility from resources. Cooperation may increase output, so all who cooperate can consume more. It may prevent overuse, where everyone gets an

adequate level of consumption, but, where everyone is facing malnutrition, there is an incentive for each to grab whatever they can to ensure survival. Communism is premised upon capitalism developing the productive forces to a level where abundance becomes possible, but, so long as scarcity exists, humans will be driven by competition. Socialised capital does not change that. Cooperatives compete with corporations, which dominate the market. Worker-controlled corporations could change that, but it would require a political revolution, on a scale like what was needed to bring about political democracy and universal suffrage.

Wall engages in a discussion over the nature of revolutionary social change. He argues that changes at a micro level are always conditioned by, and subordinate to, changes at a macro level. That is true, but what brings about this macro-level transformation?

Wall notes the argument of Jon Elster that "until we replace the assumptions of mainstream economics that human beings are basically selfish and seek to maximise personal gain, an alternative economics will fail to provide an understanding of how humans work" (p50).

This is subjectivist. If humans are naturally selfish, why do some people risk their lives rescuing others from burning buildings, etc? If this behaviour is aberrant, then it is necessary to point to some powerful social force that causes it; but the most powerful social force we can see is that of capitalist competition, which acts to encourage all individuals to behave in a competitive, individualistic and selfish manner. Given that under capitalism competition, individualism, selfishness and so on are the norm, then it's clear that altruism is aberrant *for capitalism*. It is impossible to speak of 'human nature' separate from the material conditions under which real human beings live their lives. To change human nature it is necessary to change those material conditions.

Capitalist *productive* relations engendered bourgeois *social* relations, forming the material basis for bourgeois ideas, norms and rules dominating society, and making possible the bourgeois political revolutions. The continued concentration and centralisation of capital leads to the development, growth and then dominance of socialised capital - the transitional form of property, engendering transitional forms of social relations and necessitating a political struggle to bring political structures into alignment with the material base: eg, a political struggle for industrial democracy. Marx's point is that agriculture could not be developed, making possible large-scale industrial production, without the process of enclosure and capitalist production. Individual peasant producers would not cooperate to accumulate, and centralise, their scattered means of production, to leap from peasant to large-scale industrial production. That requires the capitalist, so these means of production must take the form of capital. That defines the progressive, historic mission of capital. But that is not the outlook of environmentalists. They seek to hold back the process of development. As Wall says of Ostrom, "She felt that part of the solution to environmental problems would come with us consuming less and downsizing" (pp2-3).

Let us move on to Ostrom's

other rules for successful commons management.

2. The rules for use of commons had to be specific. Rules appropriate for one are not appropriate for another. Rather than dismissing the potential problems of common-pool resources, Ostrom looked for solutions in the development of appropriate forms of common-pool property. Her study went much wider than political economy, taking in a range of disciplines.

Ostrom's *Governing the commons* was published in 1990. Her analysis showed how forms of common-pool property across the globe were established to manage common-pool resources, including centuries-old legally binding contracts, and there were no recorded instances of resource depletion occurring. However, the interesting point is not the existence of such isolated examples, but, as Engels describes, the reason for its dissolution and the development of private property.

Self-government

3. Commoners should be self-governing, democratically determining the rules governing use of the common resource, which facilitates restricting its use and preventing resource depletion. Another project she worked on was policing. She argued: "... input from local communities led to better policing" (p7).

The community is a commons. Self-government requires forms of democracy that enable workers to organise self-policing. Black communities, facing racist policing, and the 1984-85 miners' strike, when Thatcher's police imposed martial law on mining communities, show its importance. Democratically organised self-policing is a foundation for developing democratically controlled popular militia. In worker-owned cooperatives, daily involvement in decision-making is inherent. Longer-term planning implies democratic decision-making, even if execution is placed in the hands of managers.

The form of a co-op or corporation objectively opens up revolutionary possibilities, even though it is only in the case of the worker-owned cooperative that industrial democracy is inherent in the form. Existing technologies make possible local energy production systems, but who is to exercise control over them, and how is democratic control to be achieved? Local solutions, based upon cooperative ownership and self-government, can provide immediate solutions, without waiting for the state, or a socialist revolution, but these local solutions require them to be nested in a wider context. Local energy systems are only credible if the technology is developed

Elinor Ostrom: commons



on a sufficient scale for it to be cheaper than energy production based on fossil fuels.

Ostrom's politics revolve around participation in decision-making, resulting from her concept of direct democracy. Whilst promoting localism and decentralisation, she notes that important ideas, decisions and functions can only succeed at a national or even transnational level: "... national governments are too small to govern the global commons and too big to handle smaller-scale problems" (p62).

Ostrom's direct democracy, Wall argues, is an antidote to the rise of rightwing populism. However, it is important to recognise the Hobbesian basis of Bonapartist regimes. Atomised populations feel helpless and have difficulty coming together to overcome that condition, which is why they then give power to 'the sovereign' as their protector.

Ostrom did not believe that participatory democracy worked best on the basis of homogeneity. She thought that better ideas develop when contending views are argued out. However, this 'agnostic pluralism' requires that contending parties are open to argument, which in turn requires some homogeneity. Societies riven by sectarianism see division intensify, via such a process, leading to Bonapartism.

4. There needs to be effective monitoring. In the labour process, workers act as a check on each other, to limit free riders. At the higher level of organisation, the task is devolved to elected managers.

5. Graduated but effective sanctions must be used against those who break the rules. Some system is required to prevent rule-breaking or free riders, but it should be graduated, because someone may infringe a rule inadvertently. If they continue to break the rule, an effective sanction must be in place to deter such behaviour.

6. There should be a low-cost means of resolving disputes. There may be disagreement over the interpretation of rules and their infringement. This is why cooperatives still require trades unions.

