

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



Peter Manson looks at what passes for internal debate in the Socialist Workers Party

- Letters and debate
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A WORKING CLASS TRADE POLICY



LETTERS



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

Misreported

I readily admit I'm a terrible public speaker and, moreover, I was ill-prepared for my intervention at the December 9 CPGB aggregate. Even so, I barely recognise what Peter Manson made of my arguments in his report ('Debating our strategy and tactics', December 13). It is comrade Manson's right as editor to highlight fillers such as "Maybe it's just me" to make me look like an imbecile - but, personal vanity aside, some quotations are plainly inaccurate and the overall impression is misleading.

To his credit, the comrade already apologised in an email that he "probably misunderstood a couple of things or misinterpreted [his] notes". No hard feelings - I hope my corrections will help to clarify where I stand. My apologies in advance in the unlikely case that my memory deceives me.

Comrade Manson reports that I spoke of a "conspiratorial element that attributes omnipotence to Israel" and implies, albeit ambiguously, that I believe I have detected that element in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*. In fact, I have not found any such sentiments in the *Weekly Worker*. I said that such views are not uncommon in the Palestine solidarity milieu and broader left, where one encounters an eclectic mix of reactionary and progressive anti-Zionisms.

I did not say that people who are prone to interpret the world in conspiratorial terms are "proto-anti-Semites" - I said that reactionary forms of anti-Zionism that transparently borrow structural features from the 'socialism of fools' are a kind of "proto-anti-Semitism". A difference of nuance, but an important one: I detest witch-hunts of individuals, and I do not feel that shortcomings in their thinking should make them into pariahs quite so easily.

According to comrade Manson, I said that Zionism "had originated as an ideology of an oppressed people, but had become reactionary, maybe once settlers arrived in Palestine and started to remove the native population from their land".

I said no such thing. I said that Zionism originated as a 'nationalism of the oppressed' and became a 'nationalism of the oppressor', 'nationalism of the oppressor', 'nationalism of the oppressor' about that dichotomy. However, I also made clear that Zionism was reactionary *from the beginning*, stressing that oppression doesn't necessarily bring out the best in us individually or collectively. The purpose of my amendment was simply to highlight that Zionism is no singular evil - a truism for Marxists, but maybe less obvious for certain single-issue anti-Zionists. Contrary to comrade Manson's report, I gave no cut-off point along the lines of "maybe once settlers arrived in Palestine" - in this instance, another speaker's words were put in my mouth.

The report cites me as saying that I'm "embarrassed" by the *Weekly Worker's* excessive anti-Zionist copy. True enough, I did wonder out loud to what extent my misgivings might be aesthetical - that is, whether the sheer quantity of pages devoted to anti-Zionist polemic, coupled with sometime crudity in tone, triggered some kind of adverse reaction.

However, I think my issues concern more than aesthetics. Our slogan, 'Anti-Zionism does not equal anti-Semitism', is essentially correct, but in practice we seem to operate under the assumption that anti-Zionism is never anti-Semitic. In reality, there exists reactionary anti-Zionism just as there exists reactionary anti-imperialism and reactionary anti-capitalism - I'm happy to provide examples in another letter

if necessary. And while those with backward views ought to be educated, not excommunicated, you still have to call a spade a spade to facilitate this - not feebly explain away even the most appalling blunders.

What's more, if we shout 'Zionism', 'Israel' and 'witch-hunt' even when those themes are far from manifest - see George Soros/Another Europe Is Possible or the ultra-lame campaign against David Icke - we do part of our adversaries' work for them by conflating things that do not belong together. To be clear, it is not anti-Semitic to criticise George Soros Foundation funding of 'leftwing' campaigns - but it is not a good idea to invoke Zionism when nobody else does.

Finally, on the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. This argument began on our internal email list, where some comrades argued the group was no longer part of the left. Now, the AWL may be a wretched organisation that regularly issues apologies for profit-driven mass murder. It has also played a scabby and contemptible role in the witch-hunt of Labour Party and Momentum members (alas, the same is true for a number of non-AWL lefts, who have acquired a *Blockwart* mentality in the name of anti-racism). However, as long as it operates in the labour movement, self-conceives as Marxist and actively pursues some sort of 'strategy' to obtain a socialist society - unexceptional Trot economism, in the AWL's case - I'm afraid we have to deal with the fact that it remains part of the left. An organisation such as ours is in no position to drive it out by sheer wishful thinking.

I do not think the AWL has reached quite the same level of degeneration as Spiked or the 'anti-Germans', and I didn't hear any convincing arguments to the contrary at the aggregate. If hostility to the left becomes the group's defining feature and *raison d'être* in the future, we may reconsider that assessment.

Alex Carnovic
London

Correction

In your report of the CPGB aggregate, you say that I "was at pains, for obvious reasons, to stress that [I] was not a CPGB supporter". This is incorrect. What I actually said was that it had been alleged that I am a CPGB supporter, but I neither denied nor confirmed that allegation.

Moshé Machover
email

Class interests

The report of the CPGB aggregate provides more evidence for the case that the motion on withdrawal from the European Union failed, as I argued last week, to identify and support the interests of the working class.

The 2016 EU referendum divided the working class into three main camps - 'leave', 'remain' and abstain/boycott. After the result these were out of date. Neither abstain nor boycott had any significance outside the campaign. New positions appeared, identifiable as 'British exit' (Mogg and May, etc), 'remain' democrats (Corbyn and McCluskey, etc) and 'remain' liberals (Soubry, Blair and Chuka Umunna, etc).

'Remain' democrats accept the result as relating to a divided working class. This means continuing to expose ballot corruption and gerrymandering. But it means accepting *some kind of exit* at least until a clear majority of the working class recognises the advantages of 'remain'. The experience of the Brexit crisis helps the working class find the truth.

'Some kind of exit' is important here. Corbyn and Labour stand on the right wing of the 'remain' democrats. They have formulated a programme that all the UK should remain in a customs union, which does not undercut

EU regulations on workers' rights, etc. Taking the UK out of the single market means abandoning 'freedom of movement' and is very close to May's Brexit deal.

Corbyn and the Labour leadership are 'remain' democrats who have opportunistically adapted to a section of the working class hostile to freedom of movement. This has its roots in rightwing chauvinism and racism, promoted in Tory arguments about EU migration.

The left side of 'remain' democrats stand for a *different kind of exit*. This recognises the UK as a multi-nation state and accepts that Northern Ireland and Scotland voted to remain. The working class must fight for their right to remain. England and Wales voted to leave the EU, but not the single market or customs. This is consistent with maintaining freedom of movement through the UK and the EU.

'Remain' democrats must demand the right of the working class to vote for or against whatever Brexit deal the Tories come up with. We demand a national debate and a ratification-only referendum. Both 'leave' and 'remain' workers can unite on this, whilst being bitterly divided on a repeat 'remain' ballot.

There are thus left 'leave', left 'remain' and left 'remain' democrats. The CPGB is so focused on its own battles with left 'leave' (Socialist Workers Party) and left 'remain' (AWL) that it has failed to address the central question. This is how to advance working class interests and unity in a world in which a majority of the class were swayed by reactionary arguments.

The CPGB do not align themselves with any of the three mass camps. They rejected both left 'leave' and left 'remain'. With no policy, other than criticising other left sects, we end up sounding like Buddhist monks practising their own moral purity.

This is exactly what Moshé Machover criticised the CPGB for at the aggregate. He asks "what is in the interests of the working class", because this is not addressed. The interests of the class "had nothing to do with the state of the left". Yet the "state of the left" is the only thing the CPGB is concerned about.

Moshé is clear that the working class is better in than out, without saying how that can be advanced independently of liberal 'remain' and their left tail. Leaving the EU, as Moshé says, "would see a decline in worker's standard of living", etc. He is quite right to say, "All this was missing from the CPGB position."

Mike Macnair blamed the working class for this gaping hole. He says that, although 'remain' and 'leave' was a tactical question for the working class, "if there was a radical and thriving international workers' movement - picking up a good number of votes across Europe, for instance, and enjoying an influential presence in the European parliament - we would certainly 'want to fight alongside our European brothers and sisters'".

Of course, Jack Conrad recognised Moshé's criticism made the CPGB position indefensible. So after lunch he stressed "the CPGB's opposition to withdrawal". Great news, although it leaves open whether the CPGB positions itself on the left wing of 'remain' democrats (Corbyn, etc) or left wing of 'remain' liberals (Blair, etc).

The only fly in the ointment is the failure to recognise the major difference between a ratification referendum for the working class and the liberals' repeat 'remain' one for business profits. But, if May fails to win a majority for her deal, then she is finished and a general election is more or less inevitable.

Steve Freeman
email

Right person?

In his letter last week, comrade Steve Freeman observed: "The CPGB does not address immediate questions beyond boycotting everything ... Stop the class struggle, because we are not ready. Perhaps this is like an airplane in a holding pattern circulating around Heathrow airport waiting to land and hoping the bad weather changes before we run out of fuel."

It occurs to me the expression, 'Am I talking to the right person, here?', would deliver both an alternative and an even more concise slant on things. The simple energy of it intended to bring immediacy within an otherwise complex setting; to convey frustration - or even brewing despair - when things are not going well within a working relationship.

Actually, that question now should be posed in the context of 'Where the hell are you?' on the 'gilets jaunes' uprising, these so-called riots - the sustained street action and occupations of schools and colleges, etc, which French government elites *themselves* are beginning to regard as full-on insurrectional.

Yet another expression that comes to mind points out the 'crocodile in the swimming pool'. It's an extension of the proverbial 'elephant in the room', but a step up in harshness, as well as implying a far greater degree of urgency. Maybe the most extreme attempt to encourage growth within recalcitrant situations or by intransigent individuals would be to suggest a snake 'living in our toilet pan'?

Comrades at *Weekly Worker*/CPGB (and even Labour Party Marxists) will take the points being made, I hope. If so, a 'softly shimmering halo of all but celestial opalescence' awaits us, as it forms over our shared futurescape - our communistic destiny.

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

Peak coal

I'd like to congratulate Jack Conrad on his well-researched and balanced article, 'Whatever happened to peak oil?' (December 6). The only thing I would question is the predicted reserves of coal.

Coal is, of course, a finite resource, but decline in outputs is not necessarily associated with the level of remaining reserves. Indeed, as Jack says, production and reserves have considerably increased, as overall British levels of production and demand have declined. It must be said, however, that overall output per man-shift continued to rise throughout the life of the industry: ie, more coal was continually produced by fewer people, operating increasingly technological methods of extraction.

The overall figure of 948 billion tonnes (recoverable) globally is a gross underestimation of actual reserves. In fact something like 60 trillion tonnes of coal lie under the coast and seas of the north-west and north-east of Britain. One would estimate something similar at least under the rest of British coasts and coalfield areas, not to mention vast untapped coalfields like Oxfordshire. Whether it is "recoverable" is not, as one might think, limited by mine technology, which the majority of those reserves are. What determines whether it is recoverable is, first and foremost, social policy - and the ability to consume coal in relatively environmentally benign systems of power generation, etc; and whether you wish to make those adjustments which have impacts on other aspects of class and power relations (like a regrowth of the National Union of Mineworkers and enrichment of the highly class-conscious coalfield areas.)

When looking at the unkempt militancy of the Doncaster coalfield, together with its relative low profitability, Ian MacGregor, chair of the National Coal Board from 1983 to 1986, commented that he could see no excuse for its continued existence. When this was countered with the fact of the

vast reserves in that coalfield, he replied: "Well, hell, there's gold in the Scottish mountains, but only a fool would try to mine it."

But it has little to do with straight economics either. Coal is by far the cheapest form of energy generation. And this would only become more so with the application of carbon capture and storage, for example (and the removal of emissions taxes), so its decline in Britain is not linked to either a lack of reserves or potential profitability, but purely and simply politics.

The danger for us miners seeking an expansion of the deep-mine coal industry on the basis of clean-coal technology is that these vast reserves will be licensed off to get-rich-quick schemes, which will rape and pillage the resource. Underground coal gasification is the most dangerous of these. This process actually involves the ignition of the coal seam to extract methane and other coal gases. It is utterly destructive and wasteful, securing only 4% of the calorific value of the coal, while totally destroying the rest. Up to 20 licences have already been granted by the Coal Authority for the offshore seams. If this were to become the norm, those vast, almost eternal, reserves worldwide would in short measure soon be exhausted and laid waste.

By the way, copies of my mining trilogy *Stardust and coaldust* are available from me at the remarkable total price of £20.

David Douglass
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Toxic legacy

Eddie Ford's article does sterling service in examining the *Spiked* operation, and its evolution from the Revolutionary Communist Party/*Living Marxism* cult into something now indistinguishable from the ranks of the worst lobbyist firms ('He who pays the piper', December 13).

Even in that depressing list of the general damage done, one area in particular will stand out to posterity as their toxic legacy. I inevitably refer to their central anti-environmental campaign. A central figure in this effort has been *Spiked* contributor and Institute of Ideas stalwart Andrew Orłowski, who, as editor of online magazine *The Register*, headed a despicable, sustained campaign of innuendo and half-truths in that publication against climate science over the late 2000s and early 2010s, regurgitating material from the likes of Nigel Lawson's denialist Global Warming Policy Foundation.

This war of black propaganda by *Spiked*, and allies such as Orłowski, against the body of climate scientists - whose work was and is essential to understanding the coming environmental disaster - is unforgivable. Irreplaceable years have been lost, for which the Earth's biosphere - and our human civilisation in particular - will pay the price in the years and decades to come. What will such individuals tell their children and grandchildren, one wonders?

David Flood
Dublin

Depressing

Whenever I hear supporters of the *Spiked* project on the radio, like Claire Fox or Frank Furedi, their main objection to any idea seems to be not that it's untrue or inadequate, but that it's depressing. I mean, isn't climate change a discouragement to those of us who glory in western technology like some Victorian engineer?

In the 1990s, *Spiked's* precursor, the magazine *Living Marxism*, did a good job of filtering the attitudes of the John Major era and reminding people of the class system. But now the Spikes seem to love opposing any politics that gets in the way of 'fantastic fracking' or the greatness of things like the national 'bond'. It's Donald Trump in joined-up sentences.

Mike Belbin
London

IRAN

Like father, like son

Reza Pahlavi's idiotic comments show that there should be no nostalgia for the shah's regime, writes Yasmine Mather

Donald Trump's alternative plans for regime change in Iran are so awful, it is difficult to say who is advising him. Can it be that there is an Islamic Republic spy in the White House?

