

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly **worker**



**An enigmatic movement.  
Far-right and soft-left  
compete to be yellow vests**

- Letters and debate
- NHS 10-year plan
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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THERESA MAY'S DEAL  
DEAD AS A DODO



# LETTERS



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

## Dead and gone

Tony Clark's response (Letters, January 10) to Jack Conrad's excellent essay on the demise of 'peak oil' as a theory ('Whatever happened to peak oil?', December 6) is flawed. Tony is trying to revive something that has been really a dead discussion for a decade or longer.

The excellent blog, *The Oil Drum* (archives of which are still available online) was for me the best energy blog there ever was because of the sheer honesty of the analysts who wrote it. Everything was discussed, including Tony's point about prices vs production - save for the *political* exercise of posing socialism and that the whole energy crisis is a function of capitalism. Speaking of being doctrinaire, *The Oil Drum* writers came to the same conclusion: the discussion is dead. And so they folded, as did all the other 'peak oil' discussions. Dead. Gone.

But Tony's antiquated view of this comes out when he reproduces this old canard (usually in the defence of the nonsensical 'Hubbert curve'): "All over the world leading oilfields are in production decline or finding it increasingly hard to maintain production at previous levels."

Well, Tony, this has been repeated since the 1980s - where have you been? It's also been disproved as a function overall of what oil 'reserves' there are, as well. When you write, "New oil coming online is not even close to making a dent in depletion!", quoting a "serious commentator", it seems you haven't a clue about what this even means. Even British Petroleum used this prediction they made in 2014 that there were less than 58 years of proven reserves left based on current production. What they left out and was thus torn apart by all the other petroleum engineers was that 'proven reserves' is a totally static and 'financial' concept. It dismisses categories of oil deposits that include 'economically recoverable resources' (about 300% more than 'proven reserves'), 'technically recoverable resources' (twice the quantity of the previous category) and lastly 'remaining oil and gas in place'.

So why is 'proven reserves vs depletion' irrelevant? One oil analyst for a major investing firm in the US noted this:

"There are a many of ways to describe the amount of oil remaining, but the most common is known as proved reserves. When you divide proved reserves by total production, you get the reserves-to-production ratio. This is where the 53-year estimate (BP) comes from and where that 32-year estimate originated in 1981 (for all you peak oil nostalgia lovers). While the number is easy to understand, it's a red herring, because it assumes production will remain constant forever and that the current proved reserves estimates represent all the oil left. As we all know, this simply isn't the case."

The problem with the term 'proved reserves' is that many assume it describes a physical limitation on oil (Tony certainly does), but it is actually a calculated economic limitation. Every country has a slightly different way of calculating the amount, but the basic gist is that proved reserve estimates

are what companies assume they can extract from the earth using existing technology while still generating a profit, which is based on the price of oil or gas over the past year. You sort of go in this direction, but you don't make ends meet: how much oil is in the ground and how much can be profitably recovered versus how much oil in the ground and how much oil can ever be recovered with expanded prospecting, technological advances and so on?

The reason Tony could be correct on any given day is that, with reserves so massive, letting those depletion rates increase relative to the 'proven reserves' is irrelevant. This happens all the time and is a function of any commodity production - even ones based on extractive industries of technically finite resources. We've heard about 'peak gas' and, even funnier, 'peak uranium'. All are wrong, as is Tony's 1990s-era world view on this.

Here is a prediction: if oil prices drop to, say, \$30 per barrel, then most oil sands/tar sands projects will grind to a halt, save for those that inject steam to liquefy the sands. At that point 'proven reserves' will fall because they are not economically viable *at all* to process.

When to worry? When oil heads to \$100 per barrel and the 'proven reserves' (remember, an economic, not a physical, category) remains the same.

**David Walters**  
San Francisco

## Witch-hunt

Last September the Labour Party national executive committee adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance pseudo-definition of 'anti-Semitism', whose purpose is to suppress criticism of Israel and meaningful solidarity with the Palestinians. Since then there has been an escalation of attacks on the democratic rights of the left by Zionists, Labour Party politicians and others.

What is worse is that some on the left are cooperating and joining in the Zionist witch-hunt against so-called 'leftwing anti-Semites'.

In early October when attempting to restock our magazine in Housmans Bookshop in Kings Cross, we were informed that our publications would no longer be sold. We asked why, and were eventually told by the manager: "You know why". The manager said that "people we trust" had told them that our magazine was 'anti-Semitic'. We hear this is people from Prevent.

On December 14 we once again went to restock our magazines - this time in Bookmarks, the outlet of the Socialist Workers Party. Just as at Housmans, the staff told us that they could no longer stock our magazine. They said that they could not say why, but that we could email the SWP for a reason. We have since contacted the SWP leadership, including their leader, Alex Callinicos, but they failed to reply.

Socialist Fight supports work for political prisoners in Ireland and internationally. In this country we try to help Ben Stimson, a young Irishman of Jewish background in jail in Manchester. He was jailed on a phoney 'terrorism' charge for going to Ukraine and giving support to the resistance of the mainly Russian-speaking population and provincial governments of eastern Ukraine against the western-backed, Nazi-infested nationalist regime in Kiev. He has been told by the authorities that he is no longer allowed to

receive our publications because it would harm his 'rehabilitation' under Prevent.

So what do we have here? We have an appalling, cowardly excuse for a left in this country! We have the right wing of the Labour Party, which promotes the Zionist agenda. We have 'leftwing' bureaucrats like McCluskey who help the right and the Zionists to impose it on the Labour Party, with only weak opposition from Jeremy Corbyn and a Labour 'left' led by Lansman, who is overtly pro-Zionist. We have other parts of the Labour left, such as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, who have joined in witch-hunts against more leftwing figures, such as Jackie Walker and Tony Greenstein, accused of 'anti-Semitism', and even those figures themselves have joined in witch-hunting Socialist Fight for our criticism of Jewish-Zionist bourgeois politics in the imperialist countries, which parallel views raised more recently by Norman Finkelstein - probably the world's most prominent and outspoken anti-Zionist of Jewish origin.

And we have the SWP, which has a very chequered record, to say the least. Alex Callinicos was one of those who joined in the outcry against Norman Finkelstein's work *The Holocaust Industry* around 2000. But then the SWP after Tony Cliff's death underwent a more leftwing period during the Iraq war, and was known for its strong anti-Zionism (within its own limitations), its bloc with George Galloway in Respect, and in that period its hosting of Gilad Atzmon as part of its 'cultures of resistance' events.

The SWP was witch-hunted for some of those things, and eventually capitulated. A key event was its refusal to defend Julian Assange from the CIA frame-up after 2011. And now we have its apparent joining in a witch-hunt against anti-Zionists to its left, with both the witch-hunt in the Labour Party and the attacks of Prevent and the Zionists outside it. Refusing to sell the publications of a socialist trend active in Labour that is witch-hunted by the right really means joining in the witch-hunt.

We appeal to the SWP membership and cadre to fight against this latest scandalous capitulation. We appeal to all socialists and working class militants to demand of Housmans and Bookmarks that they cease their censorship of Socialist Fight and allow its sale in their bookshops.

**Gerry Downing**  
Socialist Fight

## Marginalised

Why is comrade Jack Conrad so obsessed with promoting his theory of continuity over Trotsky's rearming the Bolshevik Party ('Marxism versus holy script', January 10)? In whose interests is Jack's theory? In his dismissal of Trotsky's position, he omits the latter's first history of the Russian Revolution, which was published in 1918 (just after Brest-Litovsk). It is less polemical and free of virulent attacks on Kamenev and co for reasons which I shall explain below. But Jack's detailed history of the period, before and after October, leaves this out. It is also just as polemical as Trotsky's later *History* as well, written after his exile from the party.

So I submit an alternative - a dialectical history of the period, which takes into account the question of the relationship between organisational and political continuity within the revolutionary movement over time: concretely, the transition from the Second to the Third International, the fate of

the Bolshevik Party, as it moved from the October revolution into an imperialist-imposed civil war; the counterrevolution from without, which took a tremendous toll in political and organisational terms, as well on as the beleaguered Soviet state itself. The dialectic of the organisational and political factors is, of course, inseparable. When external or objective pressures overwhelm the subjective (the revolutionary party in power), if this continues - ie, when the European revolution fails to materialise - then the degeneration of both the organisational and political aspects becomes inevitable.

But in 1917, the political degeneration of the party was averted, for the time being, because it was still able to operate under the norms of democratic centralism. Therefore, even though there was a deep political crisis within the party, as expressed in Lenin's April theses and his letters to the party that followed, this could be overcome: the party could be rearmed without a factional split, so that it was able to go on and lead the October revolution.

Not so in 1924: as a result of the terrible impact of the civil war, which very nearly destroyed all the gains of October, the party degenerated into bureaucratic centralism. Therefore, when Trotsky and the Left Opposition tried to get the revolution back on track, based on the twin pillars of internationalism and democracy within the party and state, history had turned against them. They were defeated and suppressed by the Stalin faction and its allies. So we now enter the period of the counterrevolution from within, the imposition of 'socialism in one country' - a form of nationalism - with all its dreadful results.

To answer my own question, maybe Jack bangs on about his continuity thesis in order to highlight the political degeneration of post-war Trotskyism, up to and including today. This certainly marked a new stage of discontinuity within the history of the communist movement. But this applies to both Leninism and Trotskyism. Yet we must remember that this was the result of the pressure of Stalinism on the latter, which also gave reformism a new lease of life, at least for a time (which is now well and truly over). Therefore both Leninists and Pabloite Trotskyists were marginalised: a position which, sadly, we still find ourselves in today - even more so.

**Rex Dunn**  
email

## Ultra-left

The prime minister warned that leaving the EU with no deal "would put the future of our union at risk". Her deal would do the same. The writing is on the wall. It is just a matter of time before the end.

May is now heavily defeated by 432 to 202 votes. In the old-style politics, a significant defeat in parliament would have brought a general election. But, since May is carrying out the 'will of the people', she will surely carry on and keep trying. This unholy alliance between the crown and the 'republic' is surely doomed when this contradiction works itself out.

Labour's demand for an immediate general election is thus 'ultra-left' by trying to take the second step before the first. It leads inevitably to the demand for a vote of no confidence, which Labour won't win. May threw down the gauntlet, long egged on by the Liberal Democrats and the Labour right.

The Labour right are trying to split Corbyn from Labour members and voters. They have demanded a vote of no confidence in May to close the door on a general election and clear the way for a remain referendum. Another 50-50 Chukka-Blair 'remain' referendum is a danger of entrenching the divisions in a divided working class. Those who are serious about remaining in the EU should concentrate on supporting action in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Outside parliament I heard a moment of national unity, as rival protestors for 'leave' and 'remain' cheered in unison at the news of May's defeat. A ratification referendum would allow them to keep cheering all the way into the polling booth.

**Steve Freeman**  
email

## Women

I enjoyed reading Anne McShane's article, 'The will to liberate' (January 10). It is well informed and thought-provoking. However, in her determination to foreground consciousness, especially in the case of communists in Russia, and the lack of it, when it came to the women's question, she is in danger of arriving at idealist conclusions.

We are told that the "success or failure of the women's movement in early Soviet society was not down to economic resources, but to politics." The implication is that, armed with the correct politics, women's oppression could have been ended.

Apply the idea to the working class. With the correct politics could the working class have been liberated? Surely not. Russia was an extraordinarily poor country made all the poorer by World War I and then civil war. Hunger and starvation were never far away. The populations of Petrograd and Moscow haemorrhaged by some 40%-50%. Factories barely functioned. On top of that, the imperialist powers - crucially Great Britain and France - imposed vicious economic sanctions and staged any number of provocations. Under such circumstances, it is quite possible to impose egalitarianism (and with War Communism that partially happened). But it is the egalitarianism of poverty.

For workers, male and female, to be liberated requires conditions of material abundance. That is why the Bolsheviks always stressed the limits of revolution *within* Russia. Without the European socialist revolution the working class in Russia could never be liberated.

Now we come to male chauvinism. Did it exist in the 1920s Soviet Union? Undoubtedly. Did it exist in the Communist Party? Again, undoubtedly. Should it have been fought? Of course. Did the *Zhenotdel* play a positive role in combating male chauvinism? Yes. Could male chauvinism have been uprooted in the 1920s Soviet Union? No, definitely not.

As Marx famously remarked, "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness" (1859). Male chauvinism rests on, justifies and is reproduced by the oppression of women, which itself is rooted in class society. Indeed peasant society - and Russia in the 1920s was overwhelmingly a peasant society - is based on a patriarch exploiting his wife, children and other family members.

**Jack Conrad**  
London

# LABOUR

## Another witch-hunt victim

NEC refuses to endorse Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt in South Thanet, writes Carla Roberts

In April 2018, Corbyn supporter Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt was selected as Labour's parliamentary candidate for the "key marginal" seat of Thanet South. She beat the more 'moderate' local councillor, Karen Constantine, by 17 votes - despite the fact that the latter was backed by a rather unholy alliance of Unite, Unison, GMB and, somewhat strangely, Momentum.

We hear that Constantine had never been seen at a Momentum meeting and only started to back Jeremy Corbyn for Labour leader once he was sure to win. On Twitter, she proudly declares that her "motto" was: "An ounce of action is worth a ton of theory".<sup>1</sup> Gordon-Nesbitt, on the other hand, is known as an outspoken Corbyn supporter and life-long socialist campaigner. So no real surprise then that local members chose the more leftwing candidate (as would probably be the case almost everywhere, if members were allowed to democratically select their prospective candidate via a system of mandatory reselection).

But clearly, not everybody was happy about the result. Two weeks after the local decision, the revolting Guido Fawkes published a take-down piece<sup>2</sup> on Gordon-Nesbitt, who works as a researcher to, among others, Labour peer Lord Howarth of Newport. Fawkes published a small number of tweets released by the Centre for Cultural Change in 2016, to which Gordon-Nesbitt contributed.