7. There needs to be some minimal acceptance of the right to organise the commons. When the 1945 Labour government nationalised the coal mines, it also took over the *cooperative* mines, depriving miners of the right to organise those mines. Although it said all mines were the property of "the people", the people were excluded from control.

8. Finally, effective commons must be nested within larger commons. As Marx said, individual cooperatives should be part of a cooperative federation. Wider democratic structures are required to govern intersections between the operational boundaries of commons. This implies longer-term planning, to meet the requirements of each commons.

Ostrom's view of commons being nested is illustrated by the effects of wider ecologies on local resources: eg, climate change on local weather conditions. But Danish environmentalist Bjørn Lomborg argues that the answer - say for Bangladeshis - is to rapidly grow their economy, so as to be able to cope with effects of climate change, and to divert resources into development of new forms of energy technologies. Raising living standards enables households to utilise more efficient forms of energy. In

the 1950s, Colin Clark demonstrated that the main determinant of family size is income. When incomes rise, family size declines, providing more efficient use of resources. Infant mortality rates fall, children grow up to be productive labourers, replacing the resources consumed in the production of their labour-power.

Law of value

Ostrom's work is pragmatic - identifying problems, finding practical solutions, rather than starting with an ideology and then searching for opportunities to apply it. She saw herself as part of a collective effort, basing her work on popular involvement and listening to those immediately involved. Wall notes that appearance and reality differ. If we rely on empiricism, a collation and correlation of data, we can be led astray because of confirmation bias, a false interpretation of the data or the confusion of cause and effect. The scientific method requires a theoretical framework, the formulation of a hypothesis, tested by experiment or against reality. But, with economics, this is not straightforward because of the multiplicity of variables. Ostrom's approach counteracts that by seeing research and the accumulation of knowledge as a collective effort, using a multiplicity of contested ideas and models. A creative commons must be free and open, although structured within agreed rules.

Wall refers to Ben Fine's assessment that she ignores class struggle, and that her ideas amount to economic colonialism - applying mainstream economic logic to non-market areas of life. But the economy is not the same as the market. The law of value applies to non-market economic relations. Ostrom defined herself as a political economist, recognising that economic relations are not simply market relations, but structured within, and heavily determined by, institutions. Even in developed economies, much value creation is in the sphere of domestic labour, not captured in official data. Domestic labour operates under the law of value, seeking to maximise utility with the least expenditure of labour-time. Households adopted labour-saving devices when they became available at affordable prices, so labour-time saved could be used in other ways, including taking up paid labour.

Wall confuses cooperative with non-market production. He assumes that production undertaken by voluntary labour can be generalised, and that the labour creates no new value. Voluntary labour is only possible because those that provide it reproduce their labour-power by other means.

The law of value is central to the question of competition and cooperation discussed in chapter 7. They are poles united in a contradictory whole. Competition between firms exists alongside the cooperation required by the division of labour inside each firm, and the total social capital. This is not just a feature of capitalism. Under communism the law of value means available labour-time is allocated to maximise welfare. Each industry competes against every other to obtain resources. Competition adopts a different form compared to commodity production. The greater social productivity, the less the law of value imposes a constraint over available labour-time and, therefore, the greater the potential for building trust and cooperation ●

Arthur Bough

ENERGY



North Sea: huge investment in what was once cutting-edge technology

Whatever happened to peak oil?

Prices are down to a 10-year low. It is clear that dire predictions of exhausted reserves and the world running out of oil were thoroughly misconceived. **Jack Conrad** returns to the issue of energy

The basic proposition of peak-oil pundits appears simple and on the face of it unanswerable. The world is finite, the world's natural resources - in this case oil - are equally finite. Therefore, so goes the argument, if we humans persist in extracting and burning the stuff on any sort of scale, sooner or later reserves will become exhausted. Long before that though, maximum output will be reached - peak oil - after which the rate of extraction is projected to rapidly decline, till, finally, the cost of obtaining an extra barrel exceeds what it can be sold for (in terms of physics, a negative 'energy return on energy inputs' or EROEI).

Over the years, peak-oil pundits have announced that production would begin to decline in 1975, 1985 ... 2005, etc. Regardless of those repeated prediction failures, when the tipping point finally arrives, all manner of dire socio-economic consequences are supposed to follow: eg, massive hikes in consumer prices, an end to economic growth, oil wars, etc.¹ Indeed because oil is still the world's leading primary energy source - oil 32%, coal 27%, gas 22%, renewables 14%, nuclear 5%² - and plays a vital role in air, sea and road transport, the manufacture of plastics, chemicals, etc, there are those who excitedly issue dire warnings of some kind of global collapse because of peak oil.³

Not surprisingly, peak-oil pundits have been challenged on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Some critics dismiss peak oil as economically illiterate.⁴ Others see a convenient excuse to assert *direct* US control over Middle East oil (a region which accounts for 34% of world oil production, 45% of crude oil exports and 48% of proven reserves).⁵ Then there are those who believe that peak oil is a gigantic financial scam. Rising spot prices certainly yield huge profits for Wall Street and City of London speculators.⁶

As an idea, peak oil has had an undoubted political impact. On the side of the angels, green parties, environmental NGOs and eco-crusaders have used the widespread fear of peak oil to bolster their case

for energy efficiency measures, alternative sources of power generation, novel technologies and generous government subsidies (eagerly exploited by corrupt politicians and cynical capitalists alike). But there are the devils. Opec, the oil company majors, the nuclear industry, MBS, Vladimir Putin, the frackers and shale oil buccaneers, all have taken advantage of peak oil too.

Then there is Trump. He adheres to the doctrine of "energy dominance".⁷ According to the White House, "President Donald J Trump wants reliable and affordable energy to fuel historic economic growth."⁸ That, plus massive arms sales, explains his unstinting support for Mohammed bin Salman. CIA reports blaming the Saudi crown prince for the foul murder of Jamal Khashoggi are therefore blithely brushed aside.