The reality is that animosity against Iran (not just the Islamic Republic), plus US determination to find candidates to implement regime change from above, has created the conditions for the most ridiculous contenders. First we had Mojahedin-e Khalq, a religious cult supported by Rudy Giuliani and John Bolton, and now we have Reza Pahlavi stepping into the limelight. The shah's son has already provoked much condemnation by suggesting that any US or European journalist or commentator who has ever supported the 'reformist' faction of the Islamic regime should be sacked from TV and radio stations like Voice of America, BBC Persian and Radio France Iran. It is a bit like Trump saying that journalists who supported Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton should be booted out.

As various Iranians have commented, this idiot wants to follow in the footsteps of his father, and his dictatorial rule, even before coming to power. However, he has done opponents of Iranian reaction a service, as almost no-one in the Persian media would be stupid enough to support such a suggestion.

That controversial comment was among a number of bizarre statements made by Pahlavi when he spoke at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. There is a lot of negative information on the web about this so-called 'think tank', so, in order to avoid any misrepresentation, let me stick to what Wikipedia says. It is

... focused on the foreign policy of the United States, as it pertains to the countries in the near east. Established in 1985, the institute's mission statement says that it seeks "to advance a balanced and realistic understanding of American interests in the Middle East and to promote the policies that secure them".¹

Its first executive director was Martin Indyk, a former deputy director of research for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (Aipac), which advertises itself as "America's pro-Israel lobby".²

To say that Pahlavi's choice of venue was a mistake, given the institute's close association with Aipac and the US state department at a time of severe sanctions and war threats, would be an understatement. Since his grandfather came to power with the help of British imperialism and his father only clung on thanks to a coup organised jointly by the United States and the United Kingdom, you would have thought he could have chosen a more suitable location for what was going to be a major political intervention.

However, that issue aside, it is what Pahlavi actually said that has drawn attention. He suggested that in order to weaken the Islamic republic the US and other western governments should confiscate that part of the assets of Iran's current Islamic leaders which is invested in the west. I personally think this is a brilliant idea. However, like many others, I suggest we start with the ex-shah's fortune. After all, Pahlavi and his extended family, including aunts, uncles, cousins, etc, have lived



Reza Pahlavi: stupid

in luxury for their last 40 years in exile and, now that he denies getting any funding from the Saudis, we should assume that the riches stolen from Iran are financing not just their luxurious lifestyle, but also their renewed political activity. It is only right that the wealth which the shah and his family took with them illegally, as they fled the 1979 revolution, should be returned to the Iranian people.

Having said that, I also believe that the wealth of the corrupt leaders of the Islamic republic - who, on the one hand, shout 'Death to America' and, on the other, take their fortunes out of the country, fearful of a plight similar to that of the ex-shah - should be confiscated. Apart from anything else, it will show the schizophrenia of these people, including senior clerics and government ministers, who simultaneously 'hate the west and envy the west'. Workers at the Shivan steel factory, who mounted a major protest this week against the non-payment of their wages, have used placards featuring the official slogan, 'Death to America', but with the words, "to the leaders of the regime who have taken their fortunes", between 'Death' and 'to America'!

This whole episode, and the fact that the ex-shah's son is still on the political scene, is itself an indictment of the Islamic republic. Forty years after the revolution which forced Pahlavi to flee, it has created such a corrupt, unequal system that some misguided people - albeit a small minority of mainly young people - express nostalgia for the shah.

Honouring a victim

The last years of the Pahlavi dynasty were also a time of revolutionary opposition and the birth of the radical left. By 1979 there were political demonstrations and strikes of historic significance. However, for some of us born into rightwing families, it was not the repression of revolutionaries that made us political; because of the severe censorship some of us were not even aware of the execution of Marxist activists. We became political when we saw the terrible injustice in society, the gap between the rich and poor, the scale of corruption engulfing every aspect of political and economic life. This was recounted not by Marxist radicals, but by those who favoured the *ancien régime*.

People like me became activists because we could not stand the cultural imperialism of the teachers in the posh French school we were attending in Tehran. Unlike Farah Pahlavi, the shah's widow, who

years before had attended the same school and remains an admirer of French cultural imperialism, many of us rebelled against the obnoxious attitude of those teachers (including nuns) towards Iran and Iranians.

Of course, in some cases this took the wrong form, as was the case of an older friend of mine, Catherine Adl, the daughter of the shah's personal physician, who was the leader of one of the two pro-shah parties. (That was before Pahlavi decided to end the joke that was Iran's 'two-party system' and instructed the two parties to merge.) I have decided to post an item about Catherine on social media every time Reza Pahlavi makes a political statement.

Catherine was shot dead by Savak, the shah's security force, in a village near Tehran, while sitting in her wheelchair (after falling badly, she had become paralysed). When we both left the French school, she went to university in France and I was studying in Britain, but we were often on the same plane travelling to or from Tehran before and after the holidays. I am not sure if it was the fall and subsequent paralysis or the Islamophobic cultural imperialism of the French nuns that made her religious, but she was politically conscious and hated the privileges that many, including ourselves, benefited from.

During those trips we often talked of our common experience and how much we wanted to see revolutionary change. In her case, it was a rather utopian approach - she and her husband, Jahnbani, wanted to liberate a particular village with the aid of a stockpile of arms that they never actually got the chance to use.

However, her execution by Savak had a lasting effect on many of us. As much as we disagreed with her turn to religion (a form of 'liberation Islam'), we considered her shooting a political act and we were determined - and we remain determined - to keep her name alive and to seek justice for her as a symbol of the victims of the ex-shah's murderous regime.

All this has never been more relevant than now, when the idiot pretender to the Pahlavi throne is presenting himself as the defender of human rights and claiming that his father's rule was the era of democratic freedom ●

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Notes

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Washington_Institute_for_Near_East_Policy.
2. www.aipac.org.

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday December 23 and 30: No forum.
Sunday January 6, 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): 'The end of the Third Duma and "constitutional illusions"'.
Sunday January 13, 5pm: 'Labour 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.

Friedrich Engels' Manchester

Sunday December 30, 11.30am: Guided walk, assemble Engels statue, Home arts centre, 2 Tony Wilson Place, Manchester M15. Tickets £10.50. Organised by New Manchester Walks: www.facebook.com/events/1453471988088817.

Karl Marx's Manchester

Sunday December 30, 2.15pm: Guided walk, assemble Victoria Station wall map, Manchester M3. Tickets £10.50.
Organised by New Manchester Walks: www.facebook.com/events/263197474397939.

Britain is broken - general election now

Saturday January 12, 12 noon to 3:30pm: National demonstration. Assemble BBC Portland Place, London W1.
Organised by People's Assembly Against Austerity: www.facebook.com/events/210553786522777.

Stop arming Saudi, stop bombing Yemen

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

For a national education service

Tuesday January 22, 7pm: Lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1.
Lecturer: Kevin Courtney (National Education Union). The current state of the education system and plans for its transformation. Tickets £5 (£3).
Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.facebook.com/events/687463098320616.

Labour Against the Witchhunt

Saturday February 2, 11am to 5pm: Conference, Askew Road Church, Bassein Park Road, Hammersmith, London W12.
Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt: www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org.

Stop Birmingham arms fair

Saturday February 2, 11am to 4pm: Workshop, Carrs Lane Conference Centre, Carrs Lane, Birmingham B4.
Build resistance to the March 2019 Birmingham Arms Fair.
Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade and Birmingham Palestine Action: www.facebook.com/events/204843273751468.

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.

Solidarity with the Stansted 15

Monday February 4, 8.30am to 11.30am: Crown Court, 3-5 New Street, Chelmsford CM1. Peaceful protesters who stopped a deportation flight found guilty on terror-related charges. Solidarity protest outside the court when sentencing is due. Organised by End Deportations: www.facebook.com/events/735004523524622.

Labour Representation Committee

Saturday February 9, 10am to 5pm: Conference, Student Central (formerly ULU), Malet Street, London WC1. To decide the LRC's campaigning priorities and elect a national executive committee. Speakers include John McDonnell MP.
Organised by Labour Representation Committee: <https://labourrep.com/conference-2019>.

Confronting racism on campus

Saturday February 16, 10.30 to 5pm: Conference for students, staff and education workers.
NEU, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1.
Speakers include Kate Osamor MP. Tickets £11.25 (£5.92).
Organised by Stand Up To Racism: www.facebook.com/events/124978901754397/
www.facebook.com/events/346086039308173.

Stand Up To Racism

Saturday February 23, 10.30am to 5pm: Trade union conference, NEU, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Discuss, debate and organise against the far right on the streets and institutional racism in the workplace. Tickets £11.25 (£5.92).
Organised by Stand Up To Racism:

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.

SWP

A sad state of affairs

Peter Manson looks at what passes for internal debate in the run-up to the SWP conference



The Socialist Workers Party's annual conference is just a couple of weeks away, so we are now coming to the end of the three-month annual period when members are actually allowed to exchange ideas on a national level. They may send their submissions for publication in one of three *Pre-Conference Bulletins*, which are circulated internally.

I reviewed the first of these back in October and reported that there were exactly seven contributions from rank-and-file members, so it is not as though the comrades were champing at the bit ('Keep on keeping on', October 25). Since then the two other bulletins have been distributed, but things have hardly improved in relation to the numbers participating in the debate. In *PCB* No2 (November), out of the 14 submissions, five are from the central committee and only nine from individual members or groups of members. But, as usual, the final bulletin, *PCB* No3 (December), contained the largest number - there were 31 submissions, of which only two were from the central committee. However, on closer inspection, it turns out that, of those 29 contributions from individuals, 11 are from local or national officials intent on illustrating the tremendous success of the leadership's line. That means there are only 18 featuring

some kind of independent thought.

But let us begin with the CC's own submissions. As usual, *PCB* No2 gives details of membership numbers and, in the report headed 'Building the party', the leadership states: "So far in 2018, 419 people have joined the SWP, of whom 402 remain members." So what, you may ask, happened to the other 17? Have they already resigned? In fact, if you go back a couple of years, the CC claims that 514 joined the SWP in 2016, but more than 100 of those 'recruits' are no longer members.

How can this be accounted for? Well, it is pretty straightforward. To become an SWP 'member' you just have to fill in a form - nothing more. You are not expected to actually do anything, such as turn up at branch meetings or SWP-organised events. Nor do you have to pay a subscription. The CC states: "Our total party membership currently stands at 6,101, with just under 2,000 paying a regular subscription..." (my emphasis).

In other words, the latter figure gives you a better idea of the number of comrades who are actually committed to the SWP on any level - although even here there are no doubt a good few hundred who pay a regular donation, but do nothing apart from that. The Labour Party, trade unions and my local chess club demand a higher level of commitment than the 'Bolshevik'

The one-third of members who pay subs are confused and increasingly demoralised

Martin Smith, former national organiser, is a living ghost



SWP. If you do not pay subs, you are not a member. Period.

In its 'Financial report' (*PCB* No3), the CC states: "Comrades still have a tendency to put off the discussion about subs when someone joins. This is a mistake." So 'recruits' are often not even asked to pay a subscription, let alone expected to submit themselves to 'party discipline'. The reason for this is that all local branches are supposed to be recruiting at every possible opportunity, so there is a marked reluctance to broach matters that might put people off. In fact it is quite likely that some 'recruits' who are actually asked to pay up then decide they do not want to be a member after all - that would account for the difference between the numbers who have signed up and those considered to be still members.

The CC attempts to counter all this by claiming: "Experience shows that we are much more likely to hold on to and actively involve those members who pay regular subs - there is nothing to lose and a lot to gain by asking for money as part of a discussion about what the SWP does." Obviously there is a link between paying subs and a comrade's commitment, but it works in the opposite way from what the leadership implies: if you are committed, you will pay a subscription, not the other way round.

In 'Building the party', the CC declares: "Each branch should regularly check its membership list and ensure everyone is contacted." That may seem obvious, but local officers know only too well that a good proportion of their so-called 'members' are nothing of the sort. Many never respond to emails, let alone turn up to meetings, although most of such people do not actually formally resign. Why should they bother?

Democracy

As with *PCB* No1, the CC stresses the SWP's current main priority in the two other bulletins: the need to build Stand Up To Racism (as a means of recruiting more of those 'members', of course).

By the way, "Mirfat (Birmingham)", in his contribution entitled 'Aspects of our work in the West Midlands', complains that it is insufficient to state, "No to racism, no to fascism": how about what we are for? He suggests something like "Yes to unity, yes to equality" or even "Yes to humanity, yes to love!"

But, returning to the CC, in 'Students, anti-racism and socialism' (*PCB* No2), the leadership declares:

Building on the campuses and colleges is a central question for every branch. There are two important aspects to this. The first is to build the anti-racist movement

among students ... The second is to relate to the audience for socialist ideas among young people.

This makes the priority absolutely clear! And, in 'Socialists, Brexit and the European Union' (*PCB* No2), the CC states: "The EU cannot be a site of resistance to racism. Its border regime and austerity straitjacket fuel racism." A strange logic, it has to be said - especially when it adds immediately: "Our solution is to put forward anti-austerity, anti-racist, internationalist demands that cut across the sterile debate taking place between a neoliberal and racist EU on one side and a neoliberal and racist Brexit on the other."

In other words, the UK after Brexit would also still have a "border regime", together with "austerity", which presumably "fuel racism" too. Leaving aside the automatic conflation of anti-immigration sentiment with racism, surely the CC should conclude that the UK also "cannot be a site of resistance to racism" either. Obviously, the existence of reactionary measures and laws does not mean they cannot be resisted and defeated - and that applies within the EU as well as in Britain.

But such matters are not criticised by any of the contributors to the bulletins. And neither is the SWP's blatant democratic deficit in any real sense. Outside the three-month pre-conference period comrades may not form a faction to campaign for a specific policy and even during that period statements may only be issued through official channels.

As for the central committee itself, you can only be elected to that body as part of a slate of candidates, and what always happens is that the only slate nominated is the one proposed by the outgoing CC - ie, it proposes to re-elect itself (allowing for replacement of any comrades who are stepping down). There is no provision for individual voting - conference delegates may vote only for or against the slate as a whole, take it or leave it.

This means that the CC is a self-perpetuating body, whose decisions cannot be seriously challenged. It is true that very occasionally the CC organises a 'party council', consisting of elected delegates, which is empowered to take decisions between conferences. And there is also the national committee, which, according to the SWP constitution (published in *PCB* No1), "normally meets every two months between annual conferences":

The national committee assists the central committee in providing political leadership for the party and reviews the party's political and organisational work between conferences. Its decisions are binding on the central committee ...

