

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly **worker**



**Left high and dry:  
PCS election for AGS  
descends into farce**

- Letters and debate
- AWL and witch-hunt
- Stalinism and literature
- Eurozone woes

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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# NATIONAL GOVERNMENT REAL DANGER



# LETTERS



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

## Holy script

Comrade Jack Conrad's great *tour de force*, 'Marxism versus holy script' (January 10), falls flat when we examine the details. He seeks to prove, in lockstep with Lars T Lih, yet again, that Kamenev (Trotsky's brother-in-law), Stalin and Zinoviev were fundamentally right to support the Provisional government after the February 1917 revolution before Lenin returned to reverse this with his April theses. He also proposes that Kamenev and Zinoviev were fundamentally right, or at least had good reasons, to oppose the insurrection that was the October revolution and it is incorrect to fault them for opposing the Bolsheviks for not forming a coalition.

However, the best of the Menshevik-Internationalists had joined the Bolsheviks in August, demonstrating Lenin was right against the vacillating pair. The remaining Menshevik-Internationalists won only two out of 306 seats in all-Russian central executive committee at the Third Congress of Soviets in January 1918. But, even after the victorious insurrection, the two argued that the Bolshevik Party would be unable to maintain itself in power unless they entered into a coalition with the other socialist parties: ie, the Social Revolutionists and the Mensheviks.

This was the proposal that Lenin dubbed 'treason', in the Lost Document - the minutes of the meeting of the historic session of the Petrograd Committee of the Bolsheviks held on November 1 (14) 1917. which the bureaucracy attempted to expunge from the records in 1927, because it contained such remarks as this from Lenin:

"As for conciliation [with the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionists], I cannot even speak about that seriously. Trotsky long ago said that unification is impossible. Trotsky understood this and from that time on there has been no better Bolshevik."

The capitulators to Menshevism were now obviously Kamenev and Zinoviev, with Stalin taking no open position, because he was a centrist in awe of Lenin:

"And now, at such a moment, when we are in power, we are faced with a split. Zinoviev and Kamenev say that we will not seize power [in the entire country]. I am in no mood to listen to this calmly. I view this as treason. What do they want? Do they want to plunge us into [spontaneous] knife-play? Only the proletariat is able to lead the country."

The last sentence here is important, because he had removed all doubt on what he meant in his April theses, defended so well against the rightists in his 'Letters on tactics', April 8-13 - great reading from volume 24 of his *Collected works*:

"The person who now speaks only of a 'revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' is behind the times; consequently, he has in effect gone over to the petty bourgeoisie against the proletarian class struggle; that person should be consigned to the archive of 'Bolshevik' pre-revolutionary antiques (it may be called the archive of 'old Bolsheviks')..."

"Indeed, reality shows us both the passing of power into the hands of the bourgeoisie (a 'completed' bourgeois-democratic revolution of the usual type) and, side by side with the real government, the existence of a parallel government, which represents

the "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry". This 'second government' has itself ceded the power to the bourgeoisie, has chained itself to the bourgeois government.

"Is this reality covered by comrade Kamenev's old-Bolshevik formula, which says that "the bourgeois democratic revolution is not completed"? It is not. The formula is obsolete. It is no good at all. It is dead. And it is no use trying to revive it."

Is this a dogmatic, ill-informed Lenin, as comrade Jack would have it? This widely testified-to truth of the course of the Russian Revolution is a myth invented by Trotsky in his *Lessons of October* in 1924 and far too many foolish or ill-intentioned leftists - and even uninformed bourgeois academics, like EH Carr presumably, were taken in by him, we must believe. In fact, so wrong is that take on the revolution that the very opposite is the truth, comrade Jack assures us, when he reaches the apogee of his political argumentation:

"Subsequently, Lenin talks of the differences being 'not very great', because Kamenev had come round to his viewpoint. Unfair - if anything, Lenin had come round to Kamenev's viewpoint, at the very least on the peasantry. But what we are really dealing with is the *vozhd* asserting his authority, taking back the reins of leadership. To do that he had to reassure, clarify and if need be correct statements that had been hastily written or wrongly informed."

Oh, well done there, the whole world has got the history of the great revolution upside down and completely wrong. The real leaders were Kamenev, Zinoviev and Stalin and not these bumbling idiots, Lenin and Trotsky, who not only did not understand revolution, they did not understand the peasantry (we will deal with this later) and Marxism in general, like this sagacious triumvirate.

Jack's arguments continually confuse strategy with tactics, and this is at the root of the whole confusion he perpetrates. That and the failure to understand the role of the peasantry - why there cannot be a two-class dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, revolutionary or otherwise. Lenin's April theses set the *strategic* goal of the second, socialist revolution. Kamenev, followed by Stalin and then Zinoviev, led the opposition to this - their strategic goal was a bourgeois revolution led by the working class, which entailed support for the Provisional government. Trotsky had pointed out the flaw with this argument back in 1905; once the working class had taken revolutionary power, it was impossible to expect them to tolerate bourgeois exploitation. This central aspect of his permanent revolution theory was fully accepted by Lenin, as is graphically illustrated in the above exchange with Kamenev in his April 'Letters on tactics'.

Once Lenin had won that month-long argument, then the tactical question was over the time of the insurrection when circumstances were right. But even then, as John Reed tells us, "Riazanov and Kamenev had both opposed the insurrection, and felt the lash of Lenin's terrible tongue." But comrade Jack feels that "Lenin and Trotsky proved audacious; Zinoviev and Kamenev cautious".

Lenin wrote of this incident on December 25 1922, in his 'Testament': "I shall not give any further appraisals of the personal qualities of other members of the CC. I shall just recall that the October episode with Zinoviev and Kamenev was, of course, no accident, but neither can the blame for it be laid upon them personally, any more than non-Bolshevism can upon Trotsky."