And, of course, in the name of ensuring America's energy security, the 45th president issued executive orders giving the go-ahead for the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, the shredding of federal restrictions on mining and drilling in national parklands, and reversing the ban on offshore drilling in the Atlantic and Arctic imposed by Barack Obama just before he left office.

As with the US withdrawal from the *non-binding* Paris climate accord, an arrogant display of contempt for the future of the planet ... but, note, in July 2018, the US became the world's number-one crude oil producer (overtaking both Russia and Saudi Arabia).⁹ The International Energy Agency predicts that the US will rise to become the "undisputed" top producer of oil by the middle of the next decade - the growth of US production being "unprecedented, exceeding all historical records, even Saudi Arabia after the production from the mega Ghawar field or Soviet gas production from the super Siberian fields."¹⁰

Trump wants to keep oil production high and oil prices low. Given his decision back in May to renege on the nuclear deal with Iran and reimpose sanctions, there were fears that prices were about to skyrocket - "to between \$100 and \$150" a barrel.¹¹ Then, in

November, he granted eight countries a 'temporary' waiver: Japan, China, India, South Korea, Greece, Italy, Taiwan and Turkey. Meanwhile, he strong-armed Saudi Arabia into increasing output to 10.7mbd (million barrels a day).¹² That, combined with booming production in America itself - primarily due to the shale oil revolution - sent prices crashing. US crude now hovers at around \$50 a barrel.

Yet, due to flatlining wages in the US, precarious employment and the capitalist system's relentless promotion of selfish individualism, Trump's cheap oil policy resonates with a wide enough body of electors. Through turning a diplomatic blind eye, threats of trade wars, sweeping away environmental red tape and giving free reign to market forces, many imagine that the cheap oil they need to heat their homes and fill their petrol tanks will be guaranteed ... well, at least for the moment.

Naive radicals, meantime, treated peak-oil pundits as modern-day prophets. Via tweets, blogs, websites, YouTube channels, etc, 'peakism' came to be a not inconsiderable "sub-culture".¹³ Sadly, much of the organised left bought into this sub-culture. The officially promoted slogan on the huge 1991 and 2003 anti-Iraq war demonstrations was 'No blood for oil'. As if the wars of George HW Bush and George W Bush were driven first and foremost by soon-to-be-exhausted oil supplies. It was not just George Galloway, John Rees, Lindsey German and Andrew Murray. The Socialist Party in England and Wales too presented peak-oil theory as verity: "Globally, it is believed that the world is close to the peak for oil." With oil prices soaring towards record highs, Peter Taaffe's confessional sect insisted that the "key reason for the two wars with Iraq was the USA's need for oil".¹⁴ The fact that the US has never imported significant quantities of Middle Eastern oil did not register. As of 2015, a mere 19% of US oil imports came from that region.¹⁵ The rest from Canada, Mexico, Colombia Venezuela, etc.

Of course, the US does have a

fundamental interest in exercising control over the Middle East - achieved through fleets, military bases, allies and bribes - and, therefore, giving itself a decisive "strategic leverage" over potential imperial rivals: ie, China, Japan and the European Union.¹⁶ Their oil can be choked off at a whim.

Not to be outdone, the Socialist Party of Great Britain approvingly quoted Matthew Simmons, a former energy advisor to George W Bush: "Securing adequate oil supplies was ... an important element in all the major wars of the 20th century and in the United States' two most recent interventions in the Middle East." The SPGB writer obviously agreed and added that oil is probably "about to reach its maximum rate of production".¹⁷ Nor should the hapless Alan Thornett go unmentioned. Writing in the March 2012 edition of *Socialist Resistance* - "with the price of oil only likely to go up" - this dedicated follower of every trite fad and passing fashion even managed to explain the Falklands War, 29 years before, with reference to "peak oil".¹⁸

No less bizarre are the widely dispersed refugees who have fled from the organised left. Where hopes were once placed in Stalin's Soviet Union, Mao's China and even Enver Hoxha's Albania, there comes a banking on peak oil. With oil supplies supposedly running out, they assure themselves that a new dark age is in the offing. The pampered existence of labour aristocrats in the metropolis will thereby come to a sudden end and the desperate masses will be forced to embrace an anti-globalist "peasant socialism".¹⁹

Malthus

The more sober-minded - and not only Jack Conrad - point out that the "predictions of catastrophe" regularly trotted out by peak-oil pundits are "steeped" in the doctrines of Thomas Robert Malthus and his theory of "land", "scarcity" and "overpopulation".²⁰ Malthus (1766-1834) was, of course, a Church of England cleric, an economist and a hugely influential apologist for the most heartless, brutal forms of

capitalism. He famously argued, in his *Essay on the principles of population* (1798), that the suffering, the misery, the degradation of the poor was unavoidable ... given their irresponsible tendency to produce too many children:

The faster population increases, the more help will be got to draw off the water, and consequently an increasing quantity will be taken every year. But the sooner, undoubtedly, will the reservoir be exhausted, and the streams only remain. When acre has been added to acre, till all the fertile land is occupied, the yearly increase of food will depend upon the amelioration of the land already in possession; and even this moderate stream will be gradually diminishing. But population, could it be supplied with food, would go on with unexhausted vigour, and the increase of one period would furnish the power of a greater increase the next, and this without any limit.²¹

Because land is finite it could only furnish so much food; meanwhile the poor produce too much in the way of mouths that have to be fed. True, Malthus accepted that agricultural productivity might improve over time. Subsistence, however, "increases at an arithmetical ratio" (ie, 1,2,3,4,5 ...). Meanwhile, he insisted, population, if unchecked, "increases in a geometrical ratio" (ie, 1,2,4,8,16 ...).²² Hence, the only solution, according to parson Malthus, was late marriage, sexual abstinence or, failing that, allowing nature to take its grizzly course with disease and starvation.