In the event of a major disagreement between the central committee and the national committee, the NC has the right to call a special conference.

I am not aware of any occasion when the NC has actually overturned any CC decision, and it is clear where the real power always lies, despite what is stated in the constitution. And "John C (Tyneside)", in a contribution headed 'Democratic centralism' in *PCB* No2, makes some mild criticisms (only the first names of members are provided on security grounds). He writes:

It is true that the opportunity for discussion formally exists in the national committee and the party council, but in practice any discussion that might take place there *never* appears in branch meetings. Discussion which might contradict party policy can't take place in branch meetings, especially when non-members are present.

There are 50 seats on the NC and

the list of nominated candidates (who, unlike those for the CC, can be voted for individually by conference delegates) is published in *PCB* No3. There are just 55 of them! So in practice the NC, like the CC, ends up by and large as a self-perpetuating body - not that many members take it seriously enough to consider standing for election to it.

However, it seems that there is some disquiet about the NC's role. For example, "Martin (Manchester) and Esme (Waltham Forest)", who are the NC's "outgoing joint chairs" (both up for re-election), "suggest that the newly elected NC opens up a discussion, together with the central committee (CC), about the role of the body and how it is elected".

For his part, "Pete W (Bristol)", in his 'On party democracy' (*PCB* No3), proposes: "Each pre-conference district aggregate to elect one NC member to sit for a year, the remaining seats to be filled by election at annual conference on the current basis of nomination by five subs-paying members."

A recipe for federalism. Surely the way forward is simple. Elect the NC at conference ... and have the NC elect the CC. There should be no need for checks and balances. That can be left to the capitalist class and its two-chamber parliament, supreme court, etc.

Criticism

PCB No3 in particular does feature some criticism from rank-and-file members, but none of it poses any serious political or organisational alternative to SWP policy.

For example, "Bridget (Birmingham)", in 'Where do we go from here?', states:

I joined the party in 1978 and we used to joke that if it was a Saturday we must be on a coach to somewhere to fight the National Front. When I look back over this year and Birmingham SUTR, it feels a bit like that again!

This certainly says a lot about the SWP's emphasis on 'activism', as opposed to genuinely *political* organisation - in relation to the Labour Party, for example. What really matters for the leadership are demonstrations and strikes, not 'boring' things like organising to help defeat the Labour right, for example. But Bridget points to a problem:

... after we took over 100 people down to the national demo recently, we didn't get anyone to come to the following branch meeting.

I don't know what conclusion I draw - other than the question, 'Do we have to do all this over again next year?'

It is all very well bringing together lots of people to demonstrate against racism, but what happens when they go home? Despite the CC's claims, they are not flooding into the SWP (or any other left group right now). The action is in the Labour Party and that is what we should be prioritising.

The general attraction towards Labour under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership is mentioned as an aside in the contribution headed 'Space for a socialist bookshop to intervene' from "Dave (Bookmarks)". He writes:

The other component of the period is the rise of Corbyn and the mass membership of the Labour Party, including many young people.

One expression of this is the thirst for ideas from people who are new to the movement, but who are being guided by existing trade union and Labour Party members. One indication of this is the significant growth of our sales of Robert Tressell's classic, *The ragged-trousered philanthropists*,

and by an exponential increase in sales of Walter Citrine's 1939 classic, *The ABC of chairmanship*, to young Labour Party members. Obviously there are lots of aspiring bureaucrats.

Then there is "John (Exeter)" and his 'More on democratic centralism'. Just as Bridget is fed up with organising for demonstrations, John is exasperated by the continued claim that "we punch above our weight". He writes:

The phrase is insidious because, although it contains a grain of truth, it completely misses the point. The phrase is a blanket that we hide beneath to cover the fact that our punch is weak and getting weaker, and our weight is low and getting lower.

Organisationally, the party has become conservative (with a small 'c'); activity-wise, the party has become routinised; membership-wise, many of the longer-term members (including myself), have become institutionalised.

But, like the others, he seems to have no alternative to this 'institutionalisation'.

Then there are those two long-term critics, "Anne and Martin (West London)", who every year complain about the SWP's failings. True, they often do propose alternatives to leadership policy, but these almost always relate to questions of organisation, not the actual politics of the SWP. So this year, in 'Rebuilding the party', they point out the "great advantages of smaller branches", where "Political differences and even nuances can be immediately and thoroughly discussed". But unfortunately the leadership tendency is to move in the opposite direction through the merging of branches. Yet, "with each town abandoned, each retrenchment, the party appears to celebrate".

Anne and Martin conclude:

Let's hope that this year's conference faces up to the party's long-term decline, digs its heels in over losing any further ground and takes organisation on the ground deadly seriously as the means of doing this. Otherwise the party will continue going backwards, conceding ground and with each defeat claiming, 'Oh, it's so much better now'.

A final example of this sort of criticism comes from "Huw (Bristol)" in his piece entitled 'Social media'. He claims that "Any political organisation that doesn't have a serious strategy with regards to social media is selling itself short." And he places the SWP firmly within that category: "We seem too stuck in a mindset that ends up with every time social media is mentioned it has to be quickly followed by a 'Yes, but the paper is the key'."

But, like all the other critics, he can only come up with a vague alternative: "how do we develop a leadership that represents the best rather than the selected?"

Misogyny

When it comes to more concrete proposals, a group of comrades called in *PCB* No2 for a "day school on sexual oppression" as a way of combating sexism - not to mention making up for lost ground over the Martin Smith affair. Back in 2010 he was accused of exploiting his post of national organiser by sexually abusing a female comrade. As a result of this incident the SWP was condemned as "rape apologists" and no-platformed by, in particular, a number of student groups. Several comrades have mentioned in this year's *PCBs* how local branches are still adversely affected by this.

The comrades who are proposing

the day school also talk about the right's "racialised misogyny", which overlaps with Islamophobia. They state:

[This] bordering on obsession towards Muslim women who choose to cover themselves with a hijab, niqab or burqa (recently seen with Boris Johnson's racist dog whistles in the *Telegraph*) shows how these people view the woman's body as belonging to their gaze, not the woman herself.

And the CC, in its response in *PCB* No3, headed 'Fighting oppression in the age of MeToo', agrees entirely. It writes:

When Boris Johnson ... talked about veiled women "looking like letterboxes", he was defended by some fellow Tories and commentators on the basis of the need to 'liberate' Muslim women. Part of the work of anti-racists is to challenge this Islamophobia masquerading as support for women's rights.

The CC adds that when *Guardian* writer Polly Toynbee declared, "Hiding a woman dehumanises her completely, turning a person into an anonymous thing", this was an example of the "acceptance of Islamophobic arguments".

So is the wearing of the hijab now to be regarded *merely* as a matter of a woman's choice? It is true that every woman must be free to dress and cover herself as she wishes, but what do we say about the origin of the hijab as a means of displaying patriarchy? There remain millions of women, including in Britain, who are *forced* to cover up, whether they like it or not.

We need to clearly state that the general, *voluntary* abandonment of the hijab would be a symbolic advance for women's equality.

PCS and Labour

There is a useful contribution from "Pete and Candy" from the "SWP PCS fraction". (Examples such as "Candy" demonstrate the problem of the SWP's 'first names only' policy, of course. Even if she was not the only SWP member with that name, I think most people would be able to identify this long-standing leading comrade from her prominence in the Public and Commercial Services union.)

Anyway, Pete and Candy give their take on the bitter dispute involving two leading members of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, Janice Godrich and Chris Baugh, who both attempted to secure the nomination from the PCS Left Unity faction for the post of assistant general secretary of the union. While comrade Baugh, who is the current AGS, was backed by SPEW, it was comrade Godrich who won the Left Unity nomination. However, since then she has announced that illness is now preventing her from standing for election, so it is unclear how LU will proceed.

Pete and Candy write: "The roots of the disagreement were difficult to identify for most people, and come down to a long-running political difference between Mark Serwotka and Chris Baugh." They continue:

We tried to make sense of the split in the SP and the union, seeing it as taking place against the backdrop of the impact of Corbyn's success on the Labour movement. This has led Mark Serwotka to join the Labour Party, and, on the other hand, for tensions to arise in the SP, as they tack to the ultra-left in relation to Labour.

This is a reference to SPEW's commitment, despite Corbyn's election as leader, to continue standing candidates against Labour

rightwingers - even though just about everyone else, it seems, has now abandoned the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, which was set up by SPEW to lay the ground for an alternative workers' party - in effect a Labour Party mark two.

But the SWP's decision to back comrade Godrich has nothing to do with the PCS attitude to Labour and the need for the unions to take a strong and consistent position within the party in opposition to the right:

We believe Mark Serwotka has consistently had the best strategy for leading members to fight back ... It was on this basis that we argued for support for Janice Godrich, because she is prepared to work with him on delivering this strategy, unlike Chris Baugh who has tried to undermine it.

The SWP may have stopped supporting Tusc, and correctly given up on the idea of continuing to stand candidates against Labour, but, like SPEW, it still refuses to play its part - particularly within the unions - to help the battle to defeat the right, let alone take any position on the way to transform Labour into a fighting party of the working class. PCS affiliation to the Labour Party is surely overdue.

Linked to this is the SWP's opposition to Labour's stance in regard to Scottish independence. This is illustrated by "Bob", whose surname is actually given (presumably in error, so I will not compound the mistake by repeating it!). In 'Scotland: the differences and the similarities', he writes: "people in Scotland are looking for a way to fight back. This has manifested itself politically in support for Scottish independence and now in union action over equal pay and teachers' salaries." And he continues: "what has happened in Scotland shows that when working people are given an alternative then they will respond positively". He adds: "The complete rigidity of the Labour Party in Scotland in opposing a second referendum at all costs is the main reason for their continuing failure to pick up support."

Bob is, of course, stating the official SWP line - Scottish independence would be a good thing, because it would weaken British imperialism. What is bad for them must be good for us - even though it would also divide the working class in Britain and weaken our united struggle against imperialist interests.

Finally, let me mention the pathetic debate begun by "Richard (Coventry)", who in *PCB* No1 expressed his disagreement with the notion accepted by the CC that the global capitalist economy is now in a long depression. He does this on the grounds that some companies, and indeed capitalists as a whole in some countries, are still able to flourish. Similarly, while he admits that strikes are now generally very difficult to organise, there are exceptions and gains can still be made. Therefore he concludes that we cannot be in a depression!

You might think that it would be a waste of time arguing against such nonsense, but the CC did actually reply in *PCB* No2. Its rebuttal was immediately followed by another piece from Richard in the same vein - and another in No3!

What is needed is a serious SWP opposition. One that calls for a single, united Marxist party, based on genuine democratic centralism. Towards that end the democratisation of the SWP itself is needed, first and foremost by ending the ban on permanent factions and a commitment to open, public debate between all comrades ●

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STRATEGY

Working class trade policy

Mike Macnair concludes his series on 'free trade' by looking at the positive alternative

This is the third and last article in my series on 'free trade'. In the first article ('Free trade tailism,' November 22) I argued that citation-grazing in Marx and Engels could not provide a solid basis for independent working class trade policy, even if the quotations were not mutilated, as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty had done.

This was because what Marx and Engels wrote about free trade was poisoned by the idea that impoverishing the working class would bring on radicalisation and revolution. It was also disoriented by the image that "The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future"¹ - hence that British 19th century free-tradism was the future for Germany, and so on.

In the second article ('Free trade illusions,' December 13) I developed this point further, by looking at the history of free-trade ideas before their 'triumph' in mid-19th century Britain, and at the subsequent rise of protectionism, followed by the 'golden age' of managed trade (1950s-70s) and the extent to which these developments could be explained by the theory of imperialism and monopoly capital as forms of capitalist decline (it could not).

Moreover, the history showed a geopolitical aspect, in which free trade could be a policy by which a dominant country held down a subordinate country or countries. Conversely, countries which were 'developed' could have strong geopolitical reasons for protecting strategically significant, but declining, industries.

I argued that these aspects of the history were not explicable in terms either of Ricardian 'comparative advantage' theory or of any of its modern marginalist interpretations; or of the idea that there was a natural tendency in capitalism towards free trade. Rather, I suggested that if we abandoned the idea that capitalist markets tend towards equilibrium, both phenomena could find a place in the analysis.

States

On the one hand, there could be no stateless capitalism, since, given that free markets do not attain equilibrium, the market itself could not secure its own infrastructure. To secure credit money, states need to discriminate against 'free-rider' non-payers. Hence - unless capital actually attained a world state - states were bound to attempt to discriminate against 'non-national' capitals: that is, to act in a 'mercantilist' way.

It is worth turning aside here to a point which I did not make in the December 13 article. This is that capital inherits the 'nation' form of the state, via its victory in England in the 17th century. But it begins with sub-national states (the late medieval Italian city-states, and also the Dutch Republic, which was a politically created fragment of the Dutch and Flemish-speaking low countries). The victory in England created a supra-national state (the Great Britain of England, its Scots junior partner and its Welsh incorporated dependency), albeit one which began to be imagined as a nation-state. And from its outset capital aspires to a world state. This was reflected in the late medieval Italian cities in parties: Guelph (papalist) and Ghibelline (imperialist, in the old sense of imagining the Holy Roman



The liberal ideal of mutual benefit comes with gross inequality built in

Emperor as a potential universal ruler). It was reflected in Venice's small-scale maritime empire, in the Dutch Republic's much more far-flung maritime empire, in the British empire and in today's global US empire.²

However, capital cannot actually attain a world state without a mutation in state form, which is pretty unlikely. The reason is that the forms which make the state dependent on capital (state debt and the institutional market in it, bribery, the 'rule of law', the fear of capital flight) operate by making the state dependent on a group of particular capitals - the predominant lenders, bribers, etc. The result is that an entity which approaches the character of being a world state, like Britain in the 19th century or the US after the fall of the Soviet Union, is inevitably pulled by its dominant capitals to discriminate against capitals outside the favoured group - and, as a result, to raise up state rivals to itself, as the victims of this discrimination seek a means of resisting the world-dominant state.

The second aspect of the geopolitical issue was that, if one gets rid of the assumptions of theories of market equilibrium, business scale itself could be recognised as a barrier to new firms entering the market, so that promoting free trade could be a mercantilist defence of dominant industrial and financial sectors - as it could be for the Netherlands in the 17th century, Britain in the late 19th century and the USA in the late 20th.