As is unfortunately now the norm in the Labour Party, the tweets were - probably simultaneously - passed on to the compliance unit of the Labour Party, an investigation was opened and Labour's national executive committee decided to put on hold the required endorsement of her candidacy - a highly unusual decision. Guido Fawkes seems to have had already had a good inkling of the result of the investigation even before it started: "Assume Gordon-Nesbitt will be deselected if Corbyn is really taking anti-Semitism seriously...", he wrote in April.

And he was right. Still, it took the Labour Party bureaucracy a staggering eight months to look into those few tweets - three of which were authored by Gordon-Nesbitt:

- "Accusations levelled at Jackie Walker are politically motivated."
- "Anti-Semitism has been weaponised by those who seek to silence anti-Zionist voices. See *The Lynching*, endorsed by Ken Loach, for elucidation."
- "Accusations of AS levelled in an attempt to discredit the left."

Even the most biased bourgeois justice system would have laughed this 'evidence' out of court. Not so today's Labour Party, unfortunately, which is cleaved apart by the ongoing civil war that began with the election of Corbyn. In July 2018, the NEC - even though it was now ostensibly dominated by the 'left' - voted to refer the case to its kangaroo court, the national constitutional committee (NCC). This is a crucial body in the party. It deals with all disciplinary matters that the NEC feels it cannot resolve and - given that the NCC is dominated by the right - the referral of a leftwinger usually results in expulsion from the party. Incredibly, even after its recent expansion from 11 to 25, only a minority are chosen by rank-and-file Labour members.

Gordon-Nesbitt describes how "months went by, but nothing happened". She continued to be the officially selected candidate



Rebecca and friend

and campaigned with local party members. Six months after the referral to the NCC she was invited to an interview - not with the NCC, but with a panel of three NEC members.

Gordon-Nesbitt writes that she came to the hearing on December 18 "armed with a dozen endorsements from local party members, a respected rabbi, an Oxford University anti-Semitism expert and a sizeable group of parliamentary candidates from around the country, all of whom said in various different ways that neither I nor the tweets were anti-Semitic".

Still, a few hours after the meeting, Gordon-Nesbitt received a letter stating that the NEC had "decided not to endorse my candidacy on the basis that: "In light of these posts your conduct does not meet the high standards that are expected of parliamentary candidates and has the potential to bring the party into disrepute."<sup>3</sup>

Her local Labour Party continues to support her: The CLP executive, its branches and the CLP women's forum have all rejected the NEC's decision. An emergency meeting of the CLP's general committee is scheduled for later this week.

We understand that, worryingly, leftwinger Claudia Webbe was one of the three NEC members on the panel. In fact, she was the only one who was there in person - the other two were listening in via speakerphone. In July, Webbe replaced Christine Shawcroft as chair of the NEC's disputes panel, having been nominated to the post by both Momentum's Jon Lansman and Pete Willsman, secretary of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (Webbe also serves as chair of the CLPD). It is unusual for Lansman and Willsman to agree on anything these days - the former comrades who worked together for decades in the CLPD have fallen out spectacularly over the last 12 months or so, after Lansman falsely accused Willsman of anti-Semitism and dropped him from Momentum's list of recommended candidates for the NEC (Willsman was elected anyway).<sup>4</sup>

Of course, we do not actually know how Webbe voted. These hugely important decisions are kept secret, away from the membership. She certainly has not made her views on the matter public. But we know that she is an ally of Lansman, who, we have been told, is campaigning against attempts to allow the next full NEC meeting (January 22) to revisit the panel's decision on Gordon-Nesbitt. Momentum locally and nationally has certainly not raised a finger to defend her or the democratic will of the local members.

NEC panels have the right to make decisions on behalf of the executive and those decisions do not have to be ratified by the full NEC. But, as Darren Williams explains, they can be "revisited" and overturned by the NEC. Williams seems to be the only NEC member who has come out publicly on this case, though we understand that he is not the only leftwinger on the NEC who is "unhappy" about the panel's decision.<sup>5</sup> We might find out more on January 22 - but isn't it a pity that there are no official minutes of NEC meetings? We have to rely on the few reports produced by individual members (who only report on decisions they find interesting or important, of course).

This case does shed a rather worrying light on the state of the so-called 'left' on the NEC (and the wider party). Lansman has thrown himself with gusto into the campaign to equate criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism - a campaign whose chief target is, of course, Jeremy Corbyn himself. While Lansman has always been a soft Zionist, he has certainly found his hard-core Zionist feet in recent months. He successfully campaigned for the NEC to adopt the ludicrously inaccurate and pro-Zionist 'Definition of anti-Semitism' published by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, with all its disputed 11 examples.

Lansman and his close allies make up about half of the nine NEC members elected by party members on the slate pushed by the Centre Left Grassroots Alliance. Darren Williams, Pete Willsman and Rachel Garnham seem to be the only NEC members with at least half an occasional backbone. Even though Unite is run by Corbyn ally Len McCluskey, the numerous Unite members on the NEC tend to vote - in general - with the rest of the unions on Labour's leadership body.

This is particularly worrying, as Jeremy Corbyn remains a prisoner of Labour's MPs, who are far to his right and, of course, to the right of the majority of members. Refusing to endorse a candidate who would have been a very valuable ally of Corbyn makes you wonder on which side Jon Lansman and some of his allies on the NEC really stand ●

### Notes

1. [https://twitter.com/uk\\_karen](https://twitter.com/uk_karen).
2. <https://order-order.com/2018/04/18/labour-candidates-think-tank-defended-ken-jackie-walker>.
3. [www.gofundme.com/reinstata-rebecca-as-parliamentary-candidate](http://www.gofundme.com/reinstata-rebecca-as-parliamentary-candidate).
4. <http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/ncc-left-slate-farce-ends-in-another-jon-lansman-surrender>.
5. [www.facebook.com/darren.williams.146](https://www.facebook.com/darren.williams.146).

## ACTION

### London Communist Forum

**Sunday January 20, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August H Nimtz's *Lenin's electoral strategy from 1907 to the October revolution of 1917*. This meeting: chapter 2, 'The fourth duma', including the section "The irreconcilable difference": a "liberal labor" versus a Marxist labor policy'.

**Sunday January 27, 5pm:** 'Free trade or protectionism is a false choice. The working class needs its own trade policy.' Speaker: Mike Macnair. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk) and Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk).

### Radical Anthropology Group

**Tuesday January 22, 6.30pm:** Series of talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1.

This meeting: 'How collective childcare works in practice' Speaker: Chris Knight. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

### 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](https://www.facebook.com/events/687463098320616).

### Solidarity with our tube cleaners

**Tuesday January 29, 5pm:** Demonstration, Old Palace Yard, London SW1 (opposite parliament). Stop plans to axe one thousand cleaners' jobs. Organised by RMT: [www.rmt.org.uk/news/events/solidarity-with-our-tube-cleaners](http://www.rmt.org.uk/news/events/solidarity-with-our-tube-cleaners).

### Stop arming Saudi, stop bombing Yemen

**Wednesday January 30, 7pm:** Public meeting, committee rooms 3-4, Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

### 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](http://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](https://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](https://www.facebook.com/events/1143258535837664).

### Labour Representation Committee

**Saturday February 9, 10am to 5pm:** Conference, Student Central (formerly ULU), Malet Street, London WC1. Tickets £15 (£5). 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>.

### Students stop the war

**Saturday February 9, 1pm to 4pm:** Student activists meeting, Room G13, Birkbeck University, Malet Street, London WC1. Campaign in colleges to end the war in Yemen and get the arms industry out of universities. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

### Whatever happened to liberation theology?

**Saturday February 9, 1pm:** Talk and discussion, Old Burnt Barns (by entrance to Barras), 179 London Road, Glasgow G40. Speakers Alan Stewart (Scottish Republican Socialist Movement) and Brian Quail (Scotland CND). Organised by Scottish Republican Socialist Movement: [www.tapatalk.com/groups/scottishrepublicans](http://www.tapatalk.com/groups/scottishrepublicans).

### Confronting racism on campus

**Saturday February 16, 10.30am 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](https://www.facebook.com/events/124978901754397).

### Trump and war in the Middle East

**Saturday February 16, 2pm:** Meeting, Amnesty International UK, 25 New Inn Yard, London EC2. What lies ahead for the anti-war movement in 2019? Speakers include Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

### 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: [www.facebook.com/events/346086039308173](https://www.facebook.com/events/346086039308173).

### 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.

## YELLOW VESTS FRANCE

# An enigmatic movement

How should Marxists respond to the *gilets jaunes*? Mike Macnair looks at the likely winners and losers

**W**e have just seen the ninth weekend of *gilets jaunes* (yellow vests) protests in France. Numbers were slightly up compared to previous occasions, with the government claiming 84,000 took to the streets across the country and 8,000 in Paris, while 80,000 police were deployed France-wide.

The movement has been widely celebrated by the left - for example, the Socialist Workers Party in Britain;<sup>1</sup> and also by the right: for example, the hard-right Italian interior minister, Matteo Salvini. This poses two political questions, both of which are the subjects of present debate.

The first is whether the movement is on the road to victory - or whether it is, rather, dragging on into a slow decline, like the British anti-war movement after the actual invasion of Iraq. *Spiked* (January 11), interviewing Christophe Guilluy, claims in its headline that 'The *gilets jaunes* are unstoppable'.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Léon Crémieux in *International Viewpoint* (January 12) is a good deal more sceptical about their prospects, though he hopes that the movement can be kept alive, since

If it were to end at the beginning of this year, not only would it be more difficult for other mobilisations ... to develop in different sectors, but the only outlet for politics would once again become the electoral system - either in negative terms through abstention or through a match between the France Insoumise and the FN [the far-right Front National, now rebranded as Rassemblement National], from which the latter would benefit.<sup>3</sup>

The second question is *what sort of movement is this* - of the right or the left? A '1968', as some leftwing writers think, or a 'Tea Party'? A distinct, but related, question is: is the political outcome of the movement likely to be a move to the left, or a further movement towards right-populist nationalism? The two issues are connected: a defeated mass movement of the left may perfectly well lead, through demoralisation, to a sharp shift to the right.

### Victory or defeat?

The issue of the success or failure of the movement is not at all easy to address from outside France. What follows is therefore pretty tentative. But it has to be said that it will only be true that "The *gilets jaunes* are unstoppable" if they are to be understood as a right-populist mobilisation, and their victory will take the form (even if delayed) of a Rassemblement National government and "Frexit" - to set alongside Brexit, the right-populist government in Italy, the Orbán administration in Hungary, Polish Law and Justice, and so on. It is understandable that the Brexiteers of *Spiked*, who have, like Orbán, passed from the left, though liberalism, to the populist right, should be gung-ho for this view. But, so far as the *gilets jaunes* are to be understood as a revolt against *neoliberalism* as such from the left (and this is certainly an element of the movement), they are probably headed for a lingering defeat.

The narrative background is as follows. The trigger for the protests was the rise in fuel prices, thanks to increased taxation. These were sold as 'green taxes', but they came in a context in which the government of president Emmanuel Macron has reduced taxes for the rich; while (like

many other places in Europe) public transport and other services are being cut, while urban property with access to public transport has been escalating in price.

The movement started with an online petition attracting 300,000 signatures by mid-October, and the first direct action followed on the weekend of November 17, also involving 300,000 or more in blocking roads and some fuel depots. Since then there have been weekly events, involving relatively small, but sharply militant and destructive, protests in Paris, and much wider but often less spectacular protests across France. Numbers, as indicated above, fell after the first weekend, but have risen again in the new year.

Blocking roads is not a particularly innovative form of protest for France. Farmers have done it repeatedly over one or another grievance. Fishermen and strikers have at different times blockaded Calais. Nor is it terribly unusual for protests in France to 'turn violent'; the tradition goes back well before May 1968, though the *événements* may have rejuvenated it. Communication and organising protests via social media is flagged by some fans as a novelty, but in fact it only works if the state is caught short by an initial rapid development (otherwise counter-measures to shut down such communication or spread confusion can be effective).

What was distinctive about the *gilets jaunes* was the image of the high-visibility vest itself. Required to be carried by all drivers in France as part of breakdown kit, it was flagged for protests not just by farmers, etc, but for *all drivers* (and hence for much of the suburban and rural population). Associated with this is the very high level of public support for the protests (up to 84% in polls in late November). Another feature has been the persistence of the actions, which may be the result of the choice to go for weekends only.

Macron's response has been pretty classic carrot-and-stick, combined with 'kick the can down the road'. First, the carrot: the fuel tax increases were put on hold in early December. At the same time electricity prices were frozen until March 2019. Then the president made windy declarations promising various concessions, which turn out to be paid for by some other levy on the working population, but not by the restoration of the wealth tax he abolished on taking office, or any of the other, less transparent, tax cuts for the rich he has introduced.

Next, 'kick the can down the road'. Macron in his December 10 speech announced that there would be a 'great national debate', in which many things, including additional immigration controls, are up for discussion - but *not* the basic neoliberal framework or restoration of the wealth tax. People have been invited to submit *cahiers de doléances* (lists of complaints) - a recollection of the revolution of 1789.

The 'grand debate' was launched on January 15 - not without a hiccup, as it turned out that the former minister employed to organise it was to be paid €176,000, and she was forced to resign. But this fairly minor embarrassment will not affect the value of the tactic, which is a routine one for governments (and corporate lobbyists). Decisions are often made and implemented too quickly for opposition to develop. But, once opposition to government policy does develop, and it is forced to concede further discussion, the issue is to be the subject of prolonged debate



Undeclared ... as of yet

(and as many red herrings as possible introduced) in the hope that opponents' willpower and resources will be exhausted by a prolonged struggle.

Here, the tactic has the great merit of distracting this programmeless single-issue campaign from the core of its concerns: the shifting of taxation from the rich onto the relatively poor, and the dishonesty of the Macron election campaign, for the benefit only of the man's mates in finance. The *doléances* will naturally go all over the shop.