Lenin was prepared to forgive because they had apologised and acknowledged their errors. By 1924 they were repeating the same 'errors', committed before the April theses and during the October revolution. Trotsky had to take up the fight against them. Zinoviev admitted as much during the brief period of the Joint Opposition in 1926-27. Trotsky recounts:

"At the joint plenum of the central committee and the central control commission of July 14 to July 23 1926, Zinoviev said: 'I have made many mistakes. But I consider two mistakes as my most important ones. My first mistake of 1917 is known to all of you ... The second mistake I consider more dangerous because the first one was made under Lenin. The mistake of 1917 was corrected by Lenin and made good by us within a few days with the help of Lenin, but my mistake of 1923 consisted in ...

"In this manner, Zinoviev admitted his mistake of 1923 (in waging a struggle against "Trotskyism" and even characterised it as much more dangerous than that of 1917 - when he opposed the October insurrection!)"

**Gerry Downing**  
Socialist Fight

## Don't be rude

Eddie Ford worries that an increased police presence on College Green in response to verbal and physical intimidation of MPs and lobby journalists amounts to a threat to our freedom to protest ('Our rights threatened too', January 17).

I venture to say that it does not. In political debate there should be no space for the sort of vile abuse spouted by the likes of James Goddard. Eddie quotes Mr Goddard on Anna Soubry - a "lying trollop", a "morally repugnant scumbag". Such language would get you censured, ejected and suspended from any democratic forum. And rightly so.

When the great Nye Bevan branded the Tory Party as "vermin" in a speech, he did neither himself nor the Labour Party any favours. Freedom to give gratuitous, inflammatory, intimidating abuse is not the same as freedom to protest.

We are civilised people. We win the revolution by argument and subsequent 'push and shove' by the working class. We don't need 'potty-mouth' barbarism in the ilk of Goddard to move our cause forward.

**Robert Leslie**  
email

## Our interests

Paul Demarty, I think, mischaracterises the nature of the debate over the European Economic Community/European Union, going back to the 1970s ('Dead as a dodo', January 17). He says two factors defined the approach of the left: the first, going back to the 1970s and the cold war, was historic hostility to the EU; the second was fanatical hostility to the far right.

It is completely wrong to say that any part of the left's attitude at that time was based on fanatical hostility to the far right. The far right, in the form of the National Front, which was its main representation, supplemented by various splinter groups, was certainly a growing force, and engaged in regular physical-force activities. But, compared even to the several thousand members of the Communist Party, of the Socialist Workers Party, Militant, along with the numerous other far-left groups, such as the Workers Revolutionary Party, let alone the many thousands of Labour activists - even at a time of relative morbidity of the LP - they were insignificant. Turning out to stop the NF was almost inevitably a confrontation between the massed ranks of the left against the

massed ranks of the police sent out to protect a small number of fascists, who cowered, as they slunk into some meeting hall, rather than any mass confrontation between far left and far right - other than on a few occasions, where the fascists managed to mobilise significant numbers to stage a march.

The disagreement within the left had no relation to a response to the far right, but was almost entirely a continuation of the old argument between Stalinism and Trotskyism over the question of socialism in one country, which breaks down to a debate over the issue of the attitude of Marxists to nationalism and internationalism. In the 1960s, the far left held to an internationalist position of abstention over joining the EEC. The Communist Party argued for opposition, reflecting the interests of the Moscow bureaucracy.

The debate was not just over the attitude to the EEC: it was also over opposition to the nationalistic *British road to socialism*, which reflected the Stalinist policy of socialism in one country. It also carried over into the debates over the Alternative Economic Strategy, which in its dominant formulations was based upon the same kind of economic nationalist agenda of proposing import controls and so on, which was the policy of the Communist Party, and its fellow-travellers within Tribune and the Bennite left within the Labour Party.

It was that division that drove the debate, not any concern about, let alone fanatical hostility to, the far right. What intensified the debate at that time was the fact that those that came from the more orthodox Trotskyist background found themselves having to defend that internationalist position, as the larger organisations, such as the SWP and Militant - that had driven further and further in the direction of economism and syndicalism/reformism respectively, as they sought to capitalise on the gains in recruitment they had made amongst industrial workers during the period of intensified industrial struggle of the late 1960s and early 1970s - abandoned their previous positions, for fear of losing their periphery to the CP and Bennite left, as they promoted the more populist, nationalist solutions of 'blame the foreigner, blame the EU, blame foreign imports' and so on.

In fact, in the 1970s, any chance of pulling out of the EEC was not to be found in the influence of the far right, but of the left. The Tory Party, unlike today, was firmly under the sway of its EEC-supporting wing, most visibly represented by Heath. The reactionary wing, representing the small-shopkeeper capitalists, as depicted in David Edgar's *Destiny*, were a small minority. The anti-EEC lobby, apart from the mavericks like Powell, was overwhelmingly made up of people like Michael Foot, Benn, Peter Shore, Barbara Castle and so on.

Fast-forward to today, and what we see is that those sections of the left that abandoned the internationalist position in the 1970s have continued to abide by the nationalist stance they adopted at that time, though the dynamics of why they have done so has varied. The Militant/Socialist Party is just as a left reformist outfit, whose programme of parliamentary reforms, and nationalisation of the top monopolies, fits fairly seamlessly with the old nationalistic concepts of the CP's 'British road to social democracy', whilst the SWP's two defining characteristics - spontaneism/build a bigger demo/more militancy, and Sismondist anti-capitalism/anti-imperialism - lead it inevitably into a knee-jerk opposition to anything that seems to be in the interests of the development of capitalism.