Cycles

Secondly, capitalism does not tend towards equilibrium, but rather cycles between phases of growth/boom and bust/recession. Boom phases, even if they take place under the aegis of a 'managed' economy (as in the 1950s-70s), produce the appearance of a tendency of markets towards virtuous equilibrium growth, and hence the growth of liberal ideology - including its particular variant, free-tradism.

But the boom can never last, and any actual steps taken towards liberalising the economy accentuate its instability and - as Marx actually diagnosed - tend to relatively impoverish the working class. The result is a necessary

swing towards anti-liberal forms of collectivism. If socialist forms of collectivism are suppressed, or suppress themselves for the sake of people's frontism³ (as is true of the modern left pretty generally), collectivism must find expression as religious collectivism/communalism (political Islamism, Hindutva, US Christian 'conservatism', and so on) or more secular rightist nationalism (Putin; Koizumi and Abe; French Front National; German Alternative für Deutschland; Italian Lega; Brexiteers; Trump; and so on).

Underlying this is a necessary logic of capitalism. In boom phases asset prices are bid up, shifting from boom into bubble. At the crisis - the moment of transition into recession or depression - the illusory quality of these prices is exposed. Capitalism itself requires in this situation that the losses should fall disproportionately on creditors/rentiers/landowners/savers/'strivers'; because it is these actors who have bid up asset prices in the boom-bubble phase and, as long as their inflated holding values are not deflated, their persisting claims on income proportional to these inflated capital values act as a drag on actual productive investment.

If these interests are 'bailed out' by state action, rather than forced to accept capital losses, this overhang of inflated claims persists until the losses are made to fall on creditors, and so on, by full-scale great-power war. But refusal to bail them out would run up against the institutional forms which make states dependent on capital (above). Hence, the shift into nationalism and communalism, while irrational in itself, is the only available route towards the bloodletting that capitalism objectively needs to restore it to 'health' (to allow a return to vigorous growth).

It should be emphasised that this is not a conscious process, until the very last moment at which politicians faced with intractable problems decide that war is the better option (as, for example, in summer 1914). Rather, the point is simply that the business cycle, in a hierarchical world of competing capitalist states, produces right-populist nationalism, and hence tendencies towards war.

In sum, we live in a world of a

hierarchy of competing states, and of business cycles, in which there is not an inherent long-term tendency towards free trade, and the working class movement cannot simply 'promote free trade' on the ground that this is the most advanced form of capitalism, or the form in which the contradictions of capital play out most fully.

Rather, the workers' movement needs to think through its own needs and long-term goals; and what it can and cannot do for itself under capitalist rule - in order, in turn, to analyse concrete free-trader and protectionist proposals.

Inequality

Capitalism is unavoidably linked to inter-state competition; liberalism naturally produces its right-populist negation; and capitalism will in the medium term require escalating nationalism leading to great-power war, as the only means of clearing off the inflated claims of creditors (and so on). These are pretty good reasons to seek an alternative to capitalism. But thinking about what sort of alternative to capitalism requires us also to think briefly about some of the other reasons for seeking that alternative.

The first, which has attracted quite a lot of media attention in the context of the right-populist 'revolt' against liberalism, is the tendency of free markets to produce systemic and widening economic inequalities. It is pretty clear that, in spite of the fact that the right-populists are not real egalitarians, the tendency fuels right-populism - because the latter asserts that 'we' (whether the *umma* or the nation) are all in it together, rich and poor, against 'cosmopolitan', 'globaliser' or otherwise foreign forces, and hence equally done down by them.

The liberals have endeavoured and continue to endeavour to distract attention from the issue of liberalism increasing economic inequality by focussing on 'diversity' and 'non-economic' forms of inequality - racism, sexism, and so on - and much of the left has fallen into this trap.⁴

However, it is illusory to offer as an alternative to rising inequality a return to the 'managed economy' of the 1950s-70s. In the first

place, this regime was, in fact, a system of concessions both to the industrial workers in the 'west' and to 'national bourgeoisies' in the 'south', faced with the massive extension of the Soviet bloc as a result of World War II. To get anything like it back would need a stick on the scale of the old Soviet bloc and communist parties, not merely carrots in the form of the common point made by Keynesians that economic growth was actually higher (in both 'west' and 'south') under this regime than under the liberal regime of 1978-2018.

Secondly, the 1950s-70s 'golden age' was the product of World War II. By finally imposing the accumulated losses of successive economic downturns on British investors, the war set free the conditions for a new prolonged phase of growth.

Thirdly, and most important for present purposes, the liberals are not wrong that the regime of the 1950s-70s, while flatter in economic hierarchies, was characterised by powerful bureaucratic hierarchies (in the 'west' and 'south', as well as in the 'east'); by explicit race, gender and so on, discrimination and oppression which the liberals at least formally oppose; and by violent inequalities between countries.

Liberalism was not merely imposed by US capital turning to it in the late 1970s-80s. Rather, there was a wave of mass support for liberalism resulting from Brezhnevite 'stagnation' in the 'east', from bureaucratic management of housing and welfare, and 'stagflation', in the 'west'; and from the commitment of the labour movements across the world to nationalism and to the subordination of women (and all the other things that went along with this).

Hence, even if we were to get the overthrow of the USA in war (without a generalised nuclear exchange leading to human extinction) and a renewed Stalinism to serve as the stick, a new 1950s-70s 'golden age' would lead merely to a new 1980s-2000s 'neo-neoliberalism'.

The consequence is that the socialism we aim for has to be a socialism of universal emancipation - not a 'socialism' of bureaucratic, gender, race and national hierarchies.

That does not mean a socialism of 'intersectionalism'. The latter is an idea which accepts hierarchy (whether market or bureaucratic), merely seeking to reallocate positions at the top of the economic, or party, hierarchy, in favour of members of groups which have been oppressed in the past. By leaving a large, subordinated class in existence, the result is merely to hitch the feminists', anti-racists', etc, wagons to the liberals - and thereby guarantee the victory of the overtly racist, sexist, and so on, right-populists.

The goal of overthrowing inequality, then, has to be a goal of overthrowing the permanent subordination of individuals to others; and, hence, the goal of overthrowing the 'political career' and the 'managerial career', as well as the 'entrepreneurial career'.⁵

It is for this reason, too, that it has to be a socialism based on the workers' movement. It is not that the workers are most oppressed. It is not that class 'explains' or underpins all other oppressions. It is that we cannot overcome the other oppressions without aspiring to universal emancipation; and we

cannot do so without aspiring to the overthrow of the wages system and the class order.

'Growth'

Liberalism's 'offer' in relation to inequality is sometimes that in markets we are all *treated as equal* - my money is as good as yours. But this idea has fairly limited purchase, because it turns out that the *quantity* of money affects its substantive value: the rich can buy freedom from discrimination in a way which the relatively poor cannot and, conversely, can buy the right to discriminate.

More commonly, the liberal economists' argument is that at the end of the day, even if there is radical inequality, free markets make us all better off in the long term, because they maximise economic growth. That is, after all, the implicit meaning of 'allocative efficiency' in economics: where any change from the adopted allocation would make someone worse off; hence, change *must* take the form of growth.

The point has been argued at length by David Harvey that capitalism inherently requires, for its own stability, 3% annual growth; if there is no growth someone will be worse off, and even between 0% and 3% annual growth frictional effects entail someone being made relatively worse off, and hence a crisis of the political acceptance of capitalism ('legitimacy' in Max Weber's terminology).⁶

But then the problem (also pointed out by Harvey) is that *random* economic growth, which is what is generated by capitalism, and required to generate political acceptance for capitalism, runs up against the limits of the planetary biosphere. We *objectively need* reductions in carbon emissions and, for that matter, reductions in plastic waste output. But even *regulatory* steps towards either are proving astonishingly difficult, because of geopolitical conflicts and fears of suppressing growth. Witness the weakness of last week's Katowice agreement - to which, even so, neither the US nor Russia is party.

The point is not to set zero growth as an alternative target or, for that matter, 'sustainable growth' as a target. It is that capitalism, *because* it is generalised commodity production, *because* it is humans coordinating our diverse productive activities through monetary exchanges, entails the tendency to inequality and hence to loss of political acceptance, and the tendency to cycles, with the same effect - and hence requires that there must be regular *random* growth to maintain public political acceptance.

It follows that we *may not* regulate, because, if we do, we risk destroying growth: this is the 'No return to the 1970s' message repeated *ad nauseam* by the liberal economists. It is this mantra which we have to reject if we are to address the problems of pressure on the biosphere.

To address these problems, we have to begin to go beyond coordinating our productive activities through money exchanges. And, conversely, we cannot set 'growth' as a target at all. We have to set *human development* as our social target - and we have to address questions of inequality, and of the allocation of material resources, directly rather than trying to dodge out from under with the *promise* that growth 'will provide' in the future.

Both points mean that we have to collectively plan '*in natura*': that is, in relation to use-values rather than money values; because it is the production of certain specific use-values (carbon-emitting fuels,

plastic packaging, etc) which is the problem - not merely a monetary problem.

Production is international

The strategic alternative to capitalism, then, is to take a large chunk of production out of the regime of the world market. I repeat, necessarily, a point I have made, and we in CPGB have made repeatedly: socialist construction (in this sense) is not feasible on the basis of the resources of a single country.

The crisis in Venezuela and the liberalising turn in Cuba are examples of this. *Production* is now too much internationally integrated to be carried on at any level beyond the marginal without access to trade. Through the control of finance, and the elaboration of sanctions against the supply of 'strategic' capital goods, the US can effectively choke the economy of any single nation-state. In *Europe*, the Greek tragedy shows the ability of the EU and its controllers to do the same to any single country. The inability of the Tory Brexiters to offer a realistic alternative to May's agreement is yet another symptom of the same thing - eg, Dominic Raab's failure before he became Brexit minister to appreciate the dependence of UK production on the port of Dover.

On the other hand, the perspective of action on a continental scale is perfectly realistic - if the left could bring itself to overcome the illusions of 'socialism in one country' and 'national roads to socialism'. The point is not merely the existence of continental institutions which could be exploited for workers' common political action, but so far have not (thanks to people's frontism tying one part of the left to the nationalists, another part to the liberals). It is also that *revolutionary* crises - crises that seriously call into the question the authority of the state, as opposed to mere episodes of mass unrest - come in relatively short clusters running across countries: 1916-20, 1944-49 and, much feebler, 1968-76.

The point of this rather extended discussion is that, as far as *Europe* is concerned, our policy is not free trade. It is that the workers' movement should take power across the continent; and on this basis move what is now large-scale capitalist production into direct democratic planning of the production of use-values, while what remains market-governed should be *small* capitalist production - subject to tight regulation of minimum wages, maximum working hours, and so on.

What would socialism on a European scale imply in relation to trade with the rest of the world? The first point is to recognise soberly that, if the major remaining capitalist regimes in the USA, and so on, were not brought down at the same time (within months), a socialist Europe would immediately face a 'sanctions' regime like those which have been applied to so-called 'rogue states' or to the Soviet bloc before its fall.⁷

In this context, the structural form of a socialist Europe's trade with the rest of the world would unavoidably consist of covert sanctions-busting operations, and forms of state-to-state barter (goods for goods, goods for services, and so on); like aspects of Soviet-bloc trade with some countries of the global south before the fall of the regimes. But it would have to be without the nationalism and bureaucratic manipulations of those operations, since we cannot *get close* to political power in Europe without breaking with the bureaucratic-nationalist conception. And it would have more to offer trading partners, thanks to Europe's productive forces being stronger than those of the old USSR.

In this context 'free trade' would be merely code for the restoration of

capitalism in Europe. 'Protectionism' on the other hand would be plainly irrational. Our goal in world trade would not be to strengthen European industry for geopolitical competition - though, obviously, we would unavoidably have substantial military production commitments. It would be to raise the overall possibilities of human development, and to transfer technology to countries which did not already have it, not to hoard it.

Under capitalism

We are, of course, not in a situation where taking power on a European scale is presently posed.

To say 'of course' is to deny that the *gilets jaunes* protests in France (demonstrations at the weekends only, notice) amount to the beginning of an insurrection; or that the entry of Syriza into government in Greece was the beginning of a European-wide revolt against austerity; or that Occupy Wall Street (and its imitators) were the new Bolshevism (Pham Binh); or that the 1999 'Battle of Seattle' and the ensuing anti-globalisation movement showed a new future for the left; or that any of the other false dawns which have preoccupied the left in the last 30 years, in the hope of "it all kicking off everywhere" (Paul Mason), could lead directly into revolutionary crisis.

The capitalist order is in increasing difficulty. It is not at a stage where the rulers really *cannot carry on in the old way*, as opposed to their being forced to increasingly nonsensical expedients. Meanwhile, while broad masses are increasingly disillusioned with the existing order, to the extent that they see an alternative, it is - as mentioned above - right-nationalist populism.

The reason is that the only *real* alternative to capitalism would be the beginning of democratically planned, cooperative production - socialism. And for socialism to appear as an alternative, it requires, first, that the left should actually promote it as an alternative, rather than promoting nationalism or liberalism. And, second, that people should experience democratic cooperation in practice as something which can exist beyond the momentary high of a strike or occupation - in trade unions, in cooperatives, in mutuals, in collectivist political parties. It therefore requires *building the organised workers' movement under capitalism* up to a point at which this movement itself can pose the imagination of a better way of doing things. And that requires abandoning the methods of centralised spin control, top-table-dominated rallies marketed as 'conferences', and so on, and so on.

We are not *there* yet either. But it is more probable that the left could break with its voluntary choices to sterilise itself by bureaucratic control, by liberalism and by nationalism, than that spontaneous or semi-spontaneous street protests could lead directly to an alternative to capitalism.

Suppose, then, that we had a mass workers' movement under capitalism which was not (unlike the Labour Party and its European equivalents) committed to constitutional loyalism and nationalism; or even that we had substantial minority communist parties. What policy should such a movement adopt in relation to the capitalist regimes' various manoeuvres over free trade and protection?

The point of all our policy in this situation is to build up the forces of the organised workers' movement, and to project political democracy and socialist planning as a possible alternative to capitalist rule. We do not forswear strikes, street demonstrations and so on, but we recognise that in general these can achieve only limited gains, unless the question of power - ie, the soldiers beginning to refuse orders - is immediately posed. Limited gains can be won and defended most effectively if the workers' political party seeks

constantly to delegitimise the capitalists' paid-for state, political and judicial institutions and mass media.