Finally, the stick. In early December the government authorised substantial pay increases for the police. At the same time there have been significant increases in police violence against *gilets jaunes* protestors; a crackdown in arrests; and kite-flying for proposals to 'register' unauthorised demonstrators - a technique of repression already trialled on 'football hooligans'. Government may be unable, as yet, to persuade the hard core to give up. But it can drive away the softer periphery - and solidify the loyalty of the state forces.

The intended result is indicated by a January 16 article, spun to suggest that it is already happening: "*Gilets jaunes*: is the backlash underway?" argues that public support for the protests is ebbing.<sup>4</sup> We can remember such articles all too well in the later months of the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85, or in relation to the later anti-war demonstrations. The authors of such articles want the movement to ebb, but that does not alter the fact that these tactics usually work. Just continuing with weekly protest after weekly protest does not usually lead to victory.

What is most likely is that the protests will peter out over the next weeks; there will be extensive demoralisation; and there will be a shift into *some form* of electoral politics. It is unlikely to be a shift towards leftwing political organisation.

### Politics

A limited sociological study of some of the *gilets jaunes* protestors was carried out for *Le Monde*

and translated for Verso Books in December.<sup>5</sup> The messages that come from this study were that this was predominantly a working class or lower middle class movement. There were higher than national proportions of white-collar workers (relative to manual workers) and of the self-employed. This was not the organised working class: 64% thought that trade unions had no place in the movement; 81% thought this of political parties; 33% said they were "neither left nor right". The predominant complaints, as well as the unfairness of the tax system, were of general inequality and the belief that the constitutional order needed "total reform".

As the authors say, their findings do not point to a movement of the far right or one primarily animated by immigration. But what they do point to is a classic movement of the traditional small business and peasant petty bourgeoisie (which is a substantially larger class in France than it is in this country) and the unorganised working class - with the usual illusions of such movements, that anti-partyism and radical reform of the constitution *without* serious economic change can overcome the problems. The *method* of the protests - a scaled-up version of peasants' road-blocking and so on - points towards the same political assessment.

This is not to condemn the movement as such. In the first place, the working class needs to win at least a section of the petty bourgeoisie over to its side if it is to defeat capital and project a socialist alternative.

Secondly, the demand for progressive taxation is one of the historical programmatic planks of the workers' movement, going all the way back to the *Communist manifesto*. In this respect, that part of the left which has succumbed to the temptations of 'green taxes' should see what this leads to - neoliberal variants. The socialist approach is *not* one of carbon taxes, but of direct planning to control carbon emissions - including, among other things, the defence and restoration of public transport.

Thirdly, the idea that France needs radical constitutional reform - as some of the sociologists' respondents said, a "Sixth Republic" to replace the Bonapartist-presidentialist Fifth Republic created by de Gaulle's 1958 coup - is right.

The problem is that Macron's 'great debate' will not lead to such a constitutional revolution. Nor will *cahiers de doléances* produce a coherent constitutional and economic alternative. Nor is the currently favoured single-issue reform - the introduction of the Swiss- or Californian-style right of "citizens' initiative" to trigger referendums any sort of solution. French activists should look across the channel and see what our three recent referendums have got us. Indeed, they should just look at Switzerland or California ...

What is needed to construct a platform which can pose an alternative to the corporate lobbyists' constitution is a *party*, with its own publications, independent of the advertising-funded media and based on a political programme.

The lack of a party and, indeed, the anti-partyism of the *gilets jaunes* protests will necessarily imply that, like the similarly anti-partyist 'social forums' of the early 2000s and the Occupy movement of 2011-12, the protests will run into the sand. They cannot pose a *political* alternative to the Fifth Republic.

What party politics is on offer, when the protest movement does run into the sand? *Politico*'s most recent poll for the forthcoming European parliamentary elections shows the Rassemblement National (RN) on 22%, Macron's En Marche on 19%, Mélenchon's ambiguous leftwing France Insoumise on 10%, Les Républicains on 9%, Debout la France ('France First') and the Greens on 7%, and the Parti Socialiste on 6%.<sup>6</sup> Other polls put the Parti Communiste on 2% and the Mandeliste Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) on 2.5% - neither is likely to get representatives elected.<sup>7</sup>

The NPA is an 'If it moves, salute it' group, and hence *cannot* give political leadership in the form of offering an alternative programme and constitutional conceptions. As for the PCF, it has been for a long time accommodating to French nationalism, and more recently, France Insoumise has done so too.

The problem with this approach is: 'Why vote for the left-nationalist monkey, when you can vote for the Le Pen organ-grinder?' The result is likely to be that mass dissatisfaction with the Fifth Republic among petty bourgeois and unorganised workers, after the failure of the protest campaign, issues in mass votes for the RN.

The French left needs to address the party question. Celebrating and tail-ending the *gilets jaunes* is neither a substitute for solving this problem nor a route to do so ●

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### Notes

1. See, for example, 'Yellow Vests pack a punch in France' *Socialist Worker* January 8.
2. [www.spiked-online.com/2019/01/11/the-gilets-jaunes-are-unstoppable](http://www.spiked-online.com/2019/01/11/the-gilets-jaunes-are-unstoppable).
3. [www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article5892](http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article5892).
4. *The Local* January 16: [www.thelocal.fr/20190116/gilets-jaunes-is-the-backlash-underway](http://www.thelocal.fr/20190116/gilets-jaunes-is-the-backlash-underway).
5. [www.versobooks.com/blogs/4180-gilets-jaunes-a-pioneering-study-of-the-low-earners-revolt](http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4180-gilets-jaunes-a-pioneering-study-of-the-low-earners-revolt).
6. [www.politico.eu/2019-european-elections/france](http://www.politico.eu/2019-european-elections/france).
7. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019\\_European\\_Parliament\\_election\\_in\\_France#Opinion\\_polls](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_European_Parliament_election_in_France#Opinion_polls).

## YELLOW VESTS UK

# Our rights threatened too

Although Britain's far-right yellow vests are an obnoxious assortment of racists, xenophobes and odd-balls, we must defend their right to protest, says **Eddie Ford**

Over recent weeks the media has been paying special attention to the yellow vests protests in Britain - beginning with the few dozen who blocked Westminster bridge in December. The name is derived, of course, from the *gilets jaunes* movement in France, which was originally predominantly petty bourgeois in nature, but started to attract elements of the working class outraged by Emmanuel Macron's economic policies and the French establishment in general.

In Britain the yellow vest has become a symbol, fought over by the pro-Brexit far-right and the pro-Brexit soft left. This was on display at the People's Assembly demonstration in London on January 12, which was addressed by the likes of John McDonnell and was dominated by chants of 'Tories out!' and "General election now!". According to Tom Griffiths, an organiser of the protest, it was "not too late" for the left to be the dominant force in Britain's yellow vest movement and insisted that the "thousands" who rallied in Trafalgar Square vastly outnumbered the hundred or so who rallied outside St James's Park tube station under a pro-Brexit banner on the same day.

There were even minor clashes in Trafalgar Square as well known far-right activists attempted to stage a provocation. They claimed that the People's Assembly demonstration had "hijacked" the true spirit of the *gilets jaunes*. Along with yellow vests there were anti-Islam and anti-immigration placards and a few union jacks. Naturally enough, this rivalry has found expression on Facebook. One page - 'liked' by more than 2,300 - is badged around opposing austerity and slightly oddly describes itself as the "official branch of the yellow vests"; while another, with over 14,000 'likes', is promoting a "great British betrayal rally" about Brexit on March 30 and hosts various anti-migrant videos.

On the same day, about 50 pro-Brexit yellow vest demonstrators gathered in Redcar to demand local Labour MP, Anna Turley, quit over her call for a 'final say' referendum vote. Meanwhile, some pro-Brexit activists have used closed social media groups to discuss how to single out 'remainer' MPs and "get them out of office". If you are lucky enough to live in Leeds, you can always attend the yellow vest "static demonstration" on January 19, where you can join "the fight against the establishment, bankers, the elite and globalism" - further demanding that "British folk be put before migrants", closed borders and so on.<sup>1</sup>

### Nazi

As readers will know, a character named James Goddard features with increasing frequency in the stories about yellow vest protests. Goddard was detained outside St James's Park station in an arrest related to "incidents that took place in the Westminster area" on January 7, according to a police spokeswoman - ie, for confronting Conservative MP Anna Soubry, a strong and thoroughly unrepentant pro-European Union 'remainer'. Goddard's supporters claimed he had been about to "hand himself in" at a local police station.

On that occasion he was part of a small yellow vest group shouting "Nazi" at Soubry during a live BBC news interview - earlier that day, she had faced sustained barracking by these protestors, as she walked to parliament.



State clampdown on far right threatens left

They also shouted sexist abuse at Sky anchor, Kay Burley, and yelled at Channel Four's political editor, Faisal Islam, that he was "not British" and "a rapist". Back in December, when Soubry tweeted that the protestors had expressed support for Hitler, Goddard replied by saying: "Lying trollop, I personally told you that you're doing the dirty work of Adolf Hitler, you morally repugnant scumbag."

For all the professed hatred of Adolf Hitler and his "dirty work", Goddard has been floating around far-right circles for many years. In June he gave a speech at a pro-Tommy Robinson "day for freedom" rally at Downing Street. He has posted near endless virulently Islamophobic messages and videos on social media, especially the far-right site, *Gab* - which describes itself as a social network that "champions free speech, individual liberty and the free flow of information online". Typical postings from Goddard, who has called for the mass deportations of "illegals", include: "... wherever Islam exists, you will find murder and rape"; and "It's about time the indigenous people of Great Britain were put first".

Last year he uploaded a video saying he wanted to "ban Islam from the west", as it is "a threat to every man, woman and child in this country", adding that "people who believe in child marriage and terrorism should not be in the United Kingdom, or Europe for that matter" - and "as long as that book [the Quran] exists, there will never be peace in the west". When asked what all this actually meant in practice, Goddard said: "I wouldn't blow them up. If I ever got into power, I'd give you all £5,000 to £10,000 and ask you to leave" - after all, "this is a Christian country". If they refused to leave voluntarily, Goddard mused, "then we'd have to think of a legal way that we could do it".

He and his cohorts constantly refer to Theresa May and other government ministers as "traitors" who deserved to be hanged. Yellow vests are often daubed with various English Defence League slogans and "No surrender". On January 5 a smoke bomb was set off on Downing Street, as dozens of protestors ran up Whitehall and clashed

with police officers, with Goddard live-streaming the event on Facebook - filming himself shouting: "If they want a war we'll give them a war. Let's give them a fucking war". Later, they set fire to an EU flag, as people screamed "Spit on it!"

Unsurprisingly, Goddard is also a very vocal supporter of Donald Trump and Israel/Zionism, messaging on *Gab* that "America is our oldest ally and strongest friend - so why on god's green earth did we vote against recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel?" Obviously, for Goddard, "the political class in Britain needs removing from power now", as "they care only for themselves and their moronic, progressive Islamic-appeasing views". Showing his dedication, in November he gave up his job "to focus on highlighting the hypocrisies of our so-called representatives". Helpfully, he has listed opposition to "political correctness, cultural Marxism and forced adoptions" as core values of the British yellow vest movement. Strangely enough, he did not mention anti-austerity or workers' rights.

### Don't insult MPs

Now, it need hardly be said that communists oppose the far-right nationalism and Islamophobia of people like James Goddard - pure poison for the working class movement, which first and foremost needs to be *internationalist*. Nevertheless, there are some troubling aspects to the way that the far-right have been treated with regards to free speech and democratic rights.

Communists are the strongest and most militant defenders of free speech, even for obnoxious creatures like Goddard or Robinson. By defending their right to free speech we are defending our own right to free speech and protest, as the state is the *main* enemy - not fringe, far-right or fascistic groups. By definition, the right to free speech has to include the right to shout an insult at an MP. Yet this right appears to be under threat.

As mentioned earlier, Goddard was arrested after an "incident" in the Westminster area (where he called Anna Soubry a "Nazi"). You could

argue that this is a prime example of the pot calling the kettle black, but at the end of the day Goddard or anybody else should have the right to hurl insults at a politician - verbal abuse is part and parcel of politics; they always have been and always will be, especially when passions are roused. Similarly, people should have the right to demonstrate and protest outside Westminster or any other governmental building. To erect safe spaces around politicians is to essentially neuter political struggle.

Alarming then, Scotland Yard has confirmed that it has opened an "investigation" into whether any offences had been committed by

the chants of "Soubry is a Nazi" on Abingdon Green. A day after the so-called incident, police outnumbered protestors outside Westminster, promising to respond to any "future incidents". Over 100 MPs have written to the Metropolitan police commissioner, Cressida Dick, asking for "extra" protection - after the Commons speaker, John Bercow, urged officers to do more to protect MPs and Soubry criticised the lack of police action over the "abuse". The MPs' letter to Dick states that "after months of peaceful and calm protests by groups representing a range of political views on Brexit", an "ugly element of individuals with strong far-right and extreme-right connections" have "increasingly engaged in intimidatory and potentially criminal acts, targeting members of parliament, journalists, activists and members of the public". It claims that "there appears to be an ongoing lack of coordination in the response from the police and appropriate authorities".

Goddard himself has had his Facebook pages closed down, the company declaring it "will not tolerate hate speech", which "creates an environment of intimidation and which may provoke real-world violence". His PayPal account was suspended too, not to mention his Patreon account. The same has happened to other prominent far-right protestors in what can only be described as a major curtailment of democratic rights. Doubtlessly others will be found guilty of "hate speech".

If this can happen to a raggle-taggle of far-right misfits, then imagine what could happen to militant members of the organised left mounting a *genuine* challenge to the establishment and capitalist class ●

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### Notes

1. www.facebook.com/events/2019465291687709/

## Fighting fund

# Rigorous debate

"You're not afraid of having your views challenged, are you?" notes JF, commenting on recent exchanges - not least over Russia 1917 - carried in the *Weekly Worker*.