A blasphemy against both nature and humanity.

Blaming the social horrors of late 18th century capitalism on the lowest, the most desperate stratum of the working class admirably suited the penny-pinching oligarchical authorities. With a good conscience, wealthy gentlemen could explain away poverty - not by admitting ruthless exploitation, but by the workings of god's divine laws.

ENERGY

Leaving people to starve therefore amounted to a Christian duty (the British state did just that during the 1845-52 Irish famine). The same callous political economy saw Malthus urging the United Kingdom parliament to sweep away the niggardly poor laws inherited from Tudor times (a late feudal system of social security).

According to Malthus, though the poor laws were “undoubtedly instituted for the most benevolent purpose”, they were sheer folly.²³ Interfering with the natural order of things only encouraged those living on the edge of destitution to further augment the surplus population.

Understandably, Frederick Engels lambasted Malthusianism. He described it as “the crudest, most barbarous theory that ever existed, a system of despair”, which absolved the state from any duty to come to the aid of the hungry.²⁴ But Engels did not reject Malthus and his misanthropic population theory on the basis of moral outrage alone. The underlying logic was transparently bogus. If there were too many people in 18th century England, there must have been too many people when God first made Adam and Eve. After all, they were already possessed of the same innate tendency to reproduce in excess of the available means of subsistence.

Engels also maintained that science and technology grows geometrically. Physics, chemistry, mechanical engineering, oceanic shipping, rail transport, methods of storage, postal communications, agricultural technique, etc had all been revolutionised and revolutionised again. As a result, Australia, North America and South America were able to supply Europe with grain, sugar, fruit, meat, wool, cotton, fertilisers and other raw materials in abundance.

Therefore, the desperate condition of the poor should be blamed not on natural laws, but the laws of capitalist society. Overpopulation did not result from an excess of people in relationship to the means of subsistence. No, overpopulation comes about because of the periodic overproduction of capital and, as a consequence, capital's diminished requirement for labour-power (hence the reserve army of labour).

Rainfall, sunshine and grass set an absolute limit on the number of wildebeest, zebra and gazelles roaming on the Serengeti (note, Charles Darwin's *Origin of the species* was inspired, in no small part, from his reading of Malthus). Engels, however, emphasised that human society is subject to a higher order of determination than the animal kingdom. Our population numbers result not just from nature. Historical laws, the mode of production, class struggles and technological progress, in fact, play the decisive role.

The same surely applies to oil.

Endism

Peak oil is by no means a new theory. Marion King Hubbert (1903-89), an unjustly famous Shell geologist, presented a paper in 1956 which maintained that, for any given geographical area, from an individual oil field to the planet as a whole, the rate of oil production would, over time, resemble a bell curve. Overall US oil production, he figured, would peak some time between 1965, which he considered most likely, and 1970, which he considered the outlier. Global oil production was set to peak around about 2000.²⁵

The following year - ie, 1957 - admiral Hyman Rickover discussed the fossil fuel era in the same endist terms - he envisaged the “ultimate disappearance of automobiles, trucks, buses and tractors”, because

oil would inevitably run dry.²⁶ In that Malthusian spirit, the Club of Rome think-tank published what was to become an instant bestseller. *The limits of growth* (1972) predicted not only the end of oil in 1992 - with no increase in reserves - but a whole range of other vital natural resources. Eg, mercury and silver (1985), tin (1987), zinc (1990), copper, lead and natural gas (1993), aluminium (2005-21).²⁷

In point of fact, there have been catastrophic auguries of oil peaking, then fast declining and finally running out, ever since oil was first established as an economically important industry. In 1874 US experts reported that the Pennsylvania oilfields were going to become exhausted within just four years. This, so went the prognosis, would mark the end of the US oil industry.

Then, as within our own time, it is when prices are considered abnormally high that peak-oil punditry gains its particular traction. Hence the widespread acceptance of such punditry during the early 1970s, late 1970s, early 1980s and early 1990s. The same thing happened over 2002-08, when oil prices appeared to be inexorably heading towards \$150 a barrel.

High prices are equated in the popular mind with supply shortages. Yet, instead of wells running dry and mounting geological problems, a better, more realistic explanation for the repeated oil-price ups and downs lies in capitalism's economic cycle and the interweaving - in part determining - outbreak of wars, state decisions and class struggles: eg, the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the 1975 Portuguese revolution, stagflation and the rollback of the post-World War II social democratic settlement, Iran's revolution and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the 1980-88 Iraq-Iran war, the 1985-88 inflationary boom, the 1989-91 collapse of bureaucratic socialism, Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, the 1991 US-UK ‘liberation’ of Kuwait, etc. The 21st century began with the spectacle of al Qa'eda terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon (2001), the US-UK invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and the US-UK invasion of Iraq (2003). There followed, of course, the subprime and banking crisis (2007-08) and the Arab spring (2011-12). All such events impact on the price of oil.

Indeed, there are good reasons *not* to treat the price of oil simply as a function of ordinary capitalist operations. Companies such as BP, Sinopec, Royal Dutch Shell, ExxonMobil, Total and Chevron invest variable capital to employ workers and constant capital to purchase the means of production ... and they realise a *normal rate of profit* for their investors. Standard and Poor's Global Oil Index shows annual returns running at 2.17% over a 10-year period.²⁸ Yet companies such as BP, Sinopec, Royal Dutch Shell, ExxonMobil, Total and Chevron also have to secure leases from the appropriate state, if they are to explore for, extract and market oil. They have to pay royalties, according to a combination of what they produce and the highly volatile price of oil. In other words, they have to pay rent to the state (and other landowners).