The underlying principle is to fight for political democracy, and for basic standards of protection of labour's interests to be applied across the board; on the same *principle* as the Factories Acts and the Ten-Hour Day Act, and *some* of the subsequent regulatory legislation which has been won (not all; some 'protective' legislation has contained 'poison pills' for the labour movement, as in the Trade Union and Labour Relations, and Employment Protection (Consolidation) Acts of 1974).

From this point of view, we would also favour international conventions to lay down basic labour standards; and, analogously, European Union regulations (so far as they maintained or improved on standards existing in the individual member-states; *not* so far as they 'harmonised downwards', as UK governments have usually sought).

But, on the other hand, we would *oppose* any form of international or EU standard-setting tribunal, which involved secret procedures (as in the World Trade Organisation and related operations); or where the judicial decision was not reviewable by some directly or indirectly elected body. This is the fundamental vice of the European Court of Justice: by way of judicial supremacy, justice is commonly sold to the party which can pay most for lawyers, and there is no means to reverse the decisions.

Tariffs and non-tariff barriers

In relation to more specific issues, we should *prima facie* be for low *customs tariffs*. Customs tariffs are a form of indirect taxation, which is unambiguously regressive (places the tax burden more on the poor than the rich).

Prima facie: that is, not to exclude in principle the use of retaliatory tariffs. Britain's (incomplete) unilateral free-trade policy in the later 19th century reflected the interests of the dominant British shipping sector and the related financial sector; it was not generally 'progressive'.

Non-tariff barriers are a great deal more ambiguous. It is certainly true that capitalists lobby states to introduce non-tariff barriers with a view to disadvantaging their competitors. But 'non-tariff barriers', as they are currently understood, include all sorts of regulation and public provision, as well as (according to the ECJ's *Viking* and *Laval* decisions) trade union action demanding more than the legal minimum wage, and so on.

If Britain ends up revoking article 50 and abandoning Brexit, we could fight for upgrading labour, environmental, and so on, protection through EU legislation. Our aim is a levelling-up.

There are three problems. The first is that these would still be 'non-tariff barriers' under the WTO treaties. The second problem is that the ECJ has the power to strike down directives and regulations adopted by the EU's legislative bodies (commission, council of ministers and parliament, acting together). The third is the very opaque character of these legislative bodies themselves.

We in the CPGB argue for power to be concentrated in the hands of the EU parliament as an alternative to both the roles of the commission and council, and the power of judicial review in the ECJ.⁸ But it is important to recognise that these are *revolutionary* proposals (to overthrow the EU's constitutional architecture), not *reform* proposals.

Beyond this point - and it is also true of politics within the EU - there can be no across-the-board demand for protectionism and 'British jobs

for British workers'. As long as capital is free to move in its monetary form, this policy is illusory, and ends up merely pouring money into the pockets of the shareholders of companies which are objectively insolvent, in order to stave off job losses for a few years (as happened with British Leyland and several other companies in the 1970s).

Equally, we cannot stand for immigration controls for the benefit of wages and conditions in one country. The point is not that immigration does not increase competition in the labour market and hence exert downwards pressure on wages and conditions. That idea is silly and merely liberal. Rather, it is that immigration controls will not actually stop migration: they will, by *illegalising* the immigrants, and thereby making them more dependent on their employers, put *more* downwards pressure on wages and conditions.⁹

But neither can we stand generally for 'free trade' against all forms of 'non-tariff barriers'. That is to commit to the neoliberal regime and to reject political democracy altogether.

What a communist party with significant electoral representation would need to fight for in this field would not be either free trade or protection as such. It would primarily be *transparency* of decision-making: the wholesale abolition of commercial secrecy; the demand that payments by commercial lobbyists who have *private* access to government should be treated as bribes; the prohibition of systems of 'holding' and 'subsidiary' companies; and so on.

The point of this approach is to enable the elected representatives to take real decisions about whether a regulation proposed is genuinely in the interests of the working class, the environment, and so on; or whether it is *merely* a device to disadvantage competitor firms.¹⁰

The result is messy, and I have got nowhere near explaining how messy it would actually be. It requires specific assessment of individual initiatives, not the grand sweep of 'national roads to socialism' as supporting protectionism or, on the other hand, of two options: the illusions of 'free tradism' as 'progressive' or the national condition of capitalism. It requires, as Lenin put it, "a concrete analysis of each specific historical situation".¹¹ But then that is true of politics *generally* ●

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Notes

1. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/p1.htm.
2. For more detail, see my 'Nation state and nationalism' Weekly Worker July 16 2015.
3. And its various intersectionalist, and so on, variants.
4. I discussed this at length in my series on 'intersectionality' earlier this year: 'Intersectionality is a dead end', June 7; 'Race and class', June 21; 'Mistaken versions of Maoism', June 28; 'Getting beyond capitalism', July 5; also at less length, but with more precision and references, in 'Intersectionalism, the highest stage of western Stalinism' Critique Vol 46, pp541-58 (2018).
5. I argued this point more elaborately in my 2015 article, 'Socialism will not require industrialisation' (Weekly Worker May 14 2015).
6. D Harvey The enigma of capital and the crises of capitalism New York 2010.
7. There are, of course, surviving aspects of this latter technology transfer control regime still applied against Russia and China, with a view to securing the subordination of these countries to the USA.
8. https://cpgb.org.uk/pages/programme/3-immediate-demands/, No. 3.1.6.
9. DL Wilson, 'Marx on immigration' (https://monthlyreview.org/2017/02/01/marx-on-immigration); M Macnair, 'Origins of fortress west' Weekly Worker June 13 2007, 'Floodtide of capital' Weekly Worker June 27 2007.
10. As, for example, the EU vacuum cleaner labelling regulations recently overturned by the ECJ: 'Dyson wins five-year legal battle over EU energy labelling laws' The Independent November 8 2018.
11. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jul/junius-pamphlet.htm.

BREXIT

Slaughtering sheep and unicorns

Calls for a 'people's vote' and a 'coalition of reasonable minds' are demands for a national government, writes **Eddie Ford**

With less than 100 days to go before what is supposed to be Brexit, there is a whiff of panic in the air. This week the cabinet agreed - though not entirely enthusiastically, it seems - to "ramp up" no-deal planning, with the treasury allocating an extra £2 billion to 25 Whitehall departments for the next financial year in order to prepare for a crash-out Brexit. Planned measures include hiring an extra 3,000 customer service and compliance staff in HM Revenue and Customs and recruiting hundreds of border officers.

We read that some cabinet ministers believe it is now time for 'central command' to start taking over no-deal planning, rather than the current, slightly anarchical situation, whereby departments have some degree of latitude as to when and what they spend. Michael Gove, the environment secretary, has been particularly busy - recently advertising for 90 staff for an 'exit crisis centre' to respond to emergencies following a possible hard Brexit. Nor are the issues solely financial: some relate to decisions on whether to transfer certain civil servants from important domestic priorities - such as social care or housing. Brexit is consuming everything.

Not exactly reassuringly, 3,500 troops have been put on "standby" - though what they are supposed to do in the event of a no-deal Brexit remains a bit of a mystery.¹ Apparently, citizens will be informed how to prepare through a "range of channels" that could include TV adverts and social media - maybe Facebook to the rescue. Downing Street has suggested that preparations could include reserving space on ferries in order to ensure the supply of food and medicines. Whitehall is considering the "mass slaughter" of sheep en route to slaughterhouses in the European Union, as livestock could be stranded in lorry queues that are expected to stretch back for 20 miles or more.²

During the marathon cabinet session on December 18, Amber Rudd, the work and pensions secretary, told her colleagues that preparing for a no-deal Brexit was a sensible precaution - "just because you put a seatbelt on doesn't mean you should crash the car". Sounding exasperated, justice secretary David Gauke - who said publicly at the weekend he would resign rather than be part of a government that deliberately pursued no deal - told the meeting that a "managed no deal is not a viable option" - this being the approach favoured by the likes of Penny Mordaunt and Andrea Leadsom. They envisage a "managed glidepath" of up to two years in order to facilitate a no-deal Brexit that would not destabilise the economy, in which the British government pays part of the £39 billion it owes the EU to "purchase" a status-quo transition period. Giving short shrift to such a notion, if we are to believe a cabinet source, Gauke remarked that a "managed" no deal is a "unicorn that needs to be slaughtered".

Unsurprisingly, business is said to be 'horrified' by the very idea of a hard Brexit - as HMRC prepares a 100-page pack for all UK companies on preparing for no deal. Urging support for Theresa May's deal in a joint statement, the British Chambers of Commerce, Confederation of British Industry, Federation of Small

Businesses and Institute of Directors warned that "there is simply not enough time to prevent severe dislocation and disruption". They go on to say that many companies had yet to make *any* preparations for what has until recently been seen as a remote possibility, and that it was far too late to start. Businesses of all sizes are "reaching the point of no return", with many now putting in place contingency plans that are a significant drain on time and money - firms now pausing or diverting investment into stockpiling goods or materials, diverting cross-border trade and moving offices and factories out of the UK.

With absolutely no sign that parliament is able to break out of the gridlock, Britain does appear to be lurching towards the abyss. The country is in the midst of a profound political-constitutional crisis - something has to give *soon*.

Consensus

Looking at what is going on in parliament - or *not* going on, you could say - and with the increased warnings from business about disinvestment or relocation, it is only to be expected that voices will be raised, urging people of 'reasonable minds' across all the parties to come together to sort out the problem and avoid an impending national disaster.

One of those recent voices is Tory work and pensions secretary Amber Rudd, who argued in the *Daily Mail* that Theresa May, and MPs as a whole, need to "try something different" to get a Brexit deal through parliament, after EU leaders predictably refused to reopen negotiations on the Northern Ireland backstop - even if the prime minister is still rather pathetically insisting that she can extract "legal reassurances" from the bloc about the backstop.³

What needs to be done, writes Rudd, is to "ignore the siren voices calling us to the rocks of no deal" and instead build a "coalition" behind a new Brexit plan, given that May's deal is a dead duck. This means, she continues, being willing to "forge a consensus". Rudd is part of the 'gang of five' alongside Philip Hammond, David Lidington, David Gauke and Greg Clark, who are reported to be urging the prime minister to hold a series of "indicative votes" on the various Brexit outcomes, including the possibility of another referendum or 'Norway plus', to find a plan that could command a Commons majority. Downing Street has so far dismissed the idea out of hand, but watch this space.

Rudd's comments follow on from those by Nicky Morgan days earlier in a speech on Brexit to the House of Commons. The former education secretary suggested that "maybe we need to put together a special select committee of senior members of parliament to hammer out what we mean" - perhaps it might even be "time for some sort of government of national unity". Similar sentiments have been expressed by other anti-Brexit Tories, such as Sir Nicholas Soames, who has said that, if he had his way, "we would have a national government to deal with" the "most serious problem this country has faced since the war". The hardline Tory 'remainer', Anna Soubry, has been saying such things for some time now - her most recent advice being to "reach beyond" Labour and "encompass Plaid Cymru, the SNP



1931: thumping victory for Tory-dominated national government

and other sensible, pragmatic people, who believe in putting this country's interests first and foremost". In the same vein, senior Tory backbencher and former minister Nick Boles has stated that May must stop trying to "go it alone" and instead "open cross-party discussions" - he even indicated that he would vote with Labour *against* the government in a confidence motion if it meant sabotaging a no-deal Brexit.

In the midst of all this May has been trekking up and down the country, doing a whole series of meetings and interviews. Why is she doing this? If she was going hammer and tongs for a second referendum, or even another snap election, then it would start to make sense. As things stand, however, with no referendum on the cards - though that could quickly change in such a volatile situation - she clearly needs to secure her own party and actively court the Labour right. Yet, rather inexplicably, she is not doing that. Indeed, she is ignoring Labour - and just about everybody else, for that matter.

However, politics abhors a vacuum and what appears to be happening is that the People's Vote campaign is doing the job - to one degree or another - of uniting the Tory and Labour 'remainers', and others. In reality though, PV is much less of a campaign for an actual second referendum and much more of a call for a national government. Unless Theresa May does a fairly spectacular U-turn - which cannot be entirely ruled out - there has to be a *government* legislating for another referendum. MPs or the Commons cannot just make it happen by some magical process.

But if you do have a coalition coming together in the Commons, securing support around a growing new consensus and going on to form a government, from the viewpoint of the establishment this could be the dream scenario, enabling them to kill two birds with one stone: knocking out Brexit and Jeremy Corbyn at the same time. There is little or no chance of a Corbyn government if Labour is split in this way. Clearly, the top figure in such a government would have to be someone like

Philip Hammond, Greg Clark or Amber Rudd, with the likes of Chuka Umunna, Hilary Benn, Sir Keir Starmer, etc - *genuine* 'remainers' whom the establishment can trust - being offered juicy posts such as chancellor, deputy prime minister and home secretary. According to this eminently plausible scenario, such a government could win a thumping majority in a snap general election, standing on a platform of 'national unity' to save the country from disaster - like what happened in 1931.

The main difference between now and 1931, however, is that today it would have to involve some sort of split - not necessarily organisational - in the Tory Party. In other words, there would not only be a repeat of National Labour (under which Ramsay MacDonald stood in 1931), but also National Tories as well. At the risk of getting too speculative, with the current balance of forces you would roughly have 117 Tory MPs standing on a Brexiteer programme (ie, the number who voted *against* Theresa May in last week's confidence motion) and about 200 'national government' Tories. While National Labour MPs would presumably stand in various constituencies, official Labour would field candidates in all constituencies (except Northern Ireland). That is, there would be a non-aggression pact between the National Tories and National Labour - which would have the distinct advantage, if you are part of the Labour right, of possibly keeping your seat and, more importantly still, keeping your career. As this would not be a Social Democratic Party-style walkout, but a national emergency - you can imagine them winning handsomely and 'official' Labour being reduced to a rump, well and truly seeing off Jeremy Corbyn and the radical Labour left.

In which case, you would expect a renewed anti-Corbyn campaign from within Labour and the trade union bureaucracy - he has led the party to a disaster unparalleled in post-war times, and must be replaced immediately. Whether the likes of Len McCluskey and the Labour rank and file would back such an agenda

is an entirely different matter, of course, but the thought of that sort of situation must be enough to make the establishment salivate at night. However, it is also quite possible that Labour's 500,000-plus mass membership would not take kindly to this act of treachery.

Betrayal

What would also be guaranteed in the above scenario is an increase in deeply reactionary forces - possibly a revived or reconfigured UK Independence Party, which does not have much of a chance *electorally* at the moment, given its reorientation to the streets. But maybe 117 Brexiteer Tories, combined with Nigel Farage and other odds and sods, is the form that this could take in parliament.