You're dead right, comrade. It's not for nothing that every issue carries the description, "A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity", at the top of the front page one. And the two - polemic and unity - are linked. It's through rigorous debate that we arrive at the truth - the basis of our programme, upon which the Marxist party must necessarily be based.

But JF knows that and very much appreciates what we're doing. Which is why he wrote a cheque for £20 for our January fighting fund. Of all the left papers, "Only the *Weekly Worker* carries such open and honest debate," he says.

Other appreciative readers this week include PB - who handed over £60 in cash to our editor at last weekend's London

Communist Forum - and new subscriber GB: after receiving his first copy of our paper, he was so impressed (not least by the stamps on the envelope!), he went online to donate £25 via PayPal.

Another PayPal donor was DB (£7), while four comrades paid their monthly standing orders - thanks to BK, SP, TR and KB, who between them contributed no less than £335! Finally a total of £12 was donated to the *Weekly Worker* at the January 12 People's Assembly demonstration.

All that means our running total increased by £459 over the last seven days, taking it to £864. But that's a little bit below par actually - we need £1,750 and we're just over halfway through the month. So if there are any more appreciative readers out there, you know what to do! ●

Robbie Rix

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

**BREXIT**

# Dead as a dodo

Paul Demarty asks what comes next after the crushing rejection of May's Brexit deal by the Commons

So it has come to pass, Theresa May's hopeless Brexit deal has finally met its Waterloo.

Her reckoning in parliament on January 15 - delayed far beyond the point that bourgeois propriety can possibly deem responsible - went the only way it could have done (only, if anything, more so). Defeat by a margin of 230 is quite unprecedented for a serving government. At that point, and on a matter about whose importance - if nothing else - all are agreed, you have really got to wonder whether what you have is a government at all, rather than 202-odd people in a giant government-shaped suit.

It was no surprise, then, that a no-confidence motion was tabled immediately afterwards: though that was a very different matter than a vote on a Brexit deal, even the most loyal of May loyalists must have been shaken by their brush with history the night before. Nevertheless, as expected, they all fell in behind the prime minister on January 16 - after all, however much they despise May's deal, that is nothing compared to the possibility, however slight, of a Labour government led by Jeremy Corbyn.

Watching Theresa May's progress as prime minister is bizarre. The oddity of it consists in her behaving as if she has some clever move saved up for later, except that she does not - like a poker player going all in on a pair of twos. Except that everybody knows she has no way out, so it is as if our poker player, before betting, had inadvertently dropped their cards face up on the table, picked them up, and wagered the family silver anyway.

Thus this 'meaningful vote', cancelled at the end of last year, took place as expected this time, with an historic humiliation for the government. For someone who still somehow insists on portraying herself as a "safe pair of hands", this is really quite an extraordinary waste of parliament's - indeed, the country's - time. The idea is apparently that this will put pressure on the Europeans to make a deal. Quite apart from the obvious deficiencies of this notion - being that a deal acceptable to the Irish government and the Democratic Unionist Party (who both have to be satisfied) remains a logical impossibility - surely this was just as true in December as it is now. Donald Tusk, Jean-Claude Juncker and co wasted no time in dousing any hopes that the 27 other European Union countries would agree (or even bother trying to agree) some new arrangement with May (given her red lines). One thing is for certain, though, her deal is as dead as a dodo.

Easy as it is to mock May's near-psychotic stubbornness, it takes two to tango - or, in the Commons, 650. While May's grim countenance, her coughing fits and disagreements with car doors make her the embodiment of Britain's political stalemate, the latter is really the emergent result of the whole political layout. The Tories govern as a minority supported by a restive DUP, but are internally divided between the 'remainder' City neoliberals and the blood-and-fire Thatcherite-Brexiteer head-bangers, with the usual rump of careerist creeps between the two. All bide their time, with the expectation of offloading May, when it gives them their greatest advantage. Boris Johnson and Dominic Raab have both been flying the flag for their



**A staggering defeat**

own leadership ambitions - which, of course, they do not have (honest, guv - let's allow the prime minister to get on with the job ...).

Across the floor, the picture looked pretty similar until the evening of the Brexit vote. Jeremy Corbyn muttered about calling a vote of confidence in the government, but did not want to until victory was likely. Many of his Labour colleagues - and people on the Scots and Welsh nationalist benches - wanted him to go ahead anyway, because if the motion failed, he would be more easily bounced into supporting a second referendum. It seems that a defeat by 230 was promising enough for him to show his own hand.

May is widely expected to announce, in the next few days, that the article 50 period will be extended at least to July. Leaks from the continent suggested that our friends across the Channel already expected that outcome and the hysteria around the Brexit vote prompted Jean-Claude Juncker and co to clear their diaries for the inevitable emergency visit of Theresa May. (We would not be surprised to discover that, with the ingrained prudence of the vicar's daughter, she had booked her flights well in advance of the vote.) The law of diminishing returns is surely in full effect with such 'emergency' talks, however - cabinet office minister David Lidington's acid line about his colleagues expecting a better deal to spring out of a cupboard in Brussels is more than adequate.

## What next?

We have said before that a way out of the deadlock is surely impossible as long as Theresa May clings onto the keys to number 10. At least part of her reluctance to delay article 50 must be put down to the fact that it makes her quite a bit more replaceable. She

is immune from another confidence vote of her own MPs; but her cabinet could effectively force her hand if they wanted to. A 'unity' leader could then emerge, and - with a bit of breathing room - get his or her feet under the table; a general election may then not necessarily go the wrong way for the Tories.

The problem is, of course, who? Raab is flying the flag for himself, but his resignation as Brexit secretary will surely have gone down as treachery in the minds of Tory 'moderates'; *a fortiori* the merry prankster, Boris Johnson. But perhaps the same is true of May loyalists like Sajid Javid, Jeremy Hunt and so on with their Brexiteer opponents.

Thus the louder mood music seems still to be that of a government of national unity. Nobody will say so, of course; but the groundwork is being laid. Labour and Tory remainers alike are becoming more assertive; talk is always of a second referendum, but if somehow legislation for one made it through parliament, the current government could hardly implement it, so one must be found - without a fresh election.

There is also Gordon Brown's wizard wheeze - supported by sundry bishops and other well-meaning nicensiks of the national elite - to convene a citizens' assembly to decide between various options, on the basis that a properly selected jury will produce decisions with some sort of legitimacy. The trouble is - at least in the case of the supportive politicians - that the motives are too transparent. The Brexit referendum was a grubby affair, of course, but a second referendum would be flagrantly illegitimate; we know that, and Brexiteers in the shires and the northern rustbelt know it too. We also all know that is why the assembly idea is such a source of hope to them;

thus the illegitimacy spreads from one to the other, as the Spartacist League used to say, in a syphilitic chain. The importance of the second referendum and the citizen's assembly alike is not so much for their own inherent charms as means of political decision-making, but as an occasion for a cross-party love-in in the Commons.

What the consequences will be of any of these little wheezes is hard to say. Sure, an overthrow of the referendum result is quite possible, albeit not at all likely to be done openly. The cowardice of the remainers is easily observed by their usage of ruses like a second referendum - oh, pardon me, a 'people's vote', the previous vote having apparently been conducted among chinchillas, or sentient Roombas, or whatever.

And that is surely the problem: their cowardice and dishonesty is obvious to the people on the other side. Chris Grayling was roundly condemned by establishment types for saying that the result of an overthrow of the Brexit vote would be a rise in support for the far right. Saying anything positive about such a degenerate, small-minded serial incompetent as Grayling is a hanging offence *chez* Demarty, but here he is surely stating the obvious. The fact that people are even plotting it *has already given a boost to the far right*, as Anna Soubry could no doubt tell you in the brief moments she has between crocodile tears about all the 'abuse' she suffers.

For readers on the left, as I suppose most of you are, that may seem to be merely a counsel of despair. Yet it is worth a wide-angle view of the matter. We are in this mess primarily because the left was utterly marginal in the years leading up to and following the financial

crash of 2008, which had, as one of its many consequences, the result that David Cameron had the opportunity to indulge his idiotic self-image as a master political strategist. Struggling to get an angle on the issue, the left had two competing guiding ideas. The first was historic opposition to the EU, inherited ultimately from cold war-vintage Communist Party politics. (This was quite as true of the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party in England and Wales, which accommodated to the trade union and Labour lefts, who were in turn primarily taking a lead from the 'official' CPGB.) The other was fanatical hostility to the far right.

We hope it is not necessary to motivate opposition to Stalinism, although in this new age of Red London (a gang of toffee-nosed, flatcap-wearing Trot-trollers) and adolescent-hipster Mao-worship, perhaps we should. Priority-one opposition to the far right, however, *seems* the right sort of attitude to have. It goes with the grain of our politics - radically egalitarian, radically democratic, opposed indissolubly to bigotry and oppression. That is what makes it so dangerous - we observe people who seem to be our very opposite, and make a fallacious leap to viewing them as the main threat to our success.

In truth, anti-far-right politics has triumphed in most cases over anti-EU politics. There just isn't the same level of passion involved when it comes to EU state-aid laws as there is when people are muttering that our neighbours, or those who might have been our neighbours, are being told to 'go back where you come from' and so on. The SWP only occasionally even refers to its pro-Brexit line, for example (and it is now even considering an "active abstention" in the event of a second referendum). Even the *Morning Star* occasionally grumbles about how it does not want a *Tory* Brexit, which rather begs the question of how it failed to notice who the government was when the 2016 vote rolled around.

This paper has argued for years - decades, in fact - that an overriding commitment to 'anti-fascism' or related matters *must necessarily* involve blunting the left's critique of the bourgeois establishment. Surely this has never been clearer, with left remainers - in the name of fighting the evil far right - cashing cheques from billionaires like George Soros and acting as Tony Blair's frontmen. The tragedy is no more than that Chris Grayling *is right* - this stuff is catnip to the far right, and for once, it really is not his fault.

The way out is only to call Blair's bluff - and Rees-Mogg's. Not only was the 2016 referendum a fraud on 'leave' voters; it was also a fraud on remainers, cutting their working class majority off from their brothers and sisters over - what? - a dick move in internal Tory politics. The left has no interest, even now, in choosing between two modes of managed decline for British imperial afterlife, for no other reason than that the working class has no *historic* interest in it either. The point is to remove the possibility of such games altogether, which requires courage in the face of far-right advance, rather than panic, and better resilience to the ultimatums of our enemies ●

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# NHS



Plans for privatisation afoot

# Preparing the final assault

James Linney examines the fraud that is NHS England's 'long-term plan'

Imagine, as Theresa May announced the Tories' 'long-term plan' for the national health service in Liverpool last week, that she was hoping it would give the media something positive to focus on, providing a short respite from her Brexit nightmare.

The published plan - a collaboration between the department of health and Simon Stevens' NHS England - comes on the back of the government's pledge of an extra £20.5 billion per annum over the next five years, equating to a funding increase for the NHS of 3.4% per year on average. No doubt this increase and the fanfare around the long-term plan are a symptom of May's fear of a general election in the near future. She may even be holding out the hope that, when it comes, she will still be prime minister. Either way, the Tories will try to use these funding increases as evidence that they are committed to the NHS, and that in no way have they been systematically cutting its funds and demoralising its workforce since they took office in 2010.

Stevens, for his part, would like us to believe that both the plan and the extra funding derive from his hard work campaigning on behalf of the NHS. Obviously neither of these things are true and, as we will see, despite the positive headlines, the long-term plan simply represents business as usual. And for Stevens - previously CEO of a division of UnitedHealth Group (a giant US private healthcare company) - and the Tories, this business is all about the dismantling and selling off of the NHS.

James Joyce famously said of his novel *Ulysses* that all the enigmas and puzzles he had hidden within it would keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over its meaning. Something similar could be said of the 136-page 'NHS long-term plan' and healthcare workers. However, what at first glance appears gibberish in *Ulysses*, further examination rewards us with deeper meaning and understanding, whereas all the usual confusing, technocratic health jargon in NHS England's document - which superficially could be mistaken for some form of competence - on further examination reveals only negligent optimism, lies and general nonsense.

The first chapter of the document is a prime example. It is titled: 'A new service model for the 21st century', but despite this it contains nothing new. Instead we read the same old soundbites that health service managers have been echoing for years: namely calls for more

'joined-up and integrated services', 'person-centred care', more focus on prevention, the transfer of care to 'the community', etc. None of which are necessarily bad ideas in and of themselves, but they illustrate a pathological disconnect with the realities of the NHS on the ground. A decade of funding withdrawal from both health and social care has left all services in a desperate situation: most hospitals (66%) are running a deficit,<sup>2</sup> there are massive bed and staff shortages, and people are unable to be discharged because social care has been decimated. All of which are substantial barriers to "joined-up" and "person-centred care".

Amongst all the empty jargon of the first chapter though lies a more insidious intention: the commitment to 'integrated care systems' (ICSs), which we are told are "central to the delivery of the long-term plan". They "bring together local organisations to redesign care and improve population health, creating shared leadership and action".

In reality ICSs are simply rebranded 'accountable care organisations' (see my previous article<sup>3</sup>) and what they actually do is force groups of GP surgeries and hospitals to amalgamate into regional networks, mirroring US-style health maintenance organizations (HMOs), thus paving the way for regionalised economies of scale. The result is a more disjointed health service, greatly facilitating the final assault on the NHS in the shape of its capture by private health firms. As GP and author Youssef El-Gingihy writes,

Integrated care systems (already being rolled out) could ultimately become integrated care organisations with a single provider responsible for regional health and social care. There is presently nothing to stop these multi-billion-pound, 10-year contracts from being won by a private health or insurance company.