In the first half of the 20th century, oil production in the Middle East amounted to naked robbery. There was colonialism and semi-colonialism. Select companies were granted monopoly privileges, opened concessions - sometimes covering whole countries. Royalties were minimal. Now we have a global oil industry and fierce competition. There are market prices and differential rents. Extracting oil from the North Sea depends on making a profit from what is a marginal

operation. Costs hover at around \$44. By contrast, the cost of extracting a barrel of crude oil in Saudi Arabia is a mere \$9.²⁹ That includes transport, administration and reinvestment in plant and machinery. If we allow for an average profit, what remains is rent. Therefore, what is going on at a global scale is a redistribution of surplus value ... but it is not only rentier states such as Saudi Arabia which benefit. A not inconsiderable portion of its petrodollars find their way to the US and the UK - not least in the form of arms sales.

Jevons

The case of *peak coal* is worth mentioning here. In 1865 the British economist and mathematician, William Stanley Jevons, published his book *The coal question*. The subtitle is revealing: *An inquiry concerning the progress of the nation, and the probable exhaustion of our coal mines*. Jevons argued that British industry relied on cheap coal and that this constituted an Achilles' heel. “Are we wise,” he rhetorically asked, “in allowing the commerce of this country to rise beyond the point at which we can long maintain it?”³⁰

Given that demand grows exponentially, and that coal is a finite, non-renewable, energy source, Jevons warned that having to mine deeper seams and having to incur greater costs heralded approaching limits. His central thesis was that Britain's global hegemony was in danger and that economic stagnation was unavoidable. Interestingly this doom-mongering won him national fame and many academic prizes. In fact, Jevons anticipated peak coal using exactly the same tropes we encounter when it comes to peak oil: ubiquitous applications, local exhaustions, the necessity of going to ever greater geological depths, growing rates of usage, estimates of proven reserves, EROEI, etc.

Jevons rejected Malthusian theory, when it came to agriculture: he saw no limits to the productivity of land. However, that could not apply to coal mines. Coal is a finite resource. Logically, at some point, output had to go into decline. All Jevons had to do was start with estimates of British coal reserves - no more than 90 billion tons. Jevons then subtracted expected rates of consumption and he arrived at his shocking answer. Coal, he reckoned, would be exhausted in 50 or 60 years. There was no escape. He discounted possible substitutes.

Obviously, Jevons was spectacularly wrong. However, there is one aspect of his argument that made a lasting contribution to scientific thinking - the Jevons paradox. Going against the grain of common sense, he insisted that, far from increased energy efficiency leading to reduced usage, the opposite would happen. Greater energy efficiency generates increased demand.³¹

Of course, just before the outbreak of World War I, the Royal Navy, under Winston Churchill, first lord of the admiralty, had begun the transition to oil (compared with coal, it was far less bulky, easy to store and quicker to refuel, and it provided for greater speeds and ranges, because of a far superior weight-to-energy ratio ... and, with Persia reduced to an Anglo-Russian semi-colony, oil was wonderfully cheap).³

British coal did, in fact, peak in 1912. Production amounted to around 200 million tons (about half the world's total output). However, since then, *in global terms*, both production and reserves have considerably increased. Nowadays, global coal production stands at 7,708 million tons annually.³³ Reserves are given as 948 billions tons (recoverable).³⁴

As Hossein-Zadeh says, perhaps the biggest problem with peak-oil theory is the “extrapolation or

transition from micro to macro level”.³⁵ What is true for an existing oil well or oilfield is extended to global oil production. Every operating, or producing, oil well or oilfield will reach a maximum or peak flow rate, after which output declines to the point - temporary or permanent - of shutdown. Eg, UK taxpayers face “an overall bill of £60 billion” for decommissioning gas and oil fields in the North Sea.³⁶

There are limits to all things in nature - in about five billion years the sun is expected to cease being a main-sequence star and balloon into a red giant; life on planet Earth might be sustainable for another billion years; an individual can only consume so much food and drink; there are only 24 hours in a day, etc. So, when peak-oil pundits say there are limits to global oil production, they are not saying anything profound. It is a truism, which cannot explain past, current or future rates of output or patterns of consumption. But it certainly does not follow that, because there are limits, we are just about to arrive at peak-oil production.

Peak-oil pundits refuse to confront an inconvenient truth: the discovery of new oilfields, technological innovation and the introduction of other sources of energy, including renewables, offset existing rates of depletion. No wonder alarmist predictions are repeatedly confounded. Even when it comes to conventional oil, proven reserves outgrow those fields and wells that have peaked or become exhausted. Hence, in 2016, according to BP, the world's total proven oil reserves were marked up by 15 billion barrels (0.9%) to 1,707 billion barrels - “sufficient to meet 50.6 years of global production” at 2016 levels of consumption.³⁷ The increase came largely from Iraq (+10 billion barrels) and Russia (+7 billion barrels).

Historically, there has been an institutional bias towards underestimation. Morris Adelman pointed out that in the 1920s Exxon and Mobil were “sure” that the flat planes of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia would contain “no oil at all”. Even in 1944 “a special expert mission estimated Persian Gulf reserves at 16 billion proved and 5 billion probable”.³⁸ Yet, by 1975, those same fields had “already produced 42 billion barrels and had 74 billion remaining proven reserves. Nowadays proven reserves in the Persian Gulf are put well above 800 billion barrels.”³⁹

There is also the phenomenon of post-peak bounceback. The case of the United States is instructive. Having peaked in 1972 and then slowly gone into a decline, the curve began to rise again in 2012. By the middle of 2018 output neared 11.0 million barrels daily - the highest level since 1972. And, of course, simultaneously, there has been a significant shift to natural gas and renewables.