Meanwhile you would have Tommy Robinson and the 'new' Ukip on the streets screaming 'National betrayal!' - which could become a very potent idea, as *everything* can be blamed on not making a clean break with the EU and its perfidious foreign ways. Scapegoats are always useful. In this narrative, a second referendum will be a con-trick based on false information and fake news - the once proud nation sold down the river to Brussels by metropolitan liberal backstabbers out of touch with the ordinary populace.

Nigel Farage last week told a Leave Means Leave rally to be "prepared" for a second referendum. Brexiteers need to "move into a different gear", he declared, and "start forming branches and active groups all over this country". Amongst those at the same event were Tim Martin (the owner of JD Wetherspoon), Jacob Rees-Mogg, the Democratic Unionist Party's Sammy Wilson, and Labour MPs Kate Hoey and Graham Stringer.

Though some might not like hearing this, I suspect that Farage is as intelligent as you and me, and when he hears the word "coalition" he understands what it means - a national government that is quite capable of holding a second referendum. According to the latest polls, very approximately, public opinion is split into three: one-third for 'leave', one-third for 'remain', and one-third 'don't know' or undecided. Anyhow, what the hell does 'leave' mean now - Norway plus? Norway minus? Canada plus, plus? Theresa May's deal?

Whilst there was always an outside possibility of a hard Brexit being walked into by accident - something that still cannot be completely dismissed - the main point is that Brexit, in all its promoted variants, was always illusory. The left should have been saying, from the beginning, that nothing progressive can come out of such a nationalist project. The *Morning Star*/Communist Party of Britain's idea that a Brexit under David Cameron or his replacement would be anything other than a *Tory* Brexit was just plain dumb ●

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Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/dec/18/brexit-cabinet-meets-to-discuss-ramping-up-plans-for-no-deal?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Facebook&fbclid=IwAR1f1siTxdG9ebfX-JVloY1Le56BptM_64HX4B0ivgEUDT65aNX-qorA310.
2. www.walesonline.co.uk/news/politics/whitehall-considering-mass-slaughter-sheep-15263463?fbclid=IwAR00GbdP5ySild-pZkSPiVmXCAtoky0i-ai6UapbyZEDO0gYu-0Wim5Ceufmc.
3. www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6497881/Ignore-siren-voices-calling-rocks-No-Deal-AM-BER-RUDD-Work-Pensions-Secretary.html.

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Different perspectives, different objectives

Both Lars T Lih and Jack Conrad are wrong when it comes to the history of Bolshevism, argues **Jim Creegan**

I hope those readers who have been following the debate between myself and Lars T Lih/Jack Conrad over the past few years will forgive me if I briefly summarise it for the benefit of anyone tuning in for the first time.

I have defended in these pages the traditional view of Trotsky and other historians that there were important differences between the perspectives of Lenin and Trotsky at the time of the aborted Russian Revolution of 1905 on how the revolution would unfold - whether it was the revolution occurring then, or the one that would surely in their view erupt again after temporary defeat. Lenin, in 1905, put forward the idea of a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, which he thought would clear the way for a democratic republic and a period of capitalist development as a prologue to workers' revolution. Trotsky, on the other hand, espoused the theory of permanent revolution, according to which there would be no intermediary stage between the bourgeois and socialist revolutions; that the working class would be the revolution's leading force; that, once having seized power, the workers, supported by the peasants, would be forced by the logic of circumstances to take irrevocable socialist measures, which could only be consolidated with the aid of victorious revolutions in the more advanced countries of Europe.

This traditional view holds further that Lenin in 1917, relying on his own independent assessment of revolutionary possibilities, discarded his earlier perspectives to adopt a standpoint identical in all essentials to that of Trotsky, causing the latter to join the Bolsheviks. This change, however, was not at first accepted by much of Lenin's own party, which still clung to the earlier theory of stages; that Lenin therefore had to conduct an internal fight, lasting about a month from his return to Russia in April, to reorient the Bolsheviks toward the seizure of power in the name of the working class and socialism.

Lih and Conrad reject this long-established view. They argue that there was in fact no significant difference between Lenin's democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, on the one hand, and Trotsky's permanent revolution on the other, and that Lenin therefore did not have to change his views or wage an internal struggle to realign Bolshevism toward socialist revolution. Jack Conrad, in particular, asserts that Lenin's notion of democratic dictatorship anticipated from the outset the passage from bourgeois to socialist revolution without any change at the level of political regime. Thus, argue Conrad and Lih, the Bolsheviks were fully prepared for 1917 from 1905 onward.

Lenin's major prognosis

I believe I have demonstrated through a careful exegesis of Lenin's principal 1905 programmatic work - *Two tactics of social democracy in the democratic revolution* - that he regarded the democratic dictatorship necessary to vanquish tsarism as no more than a temporary interlude between tsarism and a bourgeois-democratic republic.¹ I have since come across a quotation to this effect that is even more categorical than anything in *Two tactics*.



Lenin: set apart as the 'genius of revolution'

In April of 1905 Lenin writes in opposition to the Mensheviks, who were trying to introduce a bogus distinction between a provisional revolutionary government and the democratic dictatorship: "... the provisional revolutionary government can be nothing else but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry ..." He continues:

To speak of the 'provisional revolutionary government' is to stress the constitutional aspect of the case, the fact that the government originates not from the law, but from the revolution, that it is a *temporary government committed to the future constituent assembly* (emphasis added).

The constituent assembly would in turn establish a republic: "A republic necessarily implies a government, and - no social democrat ever doubted it - a bourgeois government at that."²

In the above article, Lenin pours scorn upon the formal Menshevik schema, which states that the Russian Revolution, being bourgeois, must be led by the bourgeoisie. He writes that the Russian bourgeoisie is far too pusillanimous to conduct a resolute fight against tsarism. A bourgeois republic can only be established by the revolutionary action of the masses. But Lenin never explains exactly how a constituent

assembly will lead to the formation of a bourgeois-democratic republic. It would stand to reason that he assumes that the bourgeois parties present would also have the support of a majority of peasant representatives.

Even if this were so, is not Lenin, by assuming that the antagonisms between the bourgeoisie and the workers thrown into action by the revolution can be resolved by voting in a peaceful parliamentary manner, descending into a formalism of his own? Will the working class, having seized control of factories and the governments of major cities and towns, meekly stand aside and hand everything back to the bourgeoisie as the result of a constituent assembly vote? This is the heart of Trotsky's criticism of the Lenin of 1905.

Lenin's other scenario

Yet, upon further research, the matter turns out to be a little more complicated. A comrade here in New York has drawn my attention to two passages in Lenin's writings that were unknown to me at the time I wrote 'Democratic dictatorship vs permanent revolution'. Polemicising in March-April 1905 from his Swiss exile against the right Menshevik, Alexander Martynov, who stressed the strictly limited bourgeois character of the revolutionary upheaval, Lenin wrote:

... [The revolutionary Social

but at meetings of thousands of workers in the streets of Moscow and St Petersburg, at the free village meetings of the Russian 'muzhiks'.³

And, writing in September of the same year, still in exile:

... we shall certainly be with the rural proletariat, with the entire working class, *against* the peasant bourgeoisie. In practice this may mean the transfer of the land to the class of petty peasant proprietors - wherever big estates based on bondage and feudal servitude still prevail, and there are as yet no material conditions for large-scale socialist production; it may mean nationalisation - given complete victory of the democratic revolution - or the big capitalist estates being transferred to *workers' associations*, for from the democratic revolution we shall at once - and precisely in accordance with the measure of our strength, the strength of the class-conscious and organised proletariat - begin to pass to the socialist revolution. We stand for uninterrupted revolution. We shall not stop halfway (emphases in the original).⁴

It is undeniable that in these two passages - the first written before, and the second written after, the publication of his most definitive revolutionary prospectus, *Two tactics* (July 1905) - Lenin envisages the possibility of the revolution exceeding the bourgeois-republican bounds he sets for it in the latter work and many other articles. These quotations lend some support to Jack Conrad's argument that Lenin, not unlike Trotsky, saw the transition from the democratic revolution to proletarian dictatorship as a single, uninterrupted process, without a change in political regime, and therefore had a perspective similar to Trotsky's. Was Lenin simply contradicting himself?

Any student of Lenin's writings is puzzled at first by the numerous inconsistencies to be found there. However, the inconsistencies become more understandable when we consider that Lenin approaches various situations not merely from the standpoint of a scholar, whose only concern is for theoretical lucidity, but from that of a revolutionary combatant, not only using Marxism to interrogate the most likely outcome of unfolding events, but also straining at the outer limits of possibility - "dreaming", as he puts it.

Lenin no doubt considered it his responsibility to set out what he thought to be the most probable scenario, the one he saw as likely to take place without the immediate assistance of the proletariat of the more advanced countries, and limited by the petty bourgeois craving of the peasant for a plot of his own. This is the scenario upon which he bases *Two tactics*. But Trotsky wrote that, for Lenin, no theoretical schema stood higher than reality. Hence Lenin regarded this scenario - a revolutionary workers' and peasants' dictatorship, followed by a constituent assembly, followed by an extended period of capitalist development - as the most probable future trajectory.

He did not, however, see this projection as graven in stone, and saw the revolution as an open-ended process, whose outcome depended

Democrat] will not confine himself on the eve of the revolution to pointing out what will happen 'if the worst comes to the worst'. Rather, he will also show the possibility of a better outcome. He will dream - and he is obliged to dream, if he is not a hopeless philistine - that, after the vast experience of Europe, after the unparalleled upsurge of energy among the working class in Russia, we shall succeed in lighting a revolutionary beacon that will illumine more brightly than ever the path of the unenlightened and downtrodden masses; that we shall succeed ... in realising all the democratic transformations, the whole of our minimum programme, with a thoroughness never equalled before. We shall succeed in ensuring that the Russian Revolution is not a movement of a few months, but a movement of many years ...

And if we succeed in achieving this, then ... the revolutionary conflagration will spread to Europe; the European worker ... will rise in his turn and show us 'how it is done'; then the revolutionary upsurge in Europe will have a repercussive effect upon Russia and will convert a few revolutionary years into an era of several revolutionary decades; then - but we shall have ample time to say what we shall do 'then', not from the cursed remoteness of Geneva,

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upon two factors that were not entirely predictable: first, the extent to which an offensive of Russian workers and peasants would stimulate the workers of other European countries to revolt, and the degree to which their revolt might rebound back on Russia; and, second, the extent to which landless peasants - the rural proletariat - could be brought into alliance with industrial workers to

that made many of its rank and file recoil instinctively from the critical support to the Provisional Government offered by Kamenev, Stalin and Muranov in their capacity as editors of *Pravda* in March of 1917, and made it possible for Lenin to reorient the party in the short interval of a single month. Yet not until his return could even the most militant Bolsheviks answer the theory of stages that the

was. One can only wonder what motives Lih would impute to another member of the audience at the first full-length speech in which Lenin propounded the April theses: the veteran sailor-Bolshevik, Felix Raskolnikov, who writes:

The most responsible party workers were represented here, but even for them what Ilyich [Lenin] said constituted a veritable revelation. It laid down a Rubicon between the tactics of yesterday and those of today ... It was not without cause that our party's tactics did not follow a straight line, but after Lenin's return took a sharp turn to the left.⁶

In his *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932) and his *Stalin* - published in 1941 from an unfinished manuscript Trotsky was still working on at the time of his assassination the previous year - the author cites a number of independent sources to corroborate his account of Lenin's re-arming of the party in 1917. Since, however, most of the quotations he supplies are not referenced in these works, and therefore not available for verification to readers, I shall refrain from reproducing them here and confine myself to quoting only carefully referenced materials. (A special note of appreciation in this regard must go to the outstanding scholar of Bolshevism and the October revolution, Paul Le Blanc, for mining several of these sources.)

One such source is Angelica Balabanova, the Russian-Italian Marxist who became recording secretary for the Communist International, who wrote: "I had been trained, like most Marxists, to expect the social revolution to be inaugurated in one of the highly industrialised countries, and at the time Lenin's analysis of the Russian events seemed to me almost utopian."⁷

Another is Alexandra Kollontai, who, as one of Lenin's closest collaborators at the time, was instrumental in attempting to route his articles from Geneva to Petrograd from her place of exile in Stockholm, and who soon returned to Petrograd herself. She corroborates Sukhanov's account: "I was in substantial agreement with Lenin and stood closer to him than many of his older followers and friends. [In many meetings in April] I was the only one of his party comrades who took the floor to support his theses."⁸

Moving from leading party strata to a rank-and-file Bolshevik military organisation, we have the testimony of AF Ilyin-Zhenevsky, a navy sub-lieutenant stationed near the Finnish border: "In the [Bolshevik] committee there were two points of view on the political situation: one more moderate, approaching the point of view of Kamenev at that time; and the other more revolutionary, based on the famous theses of Lenin immediately on his arrival from abroad ..."⁹

Then there are the words of Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya:

Lenin expounded his views on what had to be done in a number of theses ... The comrades [in attendance at a meeting of the soviet at the Tauride Palace on April 4] were somewhat taken aback for the moment. Many of them thought that Ilyich was presenting the case in much too blunt a manner, and that it was too early yet to speak of a socialist revolution ...

A struggle started within the Bolshevik organisation. It did not last long. A week later a general city conference of the Bolsheviks of Petrograd took place, at which Ilyich's point of view was upheld.¹⁰

We are also privileged to have the late-life recollections of that well known purveyor of 'Trotskyite' myths, VM Molotov. Molotov was Stalin's foreign minister, and one who remained loyal to the *vozhd* (supreme leader), even after Stalin had his wife deported to

the *gulag*. Being the highest ranking Bolshevik in Petrograd before the return of Kamenev, Muranov and Stalin in March of 1917, Molotov was briefly editor of *Pravda*, which under his direction took a line much more hostile to the Provisional Government than the trio that soon replaced him and corrected his 'leftist' deviation:

We Bolsheviks were suddenly confronted with a different direction. Lenin later spoke to a very small group, about 45 persons, no more ...

In Petrograd I sat at the presidium of a party conference, while Lenin took the floor and said: The danger to us now comes from the old Bolsheviks who do not understand that we have entered a new stage. They think we have a democratic revolution. But we should move to socialist revolution! What! - to socialist revolution?

I had never opposed Lenin, but neither I nor any of those who were always with Lenin immediately grasped the sense of his message. All Bolsheviks spoke about democratic revolution: now behold - socialist revolution!