## Outsourcing

The second chapter of the 'long-term plan' commits the NHS to greater focus on prevention of illness by aiming to reduce smoking, obesity, alcohol abuse and drug use. All very admirable goals and obviously preventing someone from getting an illness is preferable to treating them after they get ill. Yet, when we consider the realities of the NHS's dilapidated resources and services, these commitments read like a bad

joke.

To use where I work in Yorkshire as an example, over the past few years the combination of forced 'efficiency savings' and the opening of the door for private companies to bid for contracts has meant that our local smoking-cessation clinics, weight-loss services and alcohol and drug teams are now all run by private health firms. This has led to an absurd situation, where GP surgeries actually lose money if they prescribe medications to help people stop smoking, while the privately-run weight-loss service just gives patients three months' access to 'Slimming World',<sup>4</sup> but they no longer qualify for NHS dietetic support. These examples - by no means unique to my area - highlight the ongoing process of privatisation by stealth, whereby patients are often unaware that their care is outsourced to these companies. The Health and Social Care Act (2012) forces services to be put up for tender to "any qualified provider" and private health firms simply do what comes natural to them: offer third-rate care on the cheap.

The fun continues in the third chapter of the 'long-term plan', which relates to 'quality improvement'. It is the chapter which has made most of the headlines, but contains little in the way of substantive content. It sets out what amounts to a list of very unachievable 'ambitions', with no real explanation as to how to achieve them. So, for example, we are told that the plan will achieve a "50% reduction in stillbirths, maternal mortality, neonatal mortality and serious brain injury by 2025". This sounds great, but there is no explanation as to how it will come about. The "50% reduction" is a figure that has apparently been plucked out of the air because it sounds impressive. Similarly, we are told that the plan will lead to a 25% increase in cancers being diagnosed in the early stages, which apparently will lead to the saving of 55,000 lives every year. The chapter continues with further arbitrary claims about cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease and diabetes - each claim being as vague when it comes to the achievement of these aims as the others.

Now don't get me wrong: it is admirable to have goals, but all this has to be placed in the context of the actual reality of the crisis within our GP surgeries and hospitals. A crisis that makes all the of the claims of quality improvement absurd - ambitiously absurd, you might say.

Compare, for example, the fantastical claims of saving lives made with the real and evident, indescribable suffering which the more than £40 billion 'efficiency' cuts has caused. Cuts that a *British Medical Journal* study found has already led to more than 120,000 excess deaths in the UK.<sup>5</sup> These 'efficiency savings' are to continue despite the pledged increase in funding - a pledge which is woefully inadequate, not even matching the historical average annual growth in spending of 3.7% and falling below the 4% extra which the Institute for Fiscal Studies estimated would be needed just to enable the NHS to provide basic services. All this means that, despite the bold claims, the current situation, where accident and emergency, cancer care and planned operation waiting times are at their worst ever levels, is only going to get worse.

And it is not just the cuts, the selling-off of NHS services to private companies, hospital closures and bed shortages that reduce this plan's goals to fairy tales: it is also the huge staff vacancies. A recent publication by King's Fund tells us: "Across NHS trusts there is a shortage of more than 100,000 staff ... [and] this number could be more than 350,000 by 2030."<sup>6</sup>

The NHS is haemorrhaging staff and is unable to recruit for several reasons - it is known that existing staff are overworked and victims of a decade of pay freezes, while the nursing bursary has been abolished, university fees have soared and Brexit is on the horizon (to name a few). The solutions offered in chapter 4 of the 'long-term plan' are beyond inadequate. They add up to offering discounted online university degrees for nurses (a terrible idea, amounting to the training of nurses through apprenticeships), cheaper labour and international recruitment: ie, the poaching of staff from poorer countries.

Moving wearily on to the fifth chapter, we are told that the digitalisation of the NHS will be a major focus of the coming 10 years and very soon the healing powers of artificial intelligence and diagnostic apps will be rapturously embraced. Thus, we are ominously informed, the plan will, "encourage a world-leading health IT industry with a supportive environment for software developers and innovators".

Let me be clear - cutting-edge, tested and safe technology should be made available to the NHS, but, as I have previously pointed out, the current capabilities of AI

technology for diagnosing illness have been hugely exaggerated and, despite secretary of state for health Matt Hancock's full endorsement, their safety and effectiveness is entirely untested.<sup>7</sup> The reason for this irresponsible championing of unproven technology is because, as is happening globally, tech firms see health provision, and the NHS specifically, is a market ripe for exploiting. If this tech-company gold rush is allowed, NHS privatisation will go into hyper-drive and standards of care will nose-dive.

## The future

So, as we have seen, despite the positive headlines, the 'long-term plan' equates to little more than the continuation of the scheme to undermine the NHS. For the Tories the very modest increase in funding that they have pledged - although woefully inadequate in preventing the further disintegration of the NHS - will be useful propaganda in the event of an early general election. Meanwhile, the campaign of disguised privatisation continues.

The triggering of a general election and a Labour Party victory, with the injection of funding that would come from this, would offer some hope of arresting this process in the short term. And a reversal of the provisions of the Health and Social Care Act, agreed at the 2018 Labour national conference, would be a step in the right direction. But we must demand much more radical solutions for the NHS. Not only must it be fully funded, but it must be run by democratically elected representatives of its workers. We demand the socialisation of pharmaceutical companies, free university courses and living wages for trainees.

And, of course, we must not forget our own long-term plan - the only one that can offer an end to global health inequality: the replacement of the entire capitalist system with one based on radical, working class democracy - a society of genuine socialism ●

## Notes

1. [www.england.nhs.uk/long-term-plan](http://www.england.nhs.uk/long-term-plan).
2. [www.kingsfund.org.uk/projects/nhs-in-a-nut-shell/trusts-deficit](http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/projects/nhs-in-a-nut-shell/trusts-deficit).
3. 'Planning the final assault' Weekly Worker December 7 2017.
4. [www.slimmingworld.co.uk](http://www.slimmingworld.co.uk).
5. <https://blogs.bmj.com/bmjopen/2017/11/15/health-and-social-care-spending-cuts-linked-to-120000-excess-deaths-in-england>.
6. [www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-11/The%20health%20care%20workforce%20in%20England.pdf](http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-11/The%20health%20care%20workforce%20in%20England.pdf).
7. 'Science, health and profit' Weekly Worker November 22 2018.

**DEBATE**

# Socialism and the national question

Genuine liberation for Palestinians and Israelis alike must be seen in the context of an Arab and global revolution, argues **David Markovich**

**T**his article constitutes an attempt to reveal the ideological, political and programmatic roots of the deep crisis facing the Palestinian national movement. However, the author is not satisfied with analysing the current condition of the Palestinians, but outlines a solution based on the needed international change toward world socialist revolution. The analysis proposed here is based on the scientific Marxist theory, which aims to dialectically expose any phenomenon and consequently put forward practical conclusions. I wish to put the Palestinian question in its unique Arab context and at the same time examine it within the international situation, in which the United States plays a pivotal imperialist role.

The article is divided into three sections:

- The first deals with the crisis facing the Palestinian left, represented, among others, in the Democratic and Popular Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine.
- The second section looks at the impact of the imperialist world order and the false 'solutions' it has produced.
- The final section seeks to analyse the Palestinian question due to the death of the two-state solution following the Oslo accords and the recent political moves taken by the US administration led by president Trump. This third section proposes a political alternative based on the understanding that the national question in general, and the Palestinian national question in particular, cannot be resolved within the imperialist order.

This document calls for some self-examination and self-criticism with regards to the experience of Israeli and Palestinian militants, who decided to embrace the political framework suggested by the Oslo accords. The process of this self-criticism cannot be carried out without a critique of the traditional loyalty of the Palestinian and Israeli left to the doctrine that carried forward the false claim that it is possible to resolve the national question within the framework of capitalism.

It is quite sad to note that this period is one where the Palestinian left renounced its revolutionary role, neglected the Marxist theory and the Leninist method and, as a result, abandoned any programme for a socialist alternative. The remnants of the Palestinian left do not seek to present a viable socialist alternative, but rather to join the Palestinian Authority that rules the West Bank and to maintain false 'national unity' based on principles that took the Palestinian masses to a genuine dead end. This defeatist approach of the Palestinian left brought about its current condition, in which it lacks any mass basis and has no alternative to the Palestinian misleadership led by president Mahmoud Abbas. In providing legitimacy to the Palestinian Authority leaders, whose policies are based on UN resolutions and the politics of the corrupt Arab regimes, the Palestinian left spreads the illusion that it can change the situation in the region through cross-class collaboration with the national bourgeoisie.

However, this article is not just about the call for self-criticism, but rather the need to outline a revolutionary programme for the Palestinian working class; it rejects the claim that revolutionary change is impossible because of American dominance in the world. The dialectical analysis presented here not only points to the fact that revolutionary change is needed, but also places this within the current stage of development of the



**Only socialism can solve national questions?**

capitalist mode of production due to its historic contradictions.

As Marxists we can see how economic crises are accompanied by wars that reveal the weaknesses of the new world order in which we live, the imperialist epoch. The order we face, characterised by Lenin as an order of wars and revolutions, points to the fact that the conditions for socialist revolutions across the globe, including Palestine, are fertile. In Palestine, the only way to present any viable alternative to the moribund two-state solution is to carry forward a struggle for socialist revolution led by the Arab and Jewish workers and peasants - a revolution which will be part of an international socialist revolution across the globe.

This document hopes to contribute

to the reorganisation of the Palestinian revolutionary left, to the revolutionary regroupment of political forces among the Palestinian masses. Only a revolutionary leadership in Palestine, based on Marxist theory and practice, will be capable of liberating the country from many decades of oppression, colonisation and occupation.

## Misleadership

Today, after the collapse of the Palestinian national movement, there is no distinction between the Palestinian proletariat and the bourgeois Palestinian leadership. The Palestinian left is dead, and the internationalist class approach is abandoned. The dominant Fatah party, which is itself moribund, used to preach for a classless 'national unity',

in which any class division would be harmful. In signing the Oslo accords, the Palestinian leaders abandoned the revolutionary agenda of national liberation and the 'national unity' slogan became a mere death-trap.

It is useful to point to the revolutionary nature of the Palestinian national bourgeoisie in the very beginning - it was willing to sacrifice in the long march to build Palestinian statehood. However, the objective obstacles it faced, the material advantage of the Zionist project and the bourgeois nature of the Palestinian leadership pushed it to seek allies in the new capitalist order, which was built following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The result was the fact that the Palestinian bourgeoisie abandoned its historic programme and

allowed the Palestinian working class to be subordinated to new forms of exploitation. This process took place in a situation where the economy of Gaza and the West Bank were subordinated to Israeli interests.

Let us be clear: the collapse of the Palestinian national project was not a result of the treachery of the Palestinian bourgeoisie; it did not move to the Zionist camp. This collapse was a result of the fact that the minority in Palestine, namely the Palestinian left, did not present an alternative to a leadership that endorsed the Oslo accords. Neither the Popular Front nor the Democratic Front were capable of departing from the national consensus and proposing a class alternative to the politics represented by the Arafat-led Fatah party. In addition, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fact that some of the Arab regimes became reliable allies of US imperialism made it easy for the Palestinian bourgeoisie to betray the national interests of the Palestinian masses.

For the Palestinian left, the class struggle became a minor issue, whereas the struggle against Israel was the common denominator. Thus, the way towards a cross-class coalition was paved and the Palestinian working class began to be dominated by bourgeois ideology at the expense of its independent class-consciousness. In addition, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, left organisations in Palestine renounced the principles of Marxism. Among these principles was the call for the dictatorship of the proletariat: namely the call for the elimination of the bourgeoisie as class and for proletarian rule. The Palestinian left abandoned Marxist ideas and it effectively took over the old national programme abandoned by the capitalist elite, which now sought an alternative which fitted into the new capitalist order in the era of US global hegemony.

This programme is based on the narrow interests of the Palestinian bourgeoisie and is related to the strategic interests of the Zionist state. After the Palestinian bourgeoisie opted for collaboration with Israel and abandoned any Palestinian national struggle, there was no excuse for the Palestinian left to continue seeking to ally with it. The core contradiction in Palestine was now that between the masses and the bourgeoisie.

After the defeat of Iraq in the first Gulf War of 1991 the west managed to split the Arab world and win the support of Egypt and Syria, forcing a new political and economic framework on the Middle East countries in order to solve the Arab national question. The principles of this new order were formulated in the Madrid conference of 1992, in which Arab national interests were subordinated to the regional interests of the US, based on exploiting the oil resources of the Middle East and perpetuating Israel's role as a strategic ally of the imperialist west. The US attempt to subordinate and oppress the masses was aided by the collapse of the Soviet Union, following which the various national movements reached a dead end - neither the Kurds in their struggle against Turkey nor the Palestinians in their opposition to the Israeli occupation could achieve liberation. The Oslo accords, signed in 1993, only confirmed that any attempt to solve the national question within the framework of capitalism will lead to the integration of the leadership of the oppressed nation in

the imperialist order. The oppressed peoples found themselves in a trap, having no leadership to lead them toward genuine liberation.

The Palestinian left was forced to deal with this new reality, but had no programme. It wanted Europe and Russia to act as a counterweight to US imperialism. This alternative policy was anachronistic, as the occupation was given international legitimacy - the UN was meaningless in a world situation in which the only important actor was the US. The idea that there is a so-called contradiction between the US and Europe could not serve the Palestinians in their struggle against the Zionist regime. The Balkan war proved that the European countries are loyal partners of the US. Europe welcomed the Oslo accords and up to this very day help finance the Palestinian Authority. There was no wonder, therefore, that the Palestinian left could not convince the Palestinian bourgeoisie to adopt its 'alternative'.

Thus, the decision of the Palestinian and Arab left to abandon Marxist dialectics led to their inability to understand the new situation and its contradictions. This left was wrong in advancing a politics in which the national question had nothing to do with class conflict. Furthermore, it appears that from the very beginning the Palestinian left was not committed to the revolutionary ideas of Marx and Lenin. Its decision to endorse the Soviet Union had been a tactical one: since the socialist camp was not here any more to help the Palestinians, the commitment of the Palestinian left to the Marxist heritage ended. For this left, the ideas of Marxism do not form a programme, but rather pay lip-service to its past. In fact, it has no programme that can distinguish itself as a secular force from the Islamists.