Today's depressed oil prices are, needless to say, hardly conducive to sustaining marginal operations or stimulating further exploration and innovation. Nevertheless, against industry expectations, though US shale companies were at first badly hit by the 2014 price collapse, they have become far more efficient and can now expect to profitably compete with other sources.⁴⁰

Science

It must be emphasised that, in general, the category of ‘proven reserves’ is not an estimate of what oil deposits actually lie beneath the ground.⁴¹ ‘Proven reserves’ refers to oil that can be commercially obtained with *existing technology* and *existing price levels*. Hence proven reserves are a “short-term, static view of the future”.⁴² Oil companies will, of course, only invest if they can expect

a financial return. They are not driven by the imperative to maximise output. Hence, estimates of *real* oil reserves will be considerably downplayed. By definition the vast sources of oil that are currently unprofitable are excluded. However, it should be added that reserves which may be considered unviable from the viewpoint of private capital might present a golden opportunity for a state with grand ambitions. Eg, while capital aims to realise a profit, a state may well seek use-values (eg, with the aim of national self-sufficiency, military requirements, driving forward economic growth, etc).

Here the experience of the Soviet Union is instructive. Bureaucratic socialism sought to maximise output and was, therefore, prepared to invest massive resources into long-term oil and gas projects. Siberia, the far east, the inhospitable Arctic was explored, settlements founded and super-deep drilling perfected. The Soviet Union thereby became an energy superpower. Not surprisingly, the 1973 oil crisis proved to be a boon. Oil exports allowed the Soviet Union to obtain western technology on a considerable scale and thereby put off the system's inevitable demise. Having peaked in the 1980s, oil production plunged by a staggering 50% in the 1990s. Not the result of natural limits though, but the “economic and political freefall” associated with capitalist restoration.⁴³ Oil production rebounded in the 21st century, reaching a post-Soviet high of 10.8 million barrels daily in January 2017. Russia today is, once again, an energy superpower and ranks as the world's number-two oil producer and exporter.

As with Malthus, peak-oil theory fails to grasp the revolutionary role of science and technology. Satellite imaging, 3D computer modelling and sniffer devices have transformed the ability of geologists to locate oil; horizontal and directional drilling, jack-up rigs, deep-water production units and hydraulic fracking allows for the exploitation of previously unprofitable sources. The net effect is to reduce costs. Simultaneously, smart technology, energy storage, radically improved industrial methods, stiffer building regulations, combined with national and businesses interests in driving forward competitiveness, supposedly serve to reduce demand. According to Climate Progress, energy efficiency has long been the biggest and cheapest “new” source of energy by far. Energy efficiency technologies have also been called a “\$18 trillion windfall” by the International Energy Agency. Certainly cars, aeroplanes and other forms of transport have become far more fuel-efficient.

For oil industry insiders, peak oil no longer refers to the tipping point, when the world's supplies start to fall. Instead, peak oil has been turned into its opposite: when the world's *demand* for oil starts to fall. Wood Mackenzie, one of the world's leading oil consultancies, forecasts that global oil demand will peak within 20 years as a result of the “tectonic” shift in the transport sector towards electric cars and autonomous vehicles. Robo-taxis are expected to become commercially viable in 2030 and widely used by 2035. This prediction illustrates how projections of peak demand - once confined to the fringes of energy planning - “have become accepted within the mainstream, and are already shaping how the world's biggest oil and gas companies will invest in the future”.⁴⁴ Apparently, many of the world's oil majors have begun to embrace the “energy transition”, preparing for a future when oil demand is no longer rising.

However, others take a more cautious approach - chiefly ExxonMobil and the giant, state-

What we fight for

owned Saudi Aramco, which have “pushed back against the idea that demand for their primary products could stop growing within the lifetimes of their top executives”.⁴⁵ While these companies expect demand for *petrol* to peak around 2030, they are investing in petrochemicals in order to meet the rising demand for plastics in so-called emerging markets.

Nonetheless, with one eye on an ecologically concerned public and the other on reducing dependency on imported oil and gas, Germany plans to progressively bring down primarily energy consumption from a 2008 base, by 8.7% (2014), 20% (2020) and 50% (2050).⁴⁶ It is far from unique. Japan, Switzerland, Austria, Denmark and other energy-poor countries are determined to follow a similar course.

Even that energy glutton, the USA, can be cited. Bloomberg reports: “The US economy has ... grown by 10% since 2007, while primary energy consumption has fallen by 2.4%.”⁴⁷ There are, of course, a number of explanations (eg, offshoring industrial production to China, the increasing role of finance capital, the knowledge economy, etc). Undeniably, though, in terms of its basic unit, at the level of the company, the personifications of capital will ruthlessly seek to drive down costs - in other words, reducing inputs of fixed capital, labour-power, wages and raw materials to the barest minimum. A phenomenon Marx discussed in *Capital* volume one.

And yet, as a system, capital is fundamentally and inescapably predicated on endless self-expansion (M-C-M'). For capital in general, the distinction between renewables and exhaustible raw material is meaningless. What matters is accumulation. Hence, as Jevons maintained, energy efficiency could well lead to *greater* usage. Exactly what seems to be happening. Overall consumption of oil and coal has gone up and up. In September 2018, oil consumption neared 100 million bpd - more than twice the level it was 50 years ago. Global demand grows by around 1.5% per annum.⁴⁸ And countries such as China, India and Brazil more than make up for any primary-energy decreases in the capitalist metropolis. In point of fact, the US Energy Information Administration projects a 48% increase in “world energy consumption” between a 2012 base and 2040.⁴⁹ However, while conventional oil and coal consumption will doubtless grow, the expectation is that they will do so at a snail’s pace. It is other sources of energy that will make the running.

Alternatives

Peak-oil pundits pay far too little attention to alternative sources of energy, both actual and potential. They include thermal, solar, wind, bio and nuclear energy. Crucially, they also include, of course, natural gas. Natural gas now accounts for 27% of energy supplies globally. Because of the steady rise in the production of tight gas, shale gas and coal-bed methane, it is calculated that by 2050 natural gas will become the world’s main source of energy. Then there are methane hydrates (methane frozen in ice crystals). Deposits are so vast that, “when we develop the technology to bring them to market, we will have clean-burning energy for 2,000 years”.⁵⁰ Breathing, post-Paris 2015 headlines announcing the “end of the fossil-fuel era” are therefore grossly premature, to say the least.⁵¹

Nor, frankly, do peak oil pundits treat what is sometimes called ‘unconventional’ oil with the seriousness it deserves: eg, tar sands, heavy oils and shale oil.