Well, after all, Kamenev was a Bolshevik. Rykov was a Bolshevik - yet they did not understand matters Lenin's way. They asserted, as usual, that we were still at the stage of democratic revolution ... The main danger [Lenin said] lies within the party. Not because [the old Bolsheviks] are bad people but because their minds have not made a U-turn. I was ready to lay down my life for certain goals, but the goals suddenly changed: one needed to think things over again, and that was not so simple. Lenin had opened our eyes.¹¹

Finally, we have this retrospective look at 1917:

The party - its majority ... adopted a policy of pressure by the soviets on the Provisional Government in the question of peace, and did not decide at once to take the step forward from the old slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry to the new slogan of power for the soviets. This half-and-half policy was intended to give the soviets a chance to detect in the concrete questions of peace the imperialist nature of the Provisional Government and so

revolution were still too fresh for its history to be falsified completely. Such a thorough rewriting took place in 1939, with the publication of the infamous *Short course*. This shamelessly doctored history of the Bolshevik Party ("paper will take anything that is written on it", as the *vozhd* once remarked) has Stalin siding with Lenin from the very beginning.

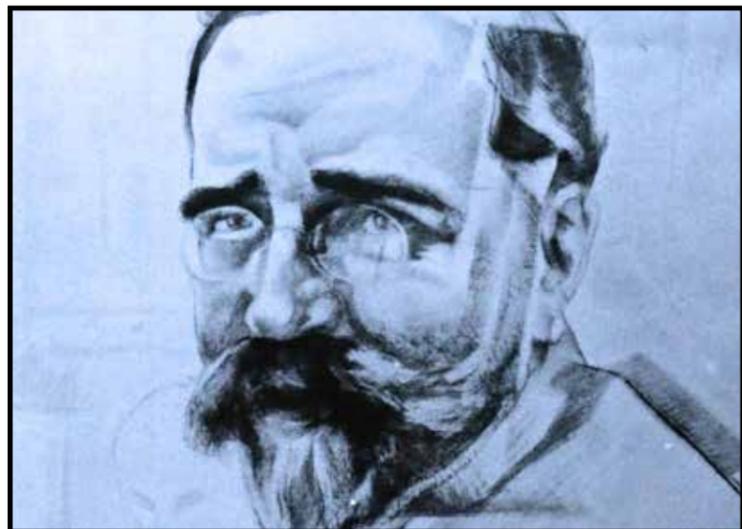
I rest my case against the claim that Lenin's rearming of the party was a myth invented by Trotsky in 1924.

No Bolshevik right?

A corollary to the Conrad-Lih 'fully armed' thesis is that there was no coherent right wing of the Bolshevik Party in 1917, and that there were no lasting or important differences between Lenin and Lev Kamenev, who is usually thought of as the most consistent spokesman of the Bolshevik right.

Lars T Lih, in fact, performs prodigies of tortured exegesis to prove that the *Pravda* editorial, penned by Kamenev immediately upon his return from exile - seen by many on the Bolshevik left to take a position of revolutionary defencism in the war and critical support for the Provisional Government - represented nothing more than a temporary tactical misunderstanding between Kamenev and Lenin. Lih says the same thing about a second *Pravda* editorial, written by Kamenev after the publication of Lenin's April theses in that paper, asserting that the theses represented only Lenin's personal point of view and not that of the party, and were "unacceptable", because the bourgeois stage of the revolution was not completed. Yet I think Lih would have difficulty explaining why these presumed tactical differences persisted through the entire month of April, up to the eve of the October revolution, and even after the conquest of power.

Lenin won the support of the Bolshevik majority for his April theses at two crucial conferences: the Petrograd city conference in mid-April, and the all-Russian Bolshevik conference at the end of the same month (or the beginning of May by the western calendar). Yet at both these conclaves Kamenev continued to oppose Lenin's call for the overthrow of the Provisional Government and power to the soviets on the basis that the bourgeois revolution was still in progress. EH Carr, the most prominent English-language historian of the



Kamenev: critical support

bring about a collectivist, as opposed to a petty-bourgeois proprietary, solution to the agrarian question.

We will refrain from commenting here upon the realism of these two prospects. But it can be safely said that the fact that the February revolution of 1917 - occurring, unlike the 1905 revolution, amidst a world war that plunged Europe into the abyss - was probably the major factor inclining Lenin to place his bets on a fully socialist Russian Revolution as part of a larger, more or less simultaneous, European conflagration.

To this he added that the cards within Russia had been differently dealt than anticipated in 1905. Instead of bourgeois, peasant and proletarian parties fighting things out in a single constituent assembly, there had arisen the phenomenon of dual power: an unelected bourgeois provisional government (which rightwing socialists soon joined); and democratically elected workers' and soldiers' soviets, which allowed the workers, through the largely peasant army, to exert a radicalising influence on the peasantry as a whole, independently of the bourgeoisie. These two circumstances moved Lenin to view as possible, even inevitable, the devoutly to be wished for consummation of uninterrupted revolution that he had only glimpsed as an outside chance in 1905.

'Old Bolshevism'

Lenin's exceptional 1905 probing of the outer limits of revolution did not, however, translate into a definite programme, or comprise the expectations that settled into the mind of the average Bolshevik, or even the party's other top leaders. Far more often had Lenin reiterated that theirs was a bourgeois revolution, not to be confused with the socialist one; that the revolutionary dictatorship was separate and distinct from the 'commune state', aka the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin's churning intellect, conjuring with various permutations and possibilities, was one of the things that set him apart as a genius of revolution. Followers of lesser cerebral fertility, on the other hand, felt the need for a stock formula for the future. They found it - not without encouragement from Lenin - in the Bolshevik version of a two-stage revolution.

The events of 1917 demonstrate that theory, far from being a purely mental exercise, can have profound implications for practice. The Bolshevik Party contained deep reserves of revolutionary experience and ardour

recently returned *Pravda* editors and many other senior Bolsheviks invoked in support of their advocacy of pressuring the Provisional Government from the left, as opposed to overthrowing it.

Lars T Lih and Jack Conrad assert that Lenin's return changed nothing of fundamental importance, and that the notion that he rearmed the party originated with Trotsky's *Lessons of October*, published in 1924. My most recent article ('The Bolsheviks and democracy' *Weekly Worker* November 1) attempted to recount the major events of the anti-Trotsky campaign being waged by the ruling triumvirate of that year - Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin - to which Trotsky's *Lessons of October* was at least partly a defensive response rather than the attempt at self-aggrandisement of Conrad's telling.

In what follows, I will summon the testimony of contemporary witnesses, some of whom had few warm feelings for Trotsky, to establish that Lenin's struggle to reorient the Bolsheviks in April of 1917 was far from a myth promulgated by Trotsky in 1924. I will also attempt to show that there was indeed a Bolshevik right clustered around Kamenev, which more or less clung to Lenin's more widely known 1905 'old Bolshevik' perspectives - of a revolution limited to a bourgeois-democratic 'minimum programme', and culminating in a constituent assembly - as their guiding light.

From the witness box

Probably the most widely read account of Lenin's arrival in Petrograd in April comes from the memoirs of the left Menshevik, Boris Sukhanov, who attended several of Lenin's speeches propounding the April theses to the Bolsheviks and wider socialist audiences. Sukhanov recollects:

The Bolsheviks were still in a state of bafflement and perplexity. And the support Lenin found may underline more clearly than anything else his complete intellectual isolation, not only among Social Democrats in general, but also among his own disciples ... Lenin was supported by no-one but [Alexandra] Kollontai (a recent Menshevik), who rejected any alliance with those who could not and would not accomplish a social revolution! Her support called forth nothing but laughter, and hubbub (emphasis added).⁵

Lars T Lih disparages Sukhanov's testimony as motivated by his strong Menshevik inclination to make Lenin appear more extreme than he actually



Zinoviev: socialist coalition

to detach them from it. But it was a profoundly mistaken position, since it bred pacifist illusions, added fuel to the flames of defencism and hindered the revolutionary uprising of the masses. This mistaken position I shared with other party comrades, and renounced completely only in the middle of April when I adhered to Lenin's theses.¹²

The above are the words of Joseph Stalin in 1924, when memories of the

Russian Revolution, describes how Kamenev persisted in opposing Lenin, even against his newly acquired party majority:

... Now only Kamenev presented a coherent defence of the policies accepted by all leading Bolsheviks in Petrograd before the presentation of the April theses. The main issue was narrowed down to the question of whether, as Lenin proposed, the party should work for a transfer of power to

What we fight for

the soviets, or whether, as Kamenev desired, it should be content with the 'most watchful control' of the Provisional government by the soviets, Kamenev being particularly severe on anything that could be construed as incitement to overthrow the government. In the decisive vote, Kamenev's amendment was defeated by 20 votes to six.¹³

support among many Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs). Alexander Kerensky, however, vetoed not only any proposal that would exclude bourgeois parties, but even a far more moderate suggestion to exclude the principal bourgeois party, the Cadets (Constitutional Democratic Party), which was deeply implicated in the Kornilov affair. Kerensky, on

the culmination. Zinoviev and Kamenev wrote in 'On the present situation', their famous pre-insurrection dissent:

The chances of our party in the elections to the constituent assembly are excellent

The soviets, which have become rooted in life, cannot be destroyed. The constituent assembly will be able to find support for its revolutionary work only in the soviets. The constituent assembly plus the soviets - this is that combined type of state institutions toward which we are going. It is on this political basis that our party is acquiring enormous chances for a real victory.¹⁵

Kamenev's ally, Viktor Nogin, saw even less of a future for the soviets (if I may be permitted a single unreferenced citation from Trotsky, the authenticity of which I have no doubt):

In the process of development the most important functions of the soviets will fall away. A whole series of administrative functions will be transferred to the municipal, district and other institutions. If we examine the future development of the structure of the state, we cannot deny that the constituent assembly will be convoked and after that the parliament ... Thus it follows that the most important functions of the soviets will gradually wither away. That, however, does not mean to say that the soviets will end their existence in ignominy. They will only transfer their functions. Under these same soviets we shall not achieve the commune-republic in our country.¹⁶

Thus the weight of evidence suggests that there were two revolutionary perspectives at work in the mind of the Bolsheviks in 1917: one that aimed at proletarian revolution and socialism - formulated most clearly and unequivocally by Trotsky in his 1906 work *Results and prospects*, which propounded the theory of permanent revolution - and adumbrated in certain respects by Lenin in the two *obiter dicta* quoted above. It was to this perspective, arrived at via his own thinking, that Lenin, through the extraordinary force of his personality and political will, won the majority of his party in April of that momentous revolutionary year. Yet a Bolshevik minority of more cautious and conservative temperament still took refuge in the earlier two-

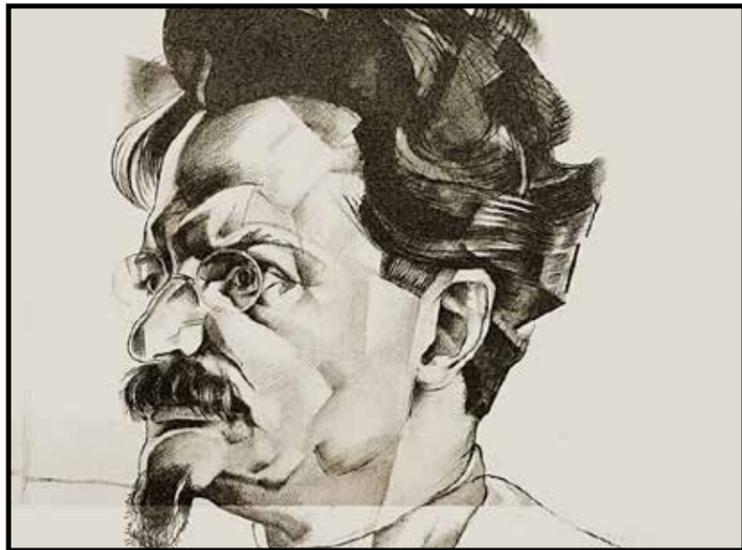
stage scenario promulgated and emphasised by Lenin in *Two tactics of social democracy in the democratic revolution* (1905), even after Lenin himself had relegated this 'old Bolshevik' prognosis to the museum of antiques.

It is true that Trotsky did not possess the political authority to actualise his views. The critical element in the success of the October revolution was the existence of the instinctively revolutionary and battle-hardened party that Lenin and others had laboured to build over previous decades. But without the evolution of Lenin's views, the Bolsheviks would never have gained the adherence of the revolution's second-greatest leader. And without a determined struggle for that changed perspective on Lenin's part, and his and Trotsky's efforts to resist the counsels of a minority still acting on the basis of the old two-stage theory, the vast rising of the Russian masses in 1917 would have gone down in history with the Paris Commune as another valiant, but ill-fated, episode in the history of class struggle ●

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Notes

1. See 'Democratic dictatorship vs permanent revolution' *Weekly Worker* May 21 2015.
2. VI Lenin, 'The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' *CW* Moscow 1962, Vol 8, p302.
3. VI Lenin, 'Social Democracy and the Provisional Revolutionary Government' *CW* Vol 8, Moscow 1962, pp287-88.
4. VI Lenin, 'Social-Democracy's attitude towards the peasant movement' *CW* Vol 9, Moscow 1962, pp236-37.
5. B Sukhanov *The Russian Revolution 1917* Oxford 1984, p288.
6. Quoted in P Le Blanc, 'Rearming the party: Bolsheviks and socialist revolution in 1917' (<https://johnriddell.wordpress.com/2017/10/21/paul-le-blanc-re-arming-the-party-bolsheviks-and-socialist-revolution-in-1917/>). Quote from FF Raskolnikov *Kronstadt and Petrograd in 1917* London 1972, pp76-77.
7. Quoted by P Le Blanc *op cit* from A Balabanoff *My life as a rebel* Bloomington 1973, pp143-44.
8. Quoted by P Le Blanc *op cit* from A Kollontai *The autobiography of a sexually emancipated communist woman* New York 1975, pp27, 31.
9. Quoted by P Le Blanc *op cit* from AF Il-yin-Zhenevsky *From the February to the October revolution 1917* New York 1970, p27.
10. NK Krupskaya *Reminiscences of Lenin* New York 1960, pp348-49.
11. A Resis (ed) *Molotov remembers* Chicago 1993, pp93-94.
12. Quoted in EH Carr *The Bolshevik revolution* Vol 1, London 1983, pp87-88.
13. *Ibid* p93.
14. *Ibid* p93.
15. Quoted in L Trotsky *The lessons of October* (www.marxist.com/classics-old/trotsky/lessons.html).
16. Quoted in L Trotsky *The lessons of October* (www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lessons/ch4.htm).