For my part, at least, it's opposition

to that reactionary nature of the forces of left nationalism that is the basis for opposing Brexit/Lexit, not any consideration of whether doing so is required in order to assuage some fanatical hostility to the far right. In fact, the driving force today behind Brexit is not the far right, nor the far left or the Stalinists: it is the reactionary wing of the Tory Party, representing all of those small-trader capitalists. It is they that have captured the Tory base, and via the European Research Group exert their influence over the Tory Party in parliament.

That is what defines this division. On the one hand, the EU represents the interests of big, socialised capital, and of the shareholders and bondholders that draw their revenues from it. It also represents the interests of the working class, because it is on the basis of these more developed forms of capital that its higher living standards, ability to organise, to increase social security and to struggle for industrial democracy and then socialism, depends. On the other hand, the interests of the small capitalists lie in Brexit, and they drag behind them a long tail of associated, usually atomised layers, which now has control over the Tory Party, as well as being falsely presented as potential Labour voters, to scare rightwing Labour MPs into not opposing Brexit.

And the situation facing Marxists today is not the same as in 1975. Then it was quite appropriate to argue for an active abstention. Now it is not. Marxists could not argue for workers to join a capitalist Europe as an alternative to a capitalist Britain - though they could point to all the reasons that the EEC was more progressive than Britain, by removing borders and so on, and making worker solidarity easier to achieve. But simply more progressive was not enough. Our solution was not a more progressive capitalist Europe, but a socialist united states of Europe. However, we are now *in* that more progressive capitalist Europe. It is quite a different matter now to be indifferent as to whether we remain within that more progressive structure, rather than leave it to go back to a more reactionary structure!

As Marx sets out in his essay on 'Political indifferentism', we would not argue for capitalist provision of state education, or various other forms of welfarism, because we are in favour of workers' self-government and provision of those services. But, if the capitalist state provides them, would we then refuse to take advantage of that development, and demand going back to some more primitive situation? Of course not.

If I work for a small firm, I do not demand that it be taken over by a monopoly, even if that might have advantages in terms of wages and conditions, ability to organise and so on. I argue that the solution lies in workers' ownership and control, not simply a more developed, more civilised capitalist regime of the larger monopoly. If the firm is to be taken over, I neither argue for or against such a takeover, I set out the advantages of working for the larger capital, but pointing out the need not to settle for that, but to struggle for industrial democracy, and workers' ownership and control. But, if the firm is taken over, I would then not be indifferent if someone were to propose that the monopoly be broken up, in order to force things back into some previous, more primitive form of capitalism. I would have a duty to oppose such a development.

And the same applies with the EU. It is no longer a question of arguing the need for a socialist alternative to what exists rather than simply accepting a more progressive capitalist alternative. It is a matter of arguing against the imposition of a more reactionary

alternative.

If the far right don't like that, and try to make hay out of it, that can be no reason not to argue for stopping Brexit, and indeed can be no argument for opposing a further democratic vote on the issue. That is a quite different situation to those proposing Lexit, who via their nationalist arguments directly gave sanction to the nationalistic, xenophobic arguments and actions of the far right.

**Arthur Bough**  
email

## Fallacious

Arthur Bough states that the product of labour in a "primitive commune or under communism" takes the form of value. This is because all products of labour in every society are "nothing more than an expression of ... labour-time" ('Subjective and objective value', January 17).

This statement rests on fallacious reasoning. It is true that all products in every society take a certain amount of time to make. It does not follow from this that they take the form of value. Labour-time is a necessary condition for value to exist, but it is not sufficient. If value is the form that abstract labour takes within generalised commodity production, then the measurement of labour-time expressed in a value relation presupposes the commodification of labour-power. This is regardless of labour's specific useful characteristics.

In other words, the measurement of labour-time can take place in societies where labour-power is not a commodity and all products are use-values, not commodities. For example, in the primitive commune, the determinants of labour-time are the length of the day, the weather and the health and strength of the producers. In contrast, under communism, the determinant of labour-time is the consciously chosen, democratically organised plan. Freely associated producers create this plan.

Put differently, the category of value entails production for exchange. It shares this quality with exchange value. Both categories imply production for the exchange of commodities as equivalents. The equivalence of exchange value with money has a subjective character, expressed in the price of a commodity. Marx argues that underlying the movement of prices is value and abstract labour. Abstract labour does not exist without the generalisation of exchangeability to labour-power. In the absence of the alienation of labour-power as a commodity, the socially objective character of value either declines or disappears. This is what happened under Stalinism, where the political police atomised workers and used brute force to try to produce a surplus. The failed aim of Stalinist production was the production of use-values - not value and surplus value.

Why is it important to strive for clarity on this issue? Ideologically, Bough's reasoning supports an aspect of commodity fetishism. This is the idea that the market has existed in every form of society. It is therefore natural and eternal. Politically, the abolition of the wages system, full employment and the shortened working week strike a blow to the global subordination of workers to the law of value. Planning for need then replaces commodity exchange as the universal social relation.

**Paul B Smith**  
email

## Hysterical

After their rout in 1745, the mangled, wounded Jacobites were systematically and brutally murdered where they lay. Retreating troops were followed in a hysterical fox-hunt by Georgian cavalry, with infantry following up behind. Every man, woman child and beast they

encountered on the way was butchered and houses destroyed.

There is something of the same hysterical revenge being enacted by the government's latest phase of exterminating coal. They now plan to ban coal from house fires, ban open fires and ban wood-burning stoves. This marks the end to wee, traditional pubs with nice roaring wood and coal fires in the grate. It also marks a huge problem for tens of thousands - maybe hundreds of thousands - of folk in coalfield and industrial areas, whose only source of heating is their solid fuel central heating and open fires. Will we have smoke detection vans patrolling the area, as TV licence enforcers used to?