● The world’s most notable tar sand operation is located in the Canadian province of Alberta. Easily accessible, the tar sands lie temptingly just below

the surface. Total production has steadily climbed and now stands at around 2.3 mbd. The world’s estimated reserves of tar sand oil are put at around 2 trillion barrels, with Canada counting for the lion’s share. Industry sources report that, although tar sand oil was originally considered uneconomical, the marginal cost has dropped from \$30 a barrel to just over \$8.⁵²

● Heavy oil is extracted, transported and refined, using the same equipment employed by the conventional oil industry. It is ‘unconventional’ only because the cost of refining is at the moment considerably higher - by between \$10 and \$20, compared with a barrel of ‘sweet light’ Saudi crude. Venezuela puts its reserves at 1.2 trillion barrels. The country’s heavy oil belt stretches from the mouth of the Orinoco River, near the Caribbean island of Trinidad, across to the eastern slopes of the Andes. This being part of an oil-bearing trough that some geologists believe may be continuous along the entire South American continent, down to the Falkland Islands in the bitterly cold South Atlantic. Only a few segments of this gigantic field have been fully explored, yet even those parts have been estimated to contain some three to four trillion barrels, with perhaps one third recoverable, given current technology.

● Oil shale requires extensive processing and consumes large amounts of water. Still, reserves far exceed those of conventional oil, and costs are bound to fall, as newer and more efficient processing techniques are invented and become available. Estimated reserves are staggering, the highest figure I have come across being 2.1 quadrillion barrels.⁵³

Given the ongoing scientific and technological revolution, such energy sources are bound to rise in significance. A considerable reduction in the relative importance of conventional oil is more than likely. The US EIA is of the view that oil’s share of global energy consumption will fall to 30% in 2040. However, this will not happen because natural limits have been reached. As argued, oil is not about to run out.

Need

Medieval society did not embrace wind and water-power because slave and animal muscle-power had become exhausted. Nor did mature capitalism turn to coal because the wind had stopped blowing and water had stopped flowing. In turn, late capitalism shows all the signs of reducing its dependence on conventional oil, not because natural limits have been reached, but because of the growing availability of other, cheap, energy supplies.

Incidentally, nothing could be more stupid than to equate capitalism and the oil industry, as if the two were synonymous. Capitalism considerably predates the Royal Navy’s turn to oil, or for that matter the coal industry that was conjoined with the widespread introduction of steam-power. Mercantile capitalism thrived in classical antiquity. Industrial capitalism began its stunning rise to dominance beginning in the 13th and 14th centuries. Profit-generating windmills and watermills - perfected by gears and other such devices - formed the primary energy source for flour-milling, iron-forging, wood-sawing, leather-tanning, etc.⁵⁴

Obviously, late capitalism’s relative downgrading of conventional oil usage is no cause for celebration. An existential fear of global warming has persuaded governments of almost every hue to subsidise thermal, solar, wind, bio and nuclear energy. A combination of the good, the bad and the downright ugly.

Thermal heating works brilliantly in geologically blessed locations - most notably Iceland and New Zealand. However, it accounts for a mere 0.07% of the world’s primary

energy consumption. That figure cannot be expected to grow by much. Solar and wind energy is equally benign, but is of far greater importance in terms of the energy mix. Solar and wind accounts for some 10% of the US energy total. And in January 2017 the World Economic Forum reckoned that, in cost terms, wind and solar power either “matched” that or was “cheaper” than fossil fuels.⁵⁵

Aircraft will, for the foreseeable future, rely on specialist aviation fuels (largely kerosene based blends, though there are ongoing experiments with biofuels: ie, so-called sustainable aviation fuels). However, in truth, biofuels are an invitation for big business to replace biologically diverse rainforests with a thoroughly denatured monoculture. A ghastly act of ecocide.

As for nuclear power, it not only comes with a gigantic price tag. Enormous public health risks are involved too. Because of the inevitability of human error, accidents are surely bound to happen: Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, Fukushima. If nuclear fission could be replaced with nuclear fusion, it would be another matter. But that requires extremely high energy inputs. As of 2018, corresponding outputs remain negative. Hence, for practical purposes, that particular technology must, for the time being at least, be counted alongside the perpetual motion machine and warp drive.

Meanwhile, tar-sands oil, heavy oil and shale oil are horribly polluting. They are also ecologically destructive. In Alberta thousands of square miles of top soils are being bulldozed, valuable boreal forest uprooted, wetlands irreversibly ruined and endangered animal species, such as the caribou, further denuded.

Nor will the turn towards natural gas and unconventional oil do anything to reduce carbon emissions. Primary energy consumption is set to increase and, therefore, anthropogenic CO₂ emissions - the main cause of global warming - are unlikely to be capped. Paris did not even intend to do that. The goal was to limit the *rise* in global temperatures to 2.7°C above pre-industrial levels. There is a real danger, however, that by 2100 the rise could be more like 4°, and with that will come severe disruption to agricultural systems and food supplies, mass plant and animal extinctions, substantial and permanent polar ice losses, higher sea levels and the distinct possibility of an abrupt shift in the climatic system. As David Attenborough told the COP24 conference in Katowice, “If we don’t take action, the collapse of our civilisations and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon.”⁵⁶

However, the hope for humanity lies not in pleading before the “excellencies, ladies and gentlemen” who constitute today’s “decision-makers”. Because they are wedded to the interests of capital, they are very much part of the problem - not in any way part of the solution. The only hope for humanity lies in the rule of the working class, breaking with the destructive logic of capital and refounding society on the basis of the communist principle of production for need ●

Notes

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53. See hubbert.mines.edu/news/Youngquist_98-4.pdf; also, DC Duncan and VE Swanson, ‘Organic-rich shale of the United States and world land areas’: pubs.usgs.gov/circ/1965/0523/report.pdf.
54. See J Gimpel *The medieval machine: the industrial revolution of the Middle Ages* London 1992, pp1-27, 24-28.
55. *The Independent* January 4 2017.
56. unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/The%20People%27s%20Address%202.11.18_FINAL.pdf.