The Palestinian left has also abandoned the internationalist idea that binds the oppressed with the working class across the globe, especially in the west. This situation is regrettable, at a time when the US is attempting to force upon the international working class an order of social instability and austerity. The Marxist concept of history demonstrates that a global revolutionary change (eg, like those that took place after the first and second world wars) will take place only as a result of the competition and contradictions between the imperialist powers. It is evident that only through revolutionary change, resulting in the defeat of US imperialism, will the oppressed nations be capable of liberating themselves from their historic serfdom. Thus, whoever tries to separate the national programme from the socialist one will fall into the imperialist trap. In Ireland, Kurdistan and Palestine there is no possibility of ending national oppression without carrying forward the socialist alternative.

It is important to note that historically the alliance with the Arab bourgeoisie was central for Palestinian and Arab Marxists. The 1948 Palestinian *Nakba* and the defeat of the Arab feudal regimes were the basis for the revolutionary period in the Arab world led by national-bourgeois parties like the Ba'ath in Iraq and the Free Officers movement in Egypt. However, the Arab defeat in 1967 put an end to the hopes of the masses that the national bourgeoisie would liberate them. The roots of the historic period in which we live are in the post-1967 era. Thus, in 1978, Egypt signed a 'peace' agreement with Israel under imperialist pressure; in 1980 Iraq launched a war against Iran in the service of the US and the Gulf states; and in 1990 the Arab countries joined the US in its war against Iraq - a move that paved the way for the Madrid conference, whose aim was to get the Arab world to recognise Israel.

The Palestinian left, especially the Democratic Front, sought to reach a national agreement between the

national bourgeoisie and the working class. It dreamt of a situation in which the toiling masses would lead the bourgeois class, thus rejecting the essence of Marxism, which is opposed to cross-class collaboration. The Palestinian left ignored the fact that the Palestinian bourgeoisie had proved to be an enemy of the masses; it always preferred its own narrow interest, even if that meant collaborating with the enemies of the Palestinians. The Oslo accords symbolised the end of the illusion about the so-called 'revolutionary role' of the Palestinian bourgeoisie, which is committed to collaboration with the Zionist enemy. The Oslo accords exposed the programmatic weakness of the Palestinian left. At first, it called for a boycott of the new Palestinian Authority to force the bourgeois Fatah faction to return to the false 'national unity' of the past. But after this tactic was seen as an utter failure, the Palestinian left called for a new 'national unity' under the slogan of 'ignoring Oslo'. Thus, instead of fighting the bourgeoisie, the left wanted to find a common denominator with it. It did not attempt to put itself forward as an alternative leadership to the bourgeoisie.

The strategy of a new 'national unity with the bourgeoisie' did not start, however, in the early 1990s. In fact, it started after the heroic *Intifada* broke out. Instead of taking advantage of the historic situation to win leadership over the masses, the Palestinian left continued to be committed to unity with the Fatah faction that ruled the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. This commitment was not undermined even after the PLO leadership started its negotiations with US imperialism. The corrupt Palestinian bourgeoisie did not hesitate to use the *Intifada* in order to advance its own interests, hence betraying the working class, as well as the refugees.

## Solutions

The Leninist approach to the national question accepts that the bourgeoisie and its parties will seek to create a false 'national unity' in order to win 'class peace'. The category of 'nation' is itself associated with the rise of capitalism and the national movement is naturally linked with the bourgeoisie. National conflicts stem from the imperialist aspiration to subordinate other nations and the traditional perspective of Marxists was that the national question is bound up with the question of proletarian revolution, as the latter can solve the former.

The Palestinian left abandoned this perspective and therefore was crushed after the Oslo accords. These accords were not opposed by the opposition parties within the PLO, which continued to accept the slogan of 'national unity'. The refusal of the Palestinian opposition to propose an alternative to the politics of the Fatah faction and the fact that it adhered to the 'national unity' perspective were the reasons for its collapse.

The crisis of the Palestinian left cannot be fully analysed without understanding the crisis of the entire Palestinian national movement. The two-state solution in Palestine - a solution adopted by the PLO during the mid- and late 1980s - was the expression of the class relations in the world during the years in which the US and the Soviet Union coexisted 'peacefully'. This 'solution' replaced the old programme of one democratic and secular state from the river to the sea - a maximalist approach which did not find support across world politics.

The PLO was ready to enter political negotiations with the Israeli enemy and accepted the idea of dividing Palestine into two states. It did so under imperialist pressure and because the Soviet Union and the socialist camp became weaker. The ascendancy of Gorbachev in 1985

gave emphasis to Soviet weakness *vis-à-vis* US imperialism: the Soviet Union wanted to ameliorate US anti-Soviet policies and initiated a campaign that stressed the need for world peace and nuclear disarmament. The desire of the Soviet government to appease the imperialist west was reflected in the end of the Soviet support for the oppressed nations. The national liberation movements were forced to adapt themselves to the new international situation.

Yasser Arafat, the PLO leader, understood this new situation quite well. In 1988 he accepted the idea of dividing Palestine into two states and decided to put an end to the armed resistance. After the American victory in the 1991 Gulf war, it was clear to Arafat and his co-leaders that the cold war was over and that a new era was nearing. The UN security council lost its position as mediator between the US and the Soviet Union and endorsed the US in its war against Iraq. The Arab League became meaningless in political terms and enabled the US to declare that UN resolutions constituted the basis for the political rights of the Palestinians.

The Oslo accords expressed the new world order, in which the Oval office was the place in which decisions are taken. The US accepted UN resolutions on the Palestinian question, but deprived them of any real content. The Oslo accords became a political reality because they were formulated and shaped according to the new world order. In fact, these accords buried the historic possibility of solving the Zionist-Palestinian conflict by dividing Palestine into two sovereign states; Israel considered the Oslo politics as useful in terms of expanding and strengthening Zionist colonisation. Furthermore, it regarded the occupied Palestinian territories - including Jerusalem and the major settlement blocks - as a basis to form an invalid Palestinian entity, a 'Bantustan' with no genuine sovereignty. The new situation that was created due to the Oslo accords was characterised by the fact that the national movement in Palestine had been defeated. Israel, a settler state, had emerged triumphant out of the negotiations with the Arafat-led PLO. During the 2000s, there were Palestinian intellectuals, along with some Israeli ones, who proposed an alternative to the reality shaped by the Oslo accords. They proposed a new binational state, in which there would be political equality between the Israelis and Palestinians. This alternative is quite bizarre, as the Zionist movement has always refused to recognise the national rights of the Palestinians. In addition, it epitomises an historic concession in abandoning the Palestinian right to live in their own state. It would grant them 'political equality' without self-determination in a capitalist state to be ruled by the USA's Zionist agents.

Marxists examine the content of a 'solution' rather than its form. Thus, there are honest revolutionaries who endorse the programme of one socialist and democratic Palestinian state, in which full political equality will be bestowed upon all ethnic and religious minorities, including the Jewish population. There are Marxists who support the division of Palestine into two democratic and secular states with socialist content. In both cases, the most important thing is granting the right of self-determination to the two peoples, the Israelis and the Palestinians, without bringing about a bloody civil war among them.

The possibility of freeing the Palestinians from their national oppression does not depend on the form of the solution - namely one or two states - but rather on its character: full political and democratic rights to the two nations in Palestine, genuine democracy in terms of ending Zionist

colonisation and oppression, and the return of Palestinian refugees to their towns and cities. In my eyes, a democratic and secular Israel can exist alongside a democratic and secular Palestine as much as a unified state for the two nations can exist; the question is rather the very nature of this political solution, not its form.

In class terms, the Palestinian problem is bound up with the international struggle to overthrow the capitalist system: namely the prison of the oppressed nations. The fate of the Palestinian working class is associated with the fate of the masses in the developed capitalist countries and in Latin America, Asia and Africa. The fate of Israel, imperialism's agent in the Middle East, is therefore bound up with the fate of the colonialist bourgeoisie: any change in the status of the latter will influence the former. A true change in Israel, a revolutionary one, will put the country in the camp of the international working class and therefore enable its masses to fully enact their right to self-determination. The question is a class one: two democratic and secular states in Palestine, the direct result of a democratic movement, will enable the Palestinian and Israeli proletariats to emerge victorious out of the class struggle. As soon as the national conflict is resolved, the path towards socialism and the unification of the country upon a class basis will be opened up.

It is worth noting that in Zionist eyes Palestinian self-determination cannot be tolerated, as it would mean the destruction of Israel. Therefore Zionist colonisation must continue. However, in this new digital era, the crimes of Zionism are exposed to international public opinion and, although there are many pro-Israeli reactionary regimes, it is evident that the global working class understands the Palestinian problem. There is therefore a need for a new Palestinian leadership that will carry forward and revive the struggle for the liberation of Palestine.

Unfortunately, the situation of the Palestinians reflects the general condition of the Arab world. The Arab regimes are corrupt: the 'Arab spring' movement did not produce new democratic regimes, and the Arabs are divided because of US policies that wish to bind Arab states to its own interests. There is no doubt that sooner or later another 'spring' will come, but the strength of Israel and the weakness of the Arabs will endure as long as the Arab world is not revolutionised by its workers and peasants. The victory of the Arab revolution in whatever form would produce change in Israel too. The prospect of changing Israel's nature and transforming it into a democratic and secular state on the road to socialism depends on the liberation of the Arab masses and in the formation of democratic and secular regimes across the Middle East.

Having said that, it is hard to define the exact framework in which the Palestinian question will be solved. However, any genuine and just solution must come at the expense of the Zionist state that depends on the colonisation of the Palestinian masses. It is evident that the existence of Israel as a regime dedicated to the Zionist cause contradicts historical justice and any viable solution would see the end of Zionist rule over Palestine, thus paving the way towards a truly democratic settlement

of the conflict. At the same time, it is important to stress that the victory of the Palestinian revolution - a working class revolution - depends on the defeat of a Palestinian bourgeoisie that defends its own narrow interests and privileges. This bourgeoisie has accepted the situation in which Palestinian toilers are deprived of their basic human rights. The Palestinian problem is therefore a problem of leadership and programme. It will not be solved unless new revolutionary leadership emerges out of the current crisis.

## Conclusion

Although the current international situation will inevitably produce serious confrontation between the masses and the ruling class, the working class lacks the leadership and the programme to secure its victory. There is no prospect for genuine revolutionary change unless the revolutionary subject - namely the working class - is organised and led by its own parties, able to utilise the crisis of capitalism in order to build a new international socialist order. Without such an alternative, there is no possibility of saving humankind from the terrible dangers embodied in the capitalist system. However, it is necessary to insist that the current political parties of the left fail to provide adequate leadership due to their own internal crisis of leadership and programme.

Many political parties which were associated with Moscow during the previous century are actually dead or totally reformist. The social democratic parties defend the capitalist order and suggest nothing in class terms besides capitulation to the bourgeoisie. As for Maoists or Trotskyists, they cannot overcome their past errors. The Maoists were betrayed by China's policy of accepting the dictates of the capitalist economies, especially that of the US, and learned no lessons from the Soviet past. Meanwhile, the Trotskyists stood for 'political' revolution against the Soviet Union, endorsed movements that were hostile to the socialist camp and eventually contributed to the imperialist effort to eliminate the Soviet Union.

The fact that such politics have managed to survive up to this very day vindicates the assessment that they are nothing but remnants of the pre-globalisation epoch, having an outdated programme which leads them to side with leaderships and states that have nothing to do with the interests of the working class. All of them will be eliminated as a result of the current political and social crises.

There is therefore a great need to understand the nature of our epoch in order to adequately perceive the national question, especially in Palestine. Palestine needs a working class party that will unify the Palestinian masses who live there with the refugees who have been expelled by the Zionists over the years. This party will seek to build a secular, socialist and democratic Palestine, in which Christians, Muslims and Jews will be equal, either alongside a socialist, democratic and secular Israel or in the framework of one unified state that grants national and democratic rights to the two nations. The future lies in the hands of the toilers in Israel and Palestine, who must reject their corrupt leaders and open the road towards genuine liberation ●

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## DEBATE

# Subjective and objective value

Arthur Bough insists that value is labour and has therefore existed in every form of society

In his recent article John Bridge confuses value and exchange-value ('Value is a human creation', November 8 2018). However, replace the term 'value' with 'exchange-value', and what he says would be more or less correct!

According to Marx, equating value and exchange-value opened the door to the proponents of theories of subjective value.<sup>1</sup> That is because value/exchange-value cannot exist without exchange - rather than exchange merely being the means by which value is manifested. Subjectivists say that value is the product of exchange and therefore has no objective basis: it is an expression of how much of one commodity can be obtained for a quantity of some other commodity, varying according to the preferences of those involved.

John would say that the objective basis lies in the amount of social labour required for the production of those commodities, but that is a determination of their *value*, not their *exchange-value* - two logically different and historically divergent concepts. The definition of exchange-value first requires the definition of value. Value is measured - absolutely and intrinsically - in terms of a quantity of labour-time, whereas exchange-value is measured - relatively and externally - as a quantity of some other use-value. Say the value of a metre of linen is 10 hours of labour, whilst its exchange-value is one litre of wine, or one gram of gold. I can only express the value of the linen as an exchange-value if first I know the value of one litre of wine and one gram of gold, and the equality of these exchange-values only exists because each commodity has equal value. Marx says that value/labour is the necessary third term which must pre-exist before exchange-value comes into existence:

In order that this can happen, the *values* of the commodities must already be *presupposed*. The commodity which measures as well as that to be measured must have a *third* element in common. In the second case, this *identity* itself is first established; later it is expressed in the price - either money price or any other price.<sup>2</sup>

And:

The term 'invariable' expresses the fact that the immanent measure of value must not itself be a commodity, a value, but rather something which constitutes value and which is *therefore* also the immanent *measure* of value (*ibid*).