But it also marks up the relentless war of attrition against the coal communities. One will recall that Drax, the largest coal-powered station in Europe, burned coal from all over Yorkshire and ultimately just from Big K, which lived next door, a few hundred yards from the power station.

The government, after closing down the White Rose Scheme based at Drax, which would have used carbon capture systems to reduce 50% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions at the plant ordered them instead to use wood. So millions of tons of wood would be grown around the world, where natural forest would have been growing and redressing the excess of CO<sub>2</sub>. Or else they took the place of much needed food for the peoples of the 'third world' - instead they grew wood to burn in the power station.

It would be cheaper than carbon capture, it would deliver the *coup de grace* against coal-mining and it would be 'carbon-neutral'. The idea behind this being that, although it would generate 40% more CO<sub>2</sub> than coal, with the White Rose CCS scheme it would come from renewable forests. They were growing anyway and might regenerate some of the CO<sub>2</sub> into oxygen. The fact that these wood chips would then be shipped across the world in vessels burning diesel was never added into the equation. Neither was the locomotive transportation from the coasts, none of which had affected Big K's delivery of coal next door.

So thrilled was the government with its 'green renewable' plan, they actually gave the process a £1 billion per year subsidy, while coal was ultimately charged a 75% mark-up on its tax for daring to be produced. They had called it an emissions tax, but they charged it not when any emissions were made, but when the coal was bought. The point about that was to penalise coal burning, even if it was used in clean-coal, non-emission systems like the Don Valley one, which had been approved for Hatfield Main colliery. It killed Hatfield Main stone dead. But it allowed Drax to mop up the million tons it had already had on the ground, burned up the flues making emissions, but charged 33% less emissions tax than any new coal they might buy. They chose not to buy any new coal and as such destroyed Hatfield's only market - job done: pit closed.

The subsidy was equivalent to £100 million per megawatt-hour (MWH), while coal without any carbon taxes was being produced at a cost of £30-£35 per MWH without subsidy!

So, having been so thoroughly thrilled with wood, many folk bought wood-burning stoves and multi-fuel burners for their living rooms. After all £1 billion of wood-burning subsidy can't be wrong, right? Oh - I nearly forgot to mention a further £2 billion was paid in subsidies to customers who used the power supplied by wood.

But here is the further rub: the government now says it will eliminate all coal-power production by 2025 (a tripartite deal drawn up by 'red' Ed and designed by Blair. It means all three political parties in Britain agreed

that, whichever of them got in, they would wipe out coal power without opposition), "unless they are using carbon-capture systems". Would that be the carbon-capture systems the government pulled the plugs on at Hatfield Main and Kellingley?

We should remember, by the way, that the big fan club for 'biomass systems' in opposition to coal was ... the Greens, God love them. Biomass was a renewable and therefore the environmental equivalent of the second coming (for those who do not read the Bible that is not a sexual reference.). The salesman for the renewable saviour of the world (literally) was Lib Dem energy secretary Chris Huhne, who went on to be hired by the big US biomass firm, Zilkha. He went on to serve a sentence for perverting the course of justice - the major players in the great environmental con against coal and for 'renewables' could all be charged with the same thing in my view.

So there they go - pursuing the evil coal demon, even to the last lump on the family hearth.

**David Douglass**  
South Shields

## Outdated

Comrade Mike Macnair's article on the *gilets jaunes* protest movement covered many aspects and considerations, for the most part interestingly so ('An enigmatic movement', January 17). But it failed in one highly important respect. Little or no emphasis was given to how this entirely spontaneous outburst of anti-establishment action has demonstrated beyond all doubt that any 21st-century capitalist state is a fragile thing.

Despite an ability to exercise manipulative control over the hearts and minds of a population. Despite the unarguably ultra-efficient methods of civil and military oppression it amasses (ie, those nowadays standing ever more well-equipped, ever more poisonously prepared). In truth and in contrast, the capitalist state is an entirely moribund entity - one that could readily be overthrown by a socio-culturally focused mass of its working class. In short, the modern-day capitalist system is wholly vulnerable to our revolutionary ambitions.

Of course, it's only too easy to fall into the trap of being simplistic, overly enthusiastic, idealistic or even downright naive. However, a good dollop of optimism, allied to platinum-grade positivity, never goes amiss - most pertinently when trying to draw fresh members of society into the fight. That is to say, encourage them to join our Marxist/communist side of the barricades and battle lines - those as variously will develop over time.

In a certain sense expanding upon these lines of thought, surely the use of a 'hammer and sickle' masthead is now entirely outdated, indeed an active obstacle to gaining connection with potential supporters or more generally reaching beyond current confines. Almost all working folk associate that iconography with Stalinism, and anyway are far more familiar with a coffee-shop barista's apron, computer mouse or steering wheel of a delivery van than any such Old Skool reminder of wage-slavery - any such profoundly dispiriting obedience to The Man.

Although by no means sweeping aside all problems, a modernised design would do nothing but help in generating some desperately needed 'wokeness' in our world. So, yes: a stylish new masthead for the *Weekly Worker*, please! - one to take its place alongside other vibrantly connected and dynamic presentations of our ideas and policies; our timelessly relevant values.

**Bruno Kretschmar**  
email

# ACTION

## London Communist Forum

**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.

**Sunday February 3, 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', section 'The Prague conference'. 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 29, 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: 'Rule by the moon in human origins and evolution'. Speaker: Chris Knight.