■ 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

Why we
should
legalise all
drugs

Fall of the house of Osamor

Kate Osamor's resignation is a symptom of more serious political sicknesses, argues Jim Grant



One of Corbyn's few genuine allies in parliament

The resignation of Kate Osamor as Labour's shadow international development secretary must be filed as one of history's more avoidable blunders.

Her son's conviction for drugs possession at last year's Bestival music festival has turned into a wider disaster than the family tragedy it would inevitably have been. It leaves her - one of the ever fewer MPs not wholly a product of the Westminster party machines, a lower-middle class woman from the same working class region of North London that includes her constituency - in disgrace, and possibly facing disciplinary action for misleading the public. It leaves Jeremy Corbyn down one shadow cabinet member, who happens to be one of the tiny handful of MPs who nominated him for the leadership in good faith in 2015. Whatever her merits in the abstract, she is not easily replaced.

There is something pervasively dispiriting about this whole saga, another of those scandals which finds persecutors and persecuted both floundering in the mire.

Let us first scrutinise Osamor's behaviour then. Her verbal (and liquid!) assault on *The Times* journalist Will Humphries is quite understandable at a time which is clearly a very difficult one for the Osamor clan. It is still hardly good form. We have had cause many times in this paper to criticise MPs for failing to acknowledge that the occasional public beasting is the price of doing business in the public square, and the alternative - the world envisaged by MPs demanding 'something be done about abuse' - is far, far worse. Long may the ladies and gentlemen of the press address themselves to these sorts of bungles.

Nonetheless, the scandal would have been straightforwardly

survivable - and the more excessive muckraking easily batted aside - were it not for serious errors of judgment on Osamor's part. It would, first of all, not have been a matter of public interest, had her son not been employed by her office as a researcher, after the nepotistic pattern of Westminster at large, where jobs for the kids, the hubby and the wife are scattered about liberally. As we were all taught by our grandparents, however, just because everyone is doing it doesn't mean you ought to; and such appointments are always risky in *exactly this way* - incidental scandals like Ishmael's conviction cannot but highlight the corrupt nature of their employment, and so the sins of the son will be visited on the mother.

Even the 'everyone's doing it' defence falls, however, when we come to consider the sharpest weapon of Osamor's tormentors - to wit, her bizarre decision to state that she had not learned of her son's conviction until his sentencing: an untruth as easily exposed as it was hard to credit in the first place. Not only was she aware: she had written to the judge urging leniency in his sentencing, after he had already pleaded guilty. The letter was soon enough in the hands of

the press, and it was this that prompted Humphries' fateful doorstopping expedition.

Nobody ever lost a million underestimating the diligence of Britain's bourgeois press corps, but the lowliest work-experience boy on the *Star* could hardly have failed to rumble this little ruse. It is true that some senior politicians get away with this sort of naked defiance of the facts - an especially orange example springs to mind. Osamor is MP for Edmonton, one of the poorest seats in London, however, not the president of the United States. No qualified majority is needed to impeach her.

Call me Ishmael

The nature of young Ishmael's 'crime', however, cannot escape our notice.

He was no doubt one of many amiable young persons who rolled up in Dorset last August with a thirst for musical entertainment and a big old bag of drugs to make the special moments that much better. The police lifted him with £2,500 worth of gear, including class-A cocaine. He claimed initially that this was all for personal use (which would have him going at quite a rate over the four days), and then that he was holding onto it for

someone else - the latter story having been accepted on the basis that nobody seems to have caught the chap actually selling the drugs.

But really, what if he was? Let us restore some perspective here - seeing as how we are talking about avoidable blunders! The prohibition of drugs must surely count as one of the 20th century's greatest of those - a fruitless struggle against a piece of human nature, made worse by its obvious hypocrisy, and the source of extraordinary evil the world over. Sentenced to a little community service, Ishmael Osamor will get off lightly, compared to the tens of thousands crushed between the military hammer and the cartel anvil in Mexico, or the legions of (mostly black) men corralled into America's brutal, exploitative prison-industrial complex.

How good it would have been to hear Kate Osamor declare that her son had been convicted of a crime that should not be a crime, that the war on drugs is simply a hypocritical exercise in arbitrary authority, with no greater effect than to punish people for being poor and not having MPs for mothers to write to judges pleading for leniency, and that it is high time that

the lot should be legal!

Alas, such an action would have panned out even worse for her (unless she suffers further action for her dishonesty). Rightwingers are very keen to remind us that Jeremy Corbyn did not sack her, but frankly we expect that he would have done if she had had the courage to denounce this injustice. One of the great disappointments of this foot-shuffling, endlessly embarrassable 'left' leadership is that it is unwilling to exploit its outsider status to escape the self-imposed ideological prisons of wider politics - the most absurd of which must surely be the 'war on drugs'. If the abolition of drug prohibition was part of Labour's policy, then the Osamors' plight might have been *redeemed*; unfortunately, it is not, so they are hung out to dry.

None of this deals with the nepotism, of course; but there the answer is staring us in the face. Labour MPs should not have a choice of the staff they employ, but rather the power should devolve to the party itself. That it does not already is a concession to the careerist methods of the vast majority of Labour MPs; how unfortunate, if not surprising, that a Corbynista should be the latest victim of nepotism's double edge ●

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