Trotsky: rallied to Lenin's side

Nor did Kamenev abandon his position at the later April conference, even when opposed by other prominent Bolsheviks, including his fellow *Pravda* editor: "At the conference," writes Carr, "the tide flowed still more strongly in Lenin's favour. Stalin briefly, and Zinoviev at greater length, supported him *against Kamenev*" (emphasis added).¹⁴

That Kamenev and Zinoviev were the only two members of the Bolshevik central committee to vote against Lenin's plan for an insurrection, and that they both publicly denounced the plan in Maxim Gorky's Menshevik paper, *Novaya Zhizn*, are well known. Less familiar are the efforts of Kamenev and his cohorts to cobble together an all-socialist soviet government *after the seizure of power*. When the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin and Trotsky, rejected their efforts to negotiate a broad coalition with the Mensheviks and right Socialist Revolutionaries, five leading party members - Kamenev, Rykov, Zinoviev, Nogin and Miliutin - collectively resigned in protest from the party's central committee. Though they never organised themselves into a formally declared faction, these individuals (with the exception of Zinoviev, who did not consistently adhere to the right) formed a distinct 'moderate' current of opinion within the Bolshevik Party of 1917. To the above names can be added Lunacharsky, Tomsy and Kalinin.

Why did Lenin and Trotsky so adamantly reject the notion of an all-socialist soviet government? The answer is that the non-Bolshevik socialists, with whom Kamenev and company proposed such a coalition, had all along rejected the idea of breaking with bourgeois parties and putting the soviets in power. Inviting them into government would have been tantamount to undoing the October revolution. (The one non-Bolshevik party that did accept the soviet-power framework - the Left Socialist Revolutionaries - was soon invited by the Bolsheviks to join a coalition government).

Earlier, in September, in the wake of a failed coup attempt by a tsarist officer and aspiring rightwing strongman Lavr Kornilov, the question arose of forming an all-socialist coalition in place of Kerensky's Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks even at one point expressed a willingness to abandon their intention to overthrow the Provisional Government if the then-existing cross-class coalition were replaced by a government comprised exclusively of socialist groups, excluding all bourgeois parties. Such a proposal gained widespread

the contrary, handed the Cadets key cabinet portfolios. Yet the 'moderate' socialists who then held a majority on the soviet executive still refused to withhold support from the Provisional Government, Kerensky's insistence on including the most reactionary bourgeois elements notwithstanding.

A few months later, immediately after the Bolshevik seizure of power, a proposal was put forward by the left Menshevik, Julius Martov, for the formation of a soviet government that would include all socialist parties. The Bolshevik delegates to the soviet at the time accepted Martov's proposal. The Right SRs and a majority of Mensheviks, however, walked out rather than legitimating its newly established power by joining such a government.

After the soviet power became an accomplished fact, the same socialists who had recently walked out returned, now themselves demanding a coalition of all socialist parties. They had one important condition, however: that any such soviet coalition government exclude Lenin and Trotsky. It was in answer to this coalition-government demand that Trotsky, speaking from the rostrum of the soviet, famously relegated these 'compromisers' to the "dustbin of history". And it was such a coalition - of the Bolsheviks with socialists who had consistently refused to break with the bourgeoisie and consistently opposed soviet power - that Kamenev and his confreres proposed to welcome into the first soviet-power regime. Jack Conrad can dilate all he likes about Lenin's 'close comrades', Zinoviev and Kamenev. Yet the fact is that, at this crucial juncture, Lenin's closest comrade in resisting the vacillations of the Bolshevik right, and putting the soviet power on a firm basis, was Leon Trotsky.

There is reason to believe that the 'moderation' of Kamenev and his co-thinkers involved more than a deficit of revolutionary mettle. If they supported the passage of political power to the soviets, which many certainly did, it may not have been because they, like Lenin and Trotsky, saw it as a step to proletarian dictatorship and, with the aid of the international revolution, to socialism. There is evidence to suggest that Lenin's 1905 'old Bolshevik' perspective still figured as a significant strand of their outlook: they tended to see soviet power as the fulfilment of Lenin's aim of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. In this optic, the rule of the soviets was not an end in itself, but either a complement to the constituent assembly or - even more in keeping with Lenin's *Two tactics* - a transition point in a process, of which an all-class constituent assembly was

Fighting fund

Have a good break

As this is the last issue of the *Weekly Worker* before our two-week Christmas break, I'm afraid readers will have to wait until the second week of January to find out whether we succeeded in reaching our £1,750 target in the final fighting fund of the year.

As things stand at present, we have £1,154 and normally I'd be confident that, with a week and a half still to go, our supporters would raise the extra £600 we still need. But with the interruption to mail and many comrades being distracted by other matters at this time of the year, I'm a little more wary than usual.

But with comrades like ET, who wrote, "Never stop your fabulous work" in the note accompanying his £10 cheque this week, maybe I should be more optimistic. After all, the six standing orders that came our way totalling £460 - thanks go to SP, BK, TR, MM, KB and TB. Then

there was the £20 extra that BW added to his subscription cheque, not to mention the £25 donated by FZ via PayPal.

That last method is perhaps something that others ought to adopt during the coming week of disruption to the postal service or - better still (as it doesn't involve fees) - have you thought of making a bank transfer? Our account number is 00744310 and our sort code is 30-99-64, if you fancy trying it out.

Anyway, everyone here at the *Weekly Worker* hopes all our readers and supporters have a good Christmas and are looking forward to a productive 2019. See you again on January 10! ●

Robbie Rix

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

weekly WORKER

**Brexiters
will cry
'betrayal' for
years to come**

Limping towards the cliff-edge

The government holds together for now - but the problems of Brexit will prove inescapable, reckons Paul Demarty

We were told by lobby journalists on December 12, as the Tories geared up to decide the fate of their leader, that Theresa May had been told by one backbencher, as she grovelled for her job to the 1922 committee, that "stamina is not a policy".

We suppose she must know that in an abstract sort of a way this MP - one Lee Rowley, a yuppie Brexiteer who captured North East Derbyshire from Labour last year against the run of play - is right. Yet she does not really seem to feel it. Perhaps a staunch Christian upbringing has left her with a pervasive sense of the heroic virtue of suffering, into which nothing so vulgar as political strategy can intrude.

Jesus came to a sticky end, after all; and, while we may hope in our more civilised age that the prime minister will not suffer quite so grisly a fate at the hands of her parliamentary colleagues, we cannot demur from the *Mirror's* verdict the following morning. "It's lame duck for Christmas," gloated the front page - "[May's] goose is cooked" (December 13). All of this week's drama is a matter of May and her dwindling supporters trying to regain the initiative - success still looks a long way off.

In the narrow sense, May was victorious in the vote of confidence - just as, in the narrow sense, she won the 2017 election: her party emerged as the largest in parliament and formed a government. In substance, however, last June was a disaster for her, of course, leaving her utterly paralysed for the next 18 months, with no end in sight. As for last week's ballot of the Tory benches, it turns out that over a third of her MPs want her gone. Remove from the equation the 'payroll vote' - cabinet members, junior ministers, and the assorted creeps, gophers and flunkies who get paid over and above their MP's salary for government business - and she was defeated. She was only able to get over the line by promising never to fight another general election, meaning that the British people can look forward to being rid of her no later than 2022 - though she will surely be gone long before that, unless god is an Anglophobe.

Where we were

For all the frothy action of last week, we appear to be back where we were - only somehow more so! May is weak, only weaker; parliament is running out of time, and will have to wait a month before it gets another bite at the cherry. The solutions on offer from various quarters are still bogus, only even more obviously so. May's European jaunt was visibly disastrous by the end of last week, when it became clear that the various worthies gathered in Brussels for yet another summit were point-blank refusing to entertain any changes to the deal. Nobody expected that they would actually make concessions, of course, but it appears that the original plan was for both sides to make a good show of it and agree a mollifying text on the matter of the Irish 'backstop' that would give



Prime minister, but not for much longer

May a fig leaf. That the consensus for this approach collapsed on the European side speaks volumes - even the lowliest bureaucrat in Brussels must know that the UK parliament will not fall for such games. The only person in Europe who cannot see that, apparently, is Theresa May - blinded by pride and that can-do attitude of hers, which has long surpassed all possible satire in its perversity.

Certainly it seems not to be lost on her cabinet colleagues, who saved her skin last week, but are ever more emboldened to pursue their own agendas, with a covetous eye on the history books and - who knows? - the keys to Number 10. Several ministers popped up to promote one particular scheme, which would see a series of free, indicative votes on various Brexit scenarios, to see which commanded enough support to actually win a *meaningful* vote. This wizard wheeze has the support of Amber Rudd, Greg Clark, Liam Fox and Damian Hinds, but it is not hard to see the problems with it.

The *Guardian's* lobby reporter, Andrew Sparrow, identified three. The first is that the government can only deliver a free vote among Tory MPs. Why on earth should Jeremy Corbyn, who is monomaniacally focused on euthanising the government, not do the opposite, and use a three-line whip to defeat all the options? Which brings us to problem number two - such a defeat is hardly impossible. The last time such a manoeuvre was tried occurred during Tony Blair's presentation of various possible reforms to the House of Lords, which were all voted down in a farcical humiliation. In 2003, with a huge majority, Blair could survive - but can the current shambolic shit-show of an administration continue to limp down the road to the cliff's edge? Perhaps even worse is Sparrow's

problem three - what if the wrong option wins? The government is almost comically overcommitted to avoiding a second referendum. On December 17, May reiterated this position, in robotically similar fashion to all her previous formulations:

Let us not break faith with the British people by trying to stage another referendum: another vote which would do irreparable damage to the integrity of our politics, because it would say to millions who trusted in democracy that our democracy does not deliver.

If MPs vote handsomely for just such a rerun, May will be faced with either the mother of all U-turns, or we are basically back to square one. Governments call referenda, not indicative votes in the Commons. Can the government be got rid of? More easily, to be sure, if it is proven that a majority exists for a solution to the problem before us - which, however, the government cannot countenance. This series of free-vote schemes is, therefore, another variety of national-government talk *in practice*.

May is having none of it, but her only alternative is further negotiations in Europe over the festive period and a vote in the week of January 14 - and this time she means it. That further delay was enough to give Corbyn a dose of the old indicative vote fever, when he demanded a non-binding vote of confidence on May on December 17. She faced him down, however, and it seems to have been a misstep.

In the short term, May has beaten back the conciliators in her cabinet and the government will make an ostentatious display of planning for a no-deal scenario, for which purposes 'Spreadsheet' Phil Hammond has

discovered £4 billion in the shade of the magic money tree.

Endgame

As we move into the endgame of the Brexit drama, or at least the end of the beginning (all this furore, remember, only concerns the *transition* deal, not the future relationship with the EU), we expect the doomsday scenario to loom large. Partly this will be a matter of scaremongering, of course, as crotchety Brexit hardliners will no doubt complain; but partly it is just the logic of events. The thought that the civil service has *not already* been exerting huge efforts to prepare for the worst is either implausible or terrifying - more the former, we suspect. If it were the case, that would make it the only organisation of any size in Britain that was *not* wargaming a cliff-edge scenario. As parliamentary brinkmanship continues, with time running out, such contingency planning becomes an urgent necessity.

And so, while we frequently have cause to denounce this or that stage in the Brexit fiasco as a piece of theatre - beginning with the referendum itself - we should resist the temptation to doubt the seriousness with which the well-meaning bureaucrats, in public service and private, take the nightmare scenarios before them. Somehow a situation has to be engineered such that, whatever happens on March 29, there are not shortages of medicine, food, power and fuel on March 30.

Their efforts will, of course, be used in the cut and thrust of politics - and indeed already are. Ian Blackford, the Scottish Nationalist Party's Westminster leader, spoke darkly of the "sobering" materials on the impact of a no-deal Brexit that had crossed his desk as a result of his sitting on the privy council, and urged the government to publish them. The government's focus on the no-deal scenario was denounced as "psychological warfare" by Vince Cable of the Liberal Democrats, and all except the government are quite satisfied that the main issue is an attempt to browbeat parliament into supporting May's deal - a 'shut up or the bunny gets it' sort of political approach.

Part of the point of this exercise is to put a scare into the Europeans, so as to obtain better terms, but that must be regarded as a piece of fantasy. The European Union - united, well-prepared and victorious in every skirmish so far - has every cause for insouciance. 'Hard' Brexit, should it be achieved by the swivel-eyed patriots of Albion, will no

doubt result in some negative economic impact, especially in those European nations (the Irish Republic, the low countries) that trade with Britain most heavily. Yet you would have to say that it would be cheap at twice the price.

The Brussels mainstream gets to offload its most intransigent saboteur. It has a free hand to impose economic punishment on the way out, *pour encourager les autres* - the EU is chock-full of large and influential Eurosceptic parties, for whom the disastrous performance of the Brexiteers is a grave embarrassment. (Even Marine le Pen's *Rassemblement National* now distances itself from French withdrawal.) At the same time, the core powers have made a big show of backing Ireland to the hilt: a carrot to go with the stick, and a much needed demonstration of 'European solidarity' after the latter was exposed as a laughable fraud by the treatment of Greece.

From this side of the channel, on the other hand, all possible outcomes look awful. There is the dislocation of a no-deal Brexit, which will surely kick the legs out from under an already-wobbling economy, with disproportionately disastrous effects on the working class and lower petty bourgeoisie. Alternatively, there is a 'Brexit in name only' situation, which is the most probable *long-term* outcome of May's success, or a second referendum which is so engineered to produce a 'remain' result, learning from David Cameron's mistakes. In both cases, the likely result will be a further shift *to the right*, as the rhetoric of national betrayal takes hold. As we quoted May above, "it would say to millions who trusted in democracy, that our democracy does not deliver".

True enough words - with one caveat. What is reconfirmed in this unpleasant situation is that, whatever it was that people trusted in on that fateful day, two and a half years ago, it was not democracy. How can it be, when every possible outcome is utterly denuded of political legitimacy? Every possible retreat from the referendum result is a betrayal; every possible attempt to fulfil it is unacceptable. What lesson can be learned, then, except that plebiscites deny democracy by means of deceit, excluding the purportedly empowered voters from the decisions that *actually matter*, and delivering stable political results only in circumstances when they vote exactly the way they are told? ●

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