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

## Grenfell: 'Dictating to the estate'

**Saturday January 26, 2.30pm and Sunday January 27, 7.30pm:** Performance, Playground Theatre, Unit 8, 343-453 Latimer Road, London W10. *Dictating to the estate* - a documentary play on the Grenfell Tower fire by local activist Nathaniel McBride. Tickets £8 (£6). <https://theplaygroundtheatre.london/events/dictating-to-the-estate>.

## Rightwing populism in Italy

**Sunday January 27, 2pm:** Meeting, King's Arms, Poland Street, London W1 (nearest tube: Oxford Circus). Speaker: Tobias Abse. Organised by Alliance for Green Socialism: [www.agstest.org.uk](http://www.agstest.org.uk).

## Solidarity with our tube cleaners

**Tuesday January 29, 5pm:** Demonstration, Old Palace Yard, London SW1 (opposite parliament). Stop plans to axe 1,000 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

### Public meetings

**Birmingham, Wednesday January 30, 7pm:** Committee rooms 3-4, Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1.

**Portsmouth, Tuesday February 5, 7pm:** Portland 0.28, University of Portsmouth, Portland Street, Portsmouth PO1.

**Lewisham, Thursday February 7, 7pm:** Lecture Theatre, Ben Pimlott Building, Goldsmiths University, London SE14. 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](http://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](http://www.facebook.com/events/1143258535837664).

## Solidarity with the Stansted 15

**Wednesday February 6, 8.30am to 4pm:** Crown court, 3-5 New Street, Chelmsford CM1. Peaceful protestors who stopped a deportation flight found guilty on terror-related charges - solidarity protest outside the court when sentencing is due.

Organised by End Deportations: [www.facebook.com/events/735004523524622](http://www.facebook.com/events/735004523524622).

## 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).

## 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.

**LAW**

# Siding with Labour right

There is a rogue's gallery of left sects, says Tony Greenstein, but the AWL must surely be the worst

Having spent much of my life on the far left, it is clear to me that our biggest immediate problem is not the capitalist class or agents of the state: it is the left itself. I refer in particular to the scattered debris of sects that see themselves as the embodiment of the future revolution.

Possibly the worst example was the Workers Revolutionary Party led by Gerry Healey, whose Labour Party acolytes included former Lambeth leader Ted Knight. It still manages to produce a daily newspaper - *News Line* - that no-one reads. For most of its existence it was led by Gerry Healey, whose serial rape of young female members was revealed 30 years ago. When he was eventually brought to book, Corin Redgrave defended him in the name of a higher morality. Citing his many "achievements", Redgrave told fellow comrades that "If this is the work of a rapist, let's recruit more rapists."<sup>1</sup>

The WRP itself was funded by a variety of reactionary and corrupt Arab regimes, such as the Iraqi Ba'athists. Healey earned his money by, for example, spying on Iraqi communist exiles in London. No doubt his entrance ticket to these Arab potentates was provided by the film stars, Corin and Vanessa Redgrave, who stood by him through thick and thin when the WRP expelled him.<sup>2</sup>

The Socialist Workers Party also came a cropper over the question of rape when a female member complained she had been raped by former national secretary, Martin Smith. Rather than suspending Smith and conducting a thorough and impartial investigation, or alternatively deciding it was a police matter, the disputes committee consisting of Smith's mates decided that it was the woman who was at fault, questioning her about previous partners and her drinking habits. Interestingly the defence of the SWP's behaviour by Alex Callinicos included accusing his opponents of "bourgeois morality" - which was also Corin Redgrave's defence of Gerry Healey.<sup>3</sup>

As for the Revolutionary Communist Party, rape was not a feature of its lurch to the right. In many ways it was far worse. The RCP became genocide deniers or what Ed Vulliamy called "tinpot holocaust deniers".<sup>4</sup> Its magazine, *Living Marxism*, alleged in 1992 that a TV news report on the Serbian concentration camps of Trnopolje and Omarska in Bosnia was faked.

In 'The picture that fooled the world' *LM* alleged that the photograph of emaciated concentration camp inmate Fikret Alić was bogus and the barbed wire said to be surrounding the camp was actually surrounding the reporters. One libel action later and *LM* was out of business.<sup>5</sup> The RCP, which had been steadily jettisoning socialist politics for a long time, disappeared and *Spiked* was reborn as an internet journal of the corporate, anti-environmental, racist right.

And, of course, the list of socialist renegades would not be complete without a mention of Socialist Action, whose John Ross masquerades these days as PR man for the Chinese regime in all its horrors.<sup>6</sup>

## Pride of place

But pride of place is reserved for the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. The organisation's claim to be on the left would be the subject of a trading standards investigation if it were



What Zionism wants is zero criticism of Zionism

trying to sell you anything other than its shop-worn paper.

This is an organisation which believes that socialism in Britain will be achieved by supporting imperialist policy abroad. When Tony Blair and George Bush launched the invasion of Iraq, the AWL distinguished itself by refusing to call for the withdrawal of western troops. The ostensible grounds were that they were protecting the incipient labour movement in Iraq!

But it is over Israel that the AWL has distinguished itself. It is an open supporter of the Israeli state - in the guise of supporting a two-state solution. It can claim to have virtually invented the concept of 'left anti-Semitism' as a means of undermining support for the Palestinians.

My attention was drawn to an article, 'No way to fight the witchhunt' in the current edition of *Solidarity*.<sup>7</sup> It is an attack on Labour Against the Witchhunt. According to the AWL's Dale Street, the main motion from the LAW steering committee for its February 2 conference "sums up the core elements of left anti-Semitism".