Besides 'use-value', 'value' and 'exchange-value', Marx uses 'individual value', which is crucial in his analysis. At a basic level, it refers to the labour expended by an individual producer - at a more developed level to the labour of one group of producers, as opposed to another. At an even more developed level, it refers to the value of output of one capital, as opposed to that of another, making possible surplus profits.

John quotes Isaak Rubin as saying: "... the product of labour has 'value' in the sense of utility, use-value, but it does not have 'value'." This is wrong, unless 'value' here means 'exchange-value'. Marx writes:

Value is labour .... 'the' labour, which is no more than an abstraction and, taken by itself,

does not exist at all, or, if we take that which is behind it, the productive activity of human beings in general, by which they promote the interchange with nature, divested not only of every social form and well-defined character, but even in its bare natural existence, independent of society, removed from all societies, and as an expression and confirmation of life which the still non-social man in general has in common with the one who is in any way social.<sup>3</sup>

Marx writes that, under communism, value, and its direct measurement in labour-time, will become even more important.<sup>4</sup>

Value, whether of a product of a primitive commune or under communism, or as a commodity in a commodity-producing economy, is nothing more than an expression of the labour-time required for its reproduction. That value can only be expressed as a quantity of labour-time. It takes different forms in different societies. What distinguishes commodity production is not that only then does value come into existence, but that only then value takes the form of exchange-value. Marx says:

What can change in historically different circumstances is only the *form* in which these laws assert themselves. And the form in which this proportional distribution of labour asserts itself, in the state of society where the interconnection of social labour is manifested in the *private exchange* of the individual products of labour, is precisely the *exchange-value* of these products.

Unless the *law of value* applies to all societies, why make this distinction? The value of products prefigures exchange-value, making it possible for exchange-value to arise. Only because products have objectively determined values can they be brought into an exchange relation with other products - as commodities, for the purpose of exchange - and the rate of exchange calculated.

John quotes Yevgeni Preobrazhensky: "... the law of value begins to operate wherever the production relations of commodity and commodity capitalist economy appear."

However, Engels says, in his supplement to *Capital* Vol 3: "Thus, the Marxian law of value has general economic validity for a period lasting from the beginning of exchange, which transforms products into commodities, down to the 15th century of the present era."

Taking Engels literally here then, the law of value does not apply from the 15th century, and the start of capitalist production. Does Engels mean that? No. He means that, from the 15th century commodities do not *exchange* on the basis of their values, as determined by the law of value. Capitalistically produced commodities sell at prices of production, not their exchange-value. If we take Preobrazhensky to mean that the law of value - understood in Engels' sense, as the exchange of commodities according to their exchange-values, and as then modified by the emergence of prices of production - operates during this period, then there is no disagreement.

Marx defines use-value as something providing utility. It need



There is value and value

be neither a commodity nor a product. The air we breathe is a use-value, but not a product. It is not produced by labour. It has no value, but the reason it has no value is because it is not produced by labour, not because it is not a commodity. A product, by contrast, is a use-value that is a free product of nature, but also the product of free human labour. Its use-value is determined by its qualities, as provided freely by nature and by the concrete labour used in its production. It does have value, as a consequence of the labour used in its production, not considered from its concrete nature, but as general social labour, which is why a chair produced by a good carpenter will not only have more use-value than that produced by a bad carpenter, but the labour used in its production will represent more value than that created by a bad carpenter. Each product has an 'individual value', determined by the labour embodied in its production.

Robinson Crusoe might take one hour to catch a fish, but only half an hour to catch the next. He learns to value his production by how long it takes to catch a fish on average. The individual value of his production of fish is simultaneously their social value, because his labour constitutes social labour in his society. When Friday joins him, it is the average of their combined labour-time that determines the value of their output. This labour provided by Robinson and Friday is already, therefore, abstract social labour. Not only is its concrete nature subsumed in its general nature as labour, but the specific differences in the labour of Robinson and that of Friday are also subsumed. Robinson and Friday only take into account their total production of different products.

This is value, not exchange-value. The fish are produced for direct consumption, not exchange. Exchange-value, here, is only that implied in the amount of some other product that they have to give up. That is the basis for determining the exchange-values of different products, as products become commodities, and value takes the form of exchange-value. Within a primitive communist society, some members are more adept at fishing than hunting, etc. These calculations of value enable them to allocate labour-time efficiently, via division of labour. It is the basis of comparative advantage.

Value is absolute, measured in abstract labour-time. The value of a gram of gold can only be expressed as a quantity of labour-time. But exchange-value is relative.

It expresses the value of one commodity as a quantity of some other commodity, its *equivalent form of value*, which as money takes the form of the *universal equivalent form of value*.

John says:

Marx is certainly *not* trying to establish that Crusoe produced commodities with a value corresponding to his labour inputs. The 'value' that concerns Crusoe is utility: in other words, use-value. Exchange-value is but a fading memory.

If Marx is saying that the only 'value' that Crusoe is concerned with is use-value, how could this example provide us with all we need to know about the determination of value? It shows the continual tension between *value* and *use-value*. If value played no part in his consideration, he would quickly find that, though he did not wish to treat with value, value would treat with him. He would find that there was a severe limit on his ability to maximise use-value imposed by the law of value: ie, by the amount of labour-time required for the production of those use-values!

In John's *Anti-Dühring* quote, Engels' reference to value is to exchange-value. He uses 'value' as shorthand for exchange-value. It is the same as Marx says, in relation to communism:

... after the abolition of the capitalist mode of production, but still retaining social production, the determination of value continues to prevail, in the sense that the regulation of labour-time and the distribution of social labour among the various production groups - ultimately the book-keeping encompassing all this - become more essential than ever.<sup>5</sup>

Value does not cease to exist, but money prices cease to exist! Value and exchange-value are two different things, and the former logically and historically precedes the latter, and subsists without it.

Marx notes:

Moreover here he [Adam Smith] confuses - as Ricardo also often does - labour, the intrinsic measure of value, with money, the external measure, which presupposes that value is already determined; although he and Ricardo have declared that labour is "the foundation of the value of commodities", while "the comparative quantity of labour which is necessary to their production" is "the rule which determines the respective quantities of goods which shall be given in exchange for each other" ...<sup>6</sup>

Exchange-value is only possible, once value exists and has been quantified in relation to the commodities being exchanged. The "intrinsic" measure of value is labour-time. The measure of exchange-value is money, which is merely an "external measure". It is impossible to determine exchange-value, and measure it in terms of money prices, unless "that value is already determined": ie, unless the "intrinsic" value of commodities is already determined.

John says:

These selected extracts serve to show that there is a broad

consensus within post-Marx Marxism - ie, the Marxism after the deaths of Marx and Engels - that 'value' refers to the exchange of socially necessary labour-time through the purchase and sale of commodities.

Then that consensus is obviously wrong. Marx and Engels are quite clear that value refers to the immediate, intrinsic measurement based upon labour-time, whilst it is only exchange-value that is expressed relatively in terms of exchange relations between commodities, and specifically money.

John quotes *Anti-Dühring*:

The quantity of social labour contained in a product need not then be established in a roundabout way; daily experience shows in a direct way how much of it is required on the average. Society can simply calculate how many hours of labour are contained in a steam-engine, a bushel of wheat of the last harvest, or a hundred square yards of cloth of a certain quality.

John has already admitted that Marx was saying that labour is the only creator of value, and its measure is labour-time. So Engels here is saying what they have said several times. Under commodity production, value is measured indirectly, as exchange-value, and under capitalism as prices of production. Marx calls it an *external*, indirect measurement of value, as opposed to the *intrinsic*, direct measurement which is labour-time. Engels repeats Marx's comment, in *Capital* Vol 3, chapter 49, that, in a communist society, it will be possible to calculate value directly in labour-time, and so allocate labour-time accordingly, so as to maximise use-value/welfare.

People can choose whatever words they wish as labels, but, having accepted that only labour creates value, and that its measurement is labour-time - which incidentally contradicts John's argument directly, because exchange-value is not measured by labour-time - he should tell us, when such a communist society directly calculates that it will take one million hours of social labour-time to build a hospital, what name he wants to give to this other than the 'value' of the hospital. Marx and Engels pointed out that it is necessary to have these 'values' in front of us, in choosing how to use this available one million hours of social labour-time, to decide whether to obtain the use-value of the hospital rather than five schools, and so on.

The values of the hospital and of the five schools do not take the form of exchange-values. The allocation of labour-time is determined directly, rather than via exchange. But if value is created only by labour, and its measure is labour-time, it seems that, to quote John, "There is the risk of generating more heat than light ... and for no good purpose at that". To then refuse to accept that the thing that has been calculated in measuring this required labour-time is the value of the hospital, school, etc! ●

## Notes

1. K Marx *Theories of surplus value* Moscow 1969, chapter 20, p155.
2. *Ibid*.
3. K Marx *Capital* Vol 3, chapter 48.
4. K Marx *Capital* Vol 3, chapter 49.
5. *Ibid*.
6. K Marx *Theories of surplus value* Moscow 1969, chapter 15.

REVIEW

# Art for our class

Christine Lindey **Art for all: British socially committed art from the 1930s to the cold war** Artery Publications, 2018, pp240, £25

**“Culture is ordinary” - Raymond Williams (*The long revolution* 1961)**

Culture is not some afterthought - either by dominant structures or challenging groups. It is part of the drive for a way of life and ways of seeing social experience. Any movement that can be claimed as affecting society will inspire some people to make art. For example, after the French Revolution, and indeed before, artists took on the ideas of republicanism and enlightenment, and made new forms which both embodied and communicated them.

Christine Lindey's account, rich in detail and illustration, gives us a particular corner of the European left - Britain (mainly England) from World War I to the early 1960s. This is a history of tension and debate over the forms to be used, alongside how the artists survived and shaped their work in response to several concerns - not least the self-requirement to reach as many people as possible. Lindey is the author of five books, including *Art in the cold war*, and has been an associate lecturer at Birkbeck College and the University of the Arts.

There were socialist artists before 1917, but afterwards the question became that of how to be a revolutionary one. The 1914-18 war and the revolution in Russia raised the promise of an alternative civilisation - not the old one with feudal trappings and a capitalist motor, but an anti-imperialist, communist, world society. Young artists in Britain turned to how they might help this project progress. Their resolve was later strengthened by depression and fascism - more proof of the ongoing decline facing the national system and class society.

They looked to other countries in the rest of Europe and to European refugees for models of art practice. Impressionism and post-impressionism gave way to forms and activities from isolated Soviet Russia and defeated Germany: constructivism and *Neue Sachlichkeit* respectively.

In 1935, these concerns led to the formation of the Artists International Association (AIA), which stood for “the unity of artists against fascism and war and the suppression of culture”. Taking over ideas from the Popular Front in France, the AIA's first major exhibition was a diverse affair. Called *Artists against fascism and war*, it featured traditionalists like Laura Knight and Augustus John, as well as younger avant-gardists such as Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth, alongside new committed artists like the painter Cliff Rowe and the Hungarian sculptor, Peter Laszlo Peri. The show had a further international contingent in works by Fernand Léger and Ossip Zadkine as well as recent Russians like Mikhail Sokolov and Yuri Pimenov.

Though many of these artists identified with communism in some way, they were not all taken with the official Soviet style of ‘socialist realism’ (proclaimed in 1934). In fact the use of this naturalistic, often prettifying, approach was one of the objects of debate within the AIA, as well as the wider issue of accessibility. If you are a committed artist dedicated to portraying and reaching out to the working class, should you produce works in a difficult, modernistic style? There were the examples of artists like Käthe Kollwitz and the Mexican muralists, who managed to be realist and modernist at the same time, but there was no ‘party line’ at the AIA. Cliff Rowe went on to produce the art-deco-looking *Woman cleaning a locomotive* (1942), as well as murals for the Electrical Union's teaching college, while Pearl Binder produced cartoons

which side-stepped the problem of what was ‘realistic’ entirely.

With World War II dramatically extending the struggle against fascism, these anti-fascist artists became part of the war effort. However, as well as producing government posters and leaflets, some were still committed to subversive art. Priscilla Thornycroft painted *Underground* (1940), which presented an urban landscape, where posters proclaiming victory looked down on women carrying a body in a sheet; zeppelins and searchlights crowded the night sky. This was no official image of cheerful cockney resilience.

The war gave many artists gainful employment and made them part of a general effort to give anti-fascism a cultural edge. But, of course, many official organisations, like the forerunner of the Arts Council and the centuries-old Royal Academy, were hostile to the more socialist-inclined artist.

## Post-war

The end of the war brought the new Labour government and the rebuilding of Britain with the new NHS and town planning. An AIA sculptor like Peter Peri found himself part of these plans. Peri for me is the discovery of the book. I had heard the name before in an essay by critic John Berger and I knew he was partly the model for the artist in Berger's novel *A painter of our time*. But I had no notion of his work or the fact that his sculptures still exist on public display. Peri became so much part of public art in the post-war state that a pair of his figures were chosen to decorate an entrance to the 1951 Festival of Britain. His most interesting works are his most public. They are often made of a concrete mixture - which, considering the bad reputation concrete as a material acquired in post-war housing, makes him an exception even among radical artists.

Peri's work was optimistic, but never soporific. His imagery is lyrical rather than heroic. His sculptures hang on brick walls in relief or thrust out from buildings like dancers or athletes defying gravity. Yet never do they depict stem, muscular, ‘good’ workers: they are moving reminders of a healthy possibility. His *Footballers* (1949) slide across the wall of a Vauxhall housing estate in London. They wear the long shorts of the time, but of the foregrounded figures one can be read as black and one as white, which is today's story. On another wall a woman and some children (*Mother and children playing* 1951-52) hold hands in a circle - survivors of the last air raid or defiant in the face of the next (nuclear) one? On the front of Longslade School, a figure, *Atom Boy* (1956), stretches out, holding a large, abstract shape of the atom itself, as if to claim it as under his control or thrusting it forward for our judgement. These works chime with their environment of brick and tarmac - they couldn't be other than modern - but they speak an idiom, imply an architecture that is light and human-centred, not grim and corporate-intimidating.