What, you might ask, does Dale

mean? Is someone arguing that Jews are racially inferior to non-Jews? Perhaps we are peddling the stereotype that Jews are mean, cosmopolitans who owe no loyalty to anyone or anything (apart from their purse). But, no, that is what Israel's best friend, Viktor Orbán, implied when he made George Soros the demonic figure of hate in the Hungarian general election last year.<sup>8</sup>

Yet last July Orbán was guest of honour in Israel visiting his old friend Benjamin Netanyahu. I mention this because the Israeli state has embraced virtually every anti-Semitic regime in Europe - and not just Europe. Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil is another friend of Israel, yet the AWL insists on seeing Israel as progressive in that it is a 'Jewish state', the 'embodiment of world Jewry'.

LAW's crime is that it is

not focused on the many hundreds of socialists expelled from the Labour Party, without notification of charges, hearing or appeal, since 2015, on grounds of association (however loose) with leftwing groups, such as Workers' Liberty,

Socialist Appeal or Left Unity. Its prime concern is with Labour Party members charged with anti-Semitism.

What the AWL really means is it would rather LAW ignores disciplinary action where the allegations involve accusations of anti-Semitism. The fact that many of these allegations are not true does not concern the AWL. LAW's honorary president, Moshé Machover, was first charged with anti-Semitism - for an article published first in the *Weekly Worker* and then in *Labour Party Marxists*, whose title was, ironically, 'Anti-Zionism does not equal anti-Semitism'. But he was expelled from Labour (and then quickly reinstated, following a campaign of protests) because of his alleged support for the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Our proposed constitution, under 'Aims', states:

The first part of rule 2.1.4.B ('Exclusions') should be abolished: it bars from Labour Party membership anybody who "joins and/or supports a political

organisation other than an official Labour group or other unit of the party" and has exclusively been used against leftwingers.

We have fought against all exclusions resulting from the current right-led witch-hunt directed against Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters - whether they are on the grounds of support for another political organisation, anti-Semitism or indeed any other political grounds, such as transphobia. Our proposed constitution is quite clear: "All those summarily expelled or suspended without due process should be immediately reinstated."

The main motion to our conference is entitled 'The slow coup against Jeremy Corbyn'. Dale Street takes exception to an analysis which says that Corbyn has been attacked because he is seen as a threat to "the strategic alliance with the US" because of his "critical attitude towards Israel". Is the AWL seriously denying that Israel, which receives over \$4 billion in aid each year from the USA, the largest of any country, is not in alliance with the USA? Why then would the USA give such large amounts of aid to Israel?

Equally objectionable to the AWL is our statement that the Israeli state and the Zionist lobby is conducting a "war of attrition" against Corbyn. Apparently all these headlines in the Zionist press saying that Corbyn is an "existential threat" to the Jewish community are just friendly banter.<sup>9</sup> The *Al Jazeera* programme, 'The lobby', showing Israeli agent Shai Masot at work helping fan the flames of false 'anti-Semitism', is presumably another example of "left anti-Semitism".<sup>10</sup>

Naturally our description of Corbyn's "policy of appeasement", which has "culminated in the Labour Party's adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism", is itself anti-Semitic, as is the suggestion that this has "massively expanded" the scope for "false allegations of anti-Semitism".

Of course, the AWL sees nothing wrong with a definition which conflates anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism. Most people in the Labour Party (and outside) have no problem distinguishing between criticism of Israel or Zionism and hostility to Jews as Jews. The AWL, however, has swallowed, hook, line and sinker, the Zionist fable that to oppose Zionism is to be anti-Semitic.

Our suggestion that the anti-Semitism witch-hunt is fabricated and that the Jewish Labour Movement, the British wing of the racist Israeli Labor Party, is orchestrating the attacks on Corbyn via its MP patrons, such as Ruth Smeeth, Luciana Berger and Ian Austin, is seen as yet more evidence of "left anti-Semitism".

## Targeted

Cast your minds back to the summer of 2016. At that time Owen Smith challenged Jeremy Corbyn for the leadership of the Labour Party and in the course of the campaign made the allegation that the AWL was itself anti-Semitic. As a result of this AWL members Pete Radcliffe and Daniel Randall were expelled by Iain McNicol.

Around this time I happened to do a debate with Daniel Randall on the subject, 'Is there such a thing as "left

anti-Semitism”?’ I could not therefore help but put it to Daniel that he and Pete had been bitten by the very dog that had attacked so many of us. There was a rich irony in the AWL being attacked by Labour’s right as ‘anti-Semites’. Of course, he failed to see the irony, but it should be crystal-clear that for the right *any* socialist can be accused of the catch-all charge of ‘anti-Semitism’. Daniel was therefore forced to concede the truth of what I was saying:

I do want to say from the outset that it is undeniably the case that the issue of anti-Semitism has been instrumentalised and manipulated by some on the Labour right and their supporters in the press in order to undermine Corbyn and the left. As Tony mentioned, last week Owen Smith accused us of anti-Semitism on national television, so it is very clear that there is a certain process going on there, a certain instrumentalisation and manipulation of an issue for cynical factional ends. It has to be understood and opposed on its own terms.<sup>11</sup>

But, returning to Dale’s article, he said of the LAW motion: “All the main themes of left anti-Semitism are there.” And what are these themes?

First, our statement that Zionism is a form of racism, which leads him to state: “so the very existence of Israel, above and beyond any particular policy, is ‘racist’”. An ethno-nationalist state which calls itself “Jewish”, which declares that it is the state of only part of its population, is indeed inherently racist. Just as a white ethno-nationalist state in South Africa or a Protestant supremacist statelet in Northern Ireland was racist.

Does this mean we deny the right of Israeli Jews to live in Israel? No, of course not. What we do deny is the right of a racist state to exist, whether it is South Africa, Israel or Nazi Germany.

Dale objects in particular to our description of “Palestinian Arabs who are born outside the territory now Israel” as natives, “whereas Jews born there are ‘settler-colonialists’”. But this is a political description of the function of Israeli Jews, many of whom to this very day see themselves as a privileged community. It is Israeli Jews who are dispossessing and removing Palestinian Arabs from their lands. Settler colonialism is an ongoing process and Israeli Jews are without doubt a settler population politically.

Dale concludes by saying that “No viable campaign against the expulsion of socialists from the Labour Party can be built by tying it to these conspiracy theories”. Which is somewhat rich, coming from the AWL. It was the AWL’s Jill Mountjoy and sympathiser Richard Chessum who voted to remove Jackie Walker as vice-chair of Momentum at the instigation of Jon Lansman, following false charges of anti-Semitism made against her. Of course, Lansman almost immediately turned round and attacked the AWL.

To describe the expulsion from Labour of myself as part of the false anti-Semitism campaign is also apparently anti-Semitic. That perhaps is why the AWL and Progress have conducted almost a love-in on the question of ‘anti-Semitism’. The AWL’s own ‘Stop the Purge’ campaign

seems to have disappeared and the reason is that you cannot support, as the AWL has done, the expulsion of Ken Livingstone for daring to mention Zionist-Nazi collaboration (a fact), you cannot support or justify the expulsion of other ‘left anti-Semites’ and then complain about your own comrades’ expulsions. You have to be consistent, but unfortunately the AWL’s consistency lies in its support for the ‘right’ of the world’s only apartheid entity, Israel, to discriminate against its Palestinian citizens in the name of a ‘Jewish’ state.

Israel is not racist because of particular policies, but because racism is in the DNA of the Israeli state. To take but one example, 93% of Israel is state land or belongs to the Jewish National Fund. It is off limits to Israeli Arabs. Over the summer there were demonstrations by Jewish residents of the northern city of Afula because an Israeli Arab had managed to buy a house in a hitherto all-Jewish city. Is this simply a racist policy of Netanyahu? The situation of hundreds of Jewish-only communities has been a feature of Israel since 1948. The 1950 Law of Return, which allowed any Jew to emigrate to Israel, whilst denying the right of return of Palestinian refugees, cemented Israel’s racist and colonial nature.

In what other country would you get such a situation, where the chief rabbi of Safed, Shmuel Eliyahu, issues an edict that Jews must not rent property to Arabs? Eliyahu is a paid state official, yet the state is silent and when he is criticised dozens of Israeli rabbis back him up and issue similar rulings.<sup>12</sup> Yet the AWL denies that this - not to mention dozens more examples of the most vicious and murderous racism - suggests anything is amiss. When an Israeli soldier, Elor Azaria, murdered in cold blood a Palestinian lying on the ground, he received a nine-month prison sentence.<sup>13</sup> Contrast this to the case of 16-year-old Ahd Tamimi, who was given eight months for slapping an Israeli soldier.<sup>14</sup>

The politics of the AWL are not new. They are reminiscent of the tradition laid down by Henry Hyndman of the Social Democratic Federation<sup>15</sup>: militancy at home and support for ‘the empire’ overseas ●

## Notes

1. <https://piraniarchive.wordpress.com/investigations-campaigns-and-other-stuff/the-break-up-of-the-wrp-from-the-horses-mouth>.
2. For a background to the split, see <https://edoc.site/bob-pitt-the-rise-and-fall-of-gerry-healy-pdf-free.html>; and [www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/healy/bio-bibl\\_healy.pdf](http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/healy/bio-bibl_healy.pdf).
3. An interesting description of what went wrong in the SWP is at <http://marksteelinfo.com/2013/03/oh-good-lord-what-has-the-swp-gone-and-done-now>.
4. [www.theguardian.com/media/2000/mar/15/pressandpublishing.tvnews](http://www.theguardian.com/media/2000/mar/15/pressandpublishing.tvnews).
5. [www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/mar/15/medialaw.media2](http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/mar/15/medialaw.media2).
6. ‘No secrets to China’s success’ The Guardian August 18 2009.
7. [www.workersliberty.org/story/2019-01-16/noway-fight-witch-hunt](http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2019-01-16/noway-fight-witch-hunt).
8. [www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-viktor-orbans-war-on-george-soros-and-hungarys-jews](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-viktor-orbans-war-on-george-soros-and-hungarys-jews).
9. [www.thejc.com/comment/leaders/three-jewish-papers-take-the-unprecedented-step-of-publishing-the-same-page-on-labour-antisemitism-1.467641](http://www.thejc.com/comment/leaders/three-jewish-papers-take-the-unprecedented-step-of-publishing-the-same-page-on-labour-antisemitism-1.467641).
10. [www.aljazeera.com/investigations/thelobby](http://www.aljazeera.com/investigations/thelobby).
11. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wBaAOHgbEL7ohkelpaaGily-q124sKqEwCglkrVm0/edit>.
12. [www.haaretz.com/1.5150345](http://www.haaretz.com/1.5150345).
13. [www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5254390,00.html](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5254390,00.html).
14. [www.nytimes.com/2018/03/21/world/middleeast/ahed-tamimi-palestinian-israel-soldier.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/21/world/middleeast/ahed-tamimi-palestinian-israel-soldier.html).
15. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_Democratic\\_Federation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Democratic_Federation).



Solidarity: AWL delegation to Israel

# Slow coup against Jeremy Corbyn

This is the motion submitted by the steering committee of Labour Against the Witchhunt, to be introduced by Asa Winstanley and Moshé Machover at the February 2 LAW conference in London

**1** Jeremy Corbyn’s election as Labour leader on September 12 2015 was a body blow to the right wing. It opened up the possibility of thoroughgoing democratisation and transformation of the Labour Party into a genuine party of the working class that would commit itself to fighting for global socialism.