But, as the first of these sculptures went up, the tenor of the times was changing. The works of pre-war modernism were now scooped up by a much more confident market - in the USA. London commercial galleries and auction houses too began to exploit the new range of acceptable high art. Meanwhile, left artists found work as illustrators during the boom in magazines, and as teachers in the expanded education sector. While Peri went on making pieces for housing estates, Henry Moore became famous as the modern British artist.

In 1950, the outbreak of war between north and south Korea was a good excuse to put charges on previously free NHS

prescriptions to pay for British aid to the US intervention. Artists set up Artists for Peace, a campaign against war, especially the nuclear kind. Henry Moore even did a work, *Warrior with shield* (1954), which addressed the issue of militarism damaging the human. But the binary opposition of the ‘Soviet Enemy’ and the ‘Free World’ was everywhere. In the AIA, a reaction set in to oust those artists who were ‘political’. Critics like Herbert Read, who called himself an anarchist, identified modern art as having nothing to do with politics - though his favourite group, the French surrealists, had opposed colonialism in Morocco and met up with Leon Trotsky.

In 1953, new administrators at the AIA changed the constitution of the organisation which declared that they would no longer “take part in political activity”. On all sides, advanced art and its techniques were being depoliticised. The CIA in Washington funded exhibitions to go round Europe to impress on intellectuals the freedom of abstract painters like Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. By the late 1950s though, official communism and its ‘socialist realism’ had come under criticism from a New Left in universities and coffee clubs. Critics like Ernst Fischer and John Berger did not reject socially concerned art, but kept open the means and forms artists might use. Berger hoped that the art-makers of the ex-colonial states might use the discoveries of early modernism for their own decolonising purposes.

Fischer, an Austrian who had lived under Stalinism, wrote:

True socialist realism is therefore a critical realism ... The artist is no longer engaged in a romantic protest against the world ... [But] the equilibrium between the ‘I’ and the community is never static; it must be established again and again through contradiction and conflict (chapter 4, *The necessity of art*, 1959).

It was not a case of only satire or portraits of great leaders. As to form, Fischer said that the art work is like the play of nature. For example, matter crystals form symmetries not because they are subject to mathematical law - as if art can only take certain ‘essential’ forms - “but because it is the natural property of atoms to form groupings together at certain intervals under certain conditions” (*ibid*). Just as evolution had not demanded that a horse be a certain size for all time, or that the human cousin of chimps could never lose her red pudenda that alerts a male to sexual readiness, art does not have to be conceived in one style.

Nevertheless, the concerns that Lindey describes in the 1920s-50s - that is, concerns with reaching a public, as well as not coming up with the same-old same-old - went on being debated afresh in new areas like the popular novel and cinema. What is realism? What will subvert conformist notions? What will challenge conservative ways of seeing politics and the working class?

## After the 60s

By the late 60s the debates about accessibility and realism had reached television. Here filmmakers like Ken Loach and Tony Garnett were faced with a medium that did not shy away from portraying the working class, if mainly in soap operas and cop shows. In fact these were some of the most widely watched programmes. Yet, these new makers asked, were they true?

John Berger also used TV to investigate art. In alternative media, newspapers began to be designed in different ways and

the ‘hippy underground’ press supplied ideas for left papers, like the greater predominance of illustrations. The editors of *Oz*, the number-one underground magazine, even set up a paper - *Ink*, which was specifically aimed at those interested in working class art, sport and leftwing politics. However, it only lasted a few issues, as the underground was being easily bankrupted by court cases over ‘obscenity’ (and its own contradictions, such as its sexism versus feminism?) One *Oz* editor even went off to join the entrepreneur revolution of the late 70s by selling fold-out mags on kung fu movies and other trends. Thatcherism was upon us.

However, art that is socially committed, or at least politically challenging, has made a prominent comeback in the 21st century. Gallery artists like Sonia Boyce and Steve McQueen brought forward knowledge of new British experiences as the offspring of empire migrants. Work focusing on subjects such as the Iraq war, homelessness and sexual violence have proved that even the upmarket gallery system of today is not immune to a bit of social consciousness, however limited we might find it.

The above has not done justice to the detail of *Art for all*, but the only fault I could find in the book was with the reproductions. They are superbly printed, but often far from the references to them in the text. Nor are they numbered, which would help us locate the works themselves if we wanted to check them against that text. There may be some technical reason for this (though John Berger's art books never had this trouble), but it results in a problem of accessibility.

I take two lessons from this book: one following that generation of artists; the second in reaction to them.

Firstly, these artists constantly discussed their product and their context. Criticism was essential to their practice. So, whatever forms we come up with, whatever arenas we contribute to, evaluation and proposal are necessary. Not constant praise or curt dismissal, but exploration of what is being made and could be made.

Secondly, looking at the workers in the art of yesteryear, this is one subject that has changed. There was an assumption then of a united working class - an obvious common condition which could make the people in a picture appear homogenous. One or a few figures in a single place could stand for the whole class, whether in a mural of Mexicans put upon by capital or Londoners in a street battle.

Now we have a class that is indeed united by more and more similar treatment by trans-global capital, but it is not *unified*, being divided by position, by ideology, by nationalism - the unemployed or overworked youth, the migrant cleaner, the well-paid electrician, the non-unionised shop staff and the strong transport union. Differences have always existed, created by the uneven economy of capitalism, but now they seem more disparate, exacerbated by a consumption-led individualism and fear of the other (whether defined as ‘underclass’ or ‘gammon’).

This indeed would make a good subject for our new arts - for the independent film, graphic novel, podcast, verse novel and any new art events in photography or assemblage. We all know our rulers are corrupt - from racist politicians to tax-evading multinationals. It is the people - ‘the People’ - who must replace them in a new system, on whom the gaze of art deserves to be fixed ●

Mike Belbin

# What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# weekly Worker

**Royalists and  
MEK would  
be wiped out  
within hours**

## Yearning to unleash mayhem

Yassamine Mather examines what lies behind Israeli air strikes against Iranian targets in Syria

While British news has been dominated by Brexit and the government shutdown in the US, the Middle East has seen the conflict between Israel and Iran dangerously escalate. Israeli aircraft undertook a series of attacks against targets in Syria. According to the official Syrian news agency (SANA), on January 11 Israeli planes fired missiles over Damascus, but Syrian artillery managed to “shoot down most of them”. SANA claimed that the jets, launched from Galilee, caused damage, but inflicted no casualties.

However, Hezbollah’s Al-Manar TV carried reports of Israeli planes targeting many areas from the suburbs of eastern Damascus all the way to the village of Dimas in the west, near the Lebanon border. And by January 14 it was clear that, even by the standards of recent Israeli air raids, this was an extensive operation. Israeli premier, Binyamin Netanyahu, told reporters: “Israel has carried out hundreds of attacks against Iranian and Hezbollah targets”, adding: “The accumulation of recent attacks proves that we are determined more than ever to take action against Iran in Syria.”

According to an interview with general Gadi Eisenkot of the Israel Defense Forces, published in the *New York Times*, Israel has carried out “thousands” of attacks against Iranian targets in Syria:

We noticed a significant change in Iran’s strategy. Their vision was to have significant influence in Syria by building a force of up to 100,000 Shi’ite fighters from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq. They built intelligence bases and an airforce base within each Syrian air base.<sup>1</sup>

The headline - ‘The man who humbled Qassim Suleimani’ - is also noteworthy. In the same interview Eisenkot was asked why Iran’s general Soleimani was still alive. Clearly the interviewer’s assumption was that the assassination of foreign military personnel is now the norm for Israel. Eisenkot refused to answer.

All this, a week after Mike Pompeo’s visit to the Middle East, indicates how dangerous the situation has become. We know what the US secretary of state meant when he claimed on January 10 that despite the US withdrawal from Syria, Washington will work to “expel every last Iranian boot from Syria”. Of course, he was not referring to direct US intervention, but action by its allies.

### Rattled

Amongst all this we have talk from national security advisor John Bolton. He has always wanted to launch a direct attack on Iran and Donald Trump’s increasingly unhinged presidency seems to offer the opportunity. State department and Pentagon officials are so worried about Bolton’s Iran regime-change plans that they have given details of his military and strategic “enquiries”



Israeli warplane takes off from Galilee

to the *Wall Street Journal*. According to these officials, quoted by the *WSJ*, they were “rattled” last year by Bolton’s request to the Pentagon to “provide the White House with military options to strike Iran”.

Bolton was under-secretary of state for arms control and international security from 2001 to 2005 during George W Bush’s presidency. He was an enthusiast for the Iraq war - one of those responsible for exaggerating Saddam Hussein’s military capabilities in what can only be described as manufactured misinformation. He continues to justify the disastrous invasion and occupation. Even at the height of the Iraq war, he was advocating an attack on Iran. In March 2015, Bolton wrote an opinion piece for the *New York Times* which was headlined, ‘To stop Iran’s bomb, bomb Iran’. It goes without saying that he was an opponent of the Iran nuclear deal.

This week, as Iranians celebrate the 40th anniversary of the shah’s flight (January 16 1979) after the popular uprising, US hawks, such as Pompeo and Bolton, want to go to war with a view to installing a US-compliant regime. According to US media, Bolton is pursuing two parallel lines. This week he repeated what he had already said in Tel Aviv in early January: “We have little doubt that Iran’s leadership is still strategically committed to achieving deliverable nuclear weapons.” Of course, as with Netanyahu’s repeated claims of newly discovered nuclear plants in Iran, there no evidence of this - UN authorities, as well as the

US intelligence services, completely rejected these claims.

The second line aims to defeat Iran’s allies in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. A tall order, especially in the latter two countries, where groups close to the Islamic Republic are actually in government. That is why for the time being attacking Iran’s allies and military bases in Syria remains the order of the day. It is a task delegated for the time being to the Israel Defense Forces.

Like his boss, Donald Trump, Bolton has no time for international law, in fact back in 1999 he gave a more honest interpretation of US foreign policy:

It is a big mistake for us to grant any validity to international law, even when it may seem in our short-term interest to do so - because, over the long term, the goal of those who think that international law really means anything are those who want to constrict the United States.

Of course, Bolton’s prediction of July 2017 that the Islamic regime in Iran would fall before the start of 2019 is a source of much mockery in Tehran. In a meeting hosted by the loony cult, Mojahedin-e Khalq, he stated that the Trump administration should embrace the goal of immediate regime change and recognise MEK as a “viable” alternative: “And that’s why, before 2019, we here will celebrate in Tehran!”

As soon as any of us point to such US madness, supporters of the

MEK cult or the ex-shah’s son, Reza Pahlavi, accuse us of supporting Iran’s Islamic Republic! Nothing could be further from the truth. There are two fundamental reasons why people like me oppose the Trump administration’s regime change plans:

1. Almost 16 years after the invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq, no-one in pro-imperialist circles has learnt a single lesson. As I have said before, the current ‘regime change alternatives’ considered by Trump, Bolton and Pompeo make Ahmed Chalabi - George W Bush’s proposed replacement for Saddam Hussein - look like a wise choice. The occupation, and Chalabi’s appointment to the Iraq interim council, were disastrous. Bolton should have faced criminal charges for falsifying information about Saddam’s claimed ‘weapons of mass destruction’. That the likes of him are not only free, but can make decisions on US foreign policy, strengthens the religious right in the Middle East.

2. The current Iranian regime is nothing like Saddam’s Ba’athist government. For all its betrayal of almost every aspiration of the February 1979 uprising (equality, freedom, independence), it maintains a layer of religious, rightwing supporters who will not hesitate to fight to the last drop of blood to defend the hell created by the corrupt, repressive Shia mullahs and their civilian apparatchiks. Some of them will fight ‘regime change’ military operations because their livelihood - their very existence - depends on the

survival of the regime. Others will do so because they are blind followers of the supreme leader.

### Grand plan

So what is the grand military plan considered by the likes of Bolton? Crippling sanctions, presumably to increase internal dissent, air attacks and the bombing of nuclear facilities, as well as key military bases - and then leaving the rest to the foot soldiers of Mojahedin-e Khalq and/or supporters of the ex-shah.

Clearly no-one with an iota of intelligence amongst the anti-Iran hawks has actually taken the time to analyse the actual balance of forces. What remains of MEK’s supporters are mainly elderly men and women, now based in Albania! Even if Bolton organised flights to carry the 300 or so MEK supporters from Tirana to Tehran, the idea that they would fight for US interests once they arrived is laughable.

As for Pahlavi’s supporters, they are mainly in the United States. Most of them voted for Trump and keep on calling for ‘intervention’. But there is also a handful of them inside Iran. Some have been completely taken in by the wall-to-wall coverage of the ‘golden era’ under the shah, presented by Saudi-financed TV stations. But don’t expect them to do any fighting in real life.

In reality Iranians who were to cooperate with a US attempt to impose regime change from above would be wiped out by hard-line supporters of the Islamic Republic within a few hours - leaving us with an even more repressive and brutal regime.

Of course, as with Iraq and Syria, the more astute US military/political strategists are looking for allies amongst Iran’s national minorities: Kurds, Arabs, Baluchis, etc, who have genuine and valid grievances against the regime, and whose political leaders are seeking power with the aid of the US and Saudi Arabia.

And here lies a real danger. We could see endless civil wars as the US seeks to Balkanise Iran into a series of small dependent states. Such a scenario would make the civil war in Syria look like a storm in a teacup ●

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### Notes

1. www.nytimes.com/2019/01/11/opinion/gadi-eisenkot-israel-iran-syria.html.

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