2. Corbyn’s longstanding record of backing strikes, opposing austerity and anti-war campaigning makes him totally unacceptable to Britain’s establishment. Above all, Corbyn is considered a threat to the strategic alliance with the United States, symbolised by his critical attitude towards Israel and his solidarity with the Palestinians.

3. The US has a particular interest in controlling the Middle East because of its oil and geopolitical position. That means shoring up the thoroughly corrupt Saudi Arabian regime and the barely disguised military dictatorship in Egypt. However, the most reliable strategic asset the US possesses in the Middle East is Israel. Israel’s ongoing settler-colonialism is inevitably opposed and bitterly resented by the Palestinian natives and the wider Arab nation. Consequently, the most important political question is security. The majority of the Israeli-Jewish population enthusiastically supports the country’s alliance with the US.

4. The war of attrition against Corbyn as Labour leader - carried out by an alliance of the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party, the party bureaucracy, the Israeli state, the pro-Israel lobby and the mainstream media - began even before he was elected. Corbyn was portrayed as a terrorist sympathiser, a security risk and an all-round danger to society.

5. Thousands of socialists and leftwingers were investigated, suspended and expelled under former general secretary Iain McNicol. The charges levelled against these comrades were often trivial. Many were found guilty of supporting unaffiliated political groups. There was much talk of dangerous ‘reds under the beds’.

6. However, the most potent weapon in the hands of Corbyn’s enemies proved to be false accusations of anti-Semitism. Anti-Zionism was equated with anti-Semitism. This approach worked not least because Corbyn and

his allies allowed it to. Rather than standing up to the right and exposing the baselessness of allegations that the Labour Party is riddled with anti-Semitism, Corbyn chose to appease the Labour right and the Zionist lobby.

7. The investigation run by Shami Chakrabarti was supposed to put an end to the allegations, but it was only a new stage. Every time Corbyn and his allies conceded a demand, every time they took a step back, the right wing and Zionist lobby were further emboldened. This culminated in the NEC’s adoption of the much-criticised International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism and all 11 of its illustrations (including the one which labels as anti-Semitic the description of Israel as a “racist endeavour”). But the IHRA definition conflates anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism.

8. This policy of appeasement has proven disastrous not just for Corbyn, but for many hundreds accused of being anti-Semites. The vast majority are no such thing. Social media accounts have been trawled, comments taken out of context and the forwarding of posts taken as evidence of agreement. As a result, reputations have been ruined, good leftwingers have been blocked from standing for positions and, just as importantly, the party as a whole has been brought into disrepute.

9. Labour Against the Witchhunt has two main roles. Firstly, we are a campaigning organisation that fights to radically transform the disciplinary procedures in the Labour Party. We defend all those unjustly suspended, expelled or put under investigation. We welcome the ending of automatic and instant suspensions and expulsions by the new general secretary Jennie Fomby - one of our founding demands. Nonetheless, the NEC’s adoption of the IHRA definition has massively expanded the grounds being used for false allegations of anti-Semitism.

10. We call on the NEC to implement the proposals coming from Shami Chakrabarti’s report in regards to natural justice and due process. In particular, we call for the abolition of appendix 6 of the party’s rulebook, which is the LP’s disciplinary code. We demand its replacement by a code that guarantees the rights of the

accused and ensures that the whole disciplinary process is seen to be fair and above board. That anyone accused has the right to legal representation, especially if the Labour Party itself is represented legally. And that the LP should be paying for such representation if someone cannot afford to pay.

11. We will continue to campaign for the abolition of the first part of rule 2.1.4.B, which bars from Labour membership anybody who “joins and/or supports a political organisation other than an official Labour group or other unit of the party” and has exclusively been used against leftwingers.

12. We will continue to organise lobbies of Labour NEC meetings, organise our own events and meetings and - after a successful intervention at Labour Party conference 2018 - will plan for another intervention at the 2019 Labour conference.

13. Second, and equally important, is the need to lay bare the role of the Labour right, the Israeli state and Zionist organisations in fabricating the anti-Semitism ‘crisis’ in the Labour Party.

14. The best way of combating backward attitudes and political views - which undoubtedly exist in the Labour Party - is through political education, discussion and joint participation in campaigning. However, giving those with the most backward attitudes and political views prime responsibility for political education is a travesty. We therefore treat with contempt and reject the so-called ‘training sessions’ organised by the Jewish Labour Movement, an openly Zionist organisation. We do not accept that an organisation which supports a racist project of colonisation is capable of providing anti-racist education.

15. Unity between the socialist left and the pro-capitalism right is illusory. The left must win the battle for freedom of speech and democracy - in the Labour Party, trade unions and society at large. Political ideas, including different attitudes towards Israel, must be debated freely, not silenced, not hedged with all manner of bureaucratic ifs and buts. We shall fight to end the current culture of fear and self-censorship ●

**Free trade or protectionism is a false choice  
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London Communist Forum

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Speaker: Mike Macnair

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**PCS**

# Left high and dry

Dave Vincent gives his take on the forthcoming election for assistant general secretary

In my last article on the Public and Commercial Services union, I reported that two members of the Socialist Party in England and Wales were seeking the backing of the PCS Left Unity faction for the post of assistant general secretary ('Left in disunity' *Weekly Worker* September 6 2018). Janice Godrich, long-serving PCS national president, was challenging the incumbent AGS, Chris Baugh. The AGS election is due in April/May 2019. However, there have been some upsets.

Left Unity groups together socialists in PCS - mainly the SP and Socialist Workers Party. At its national conference held in December LU voted to support Janice as its candidate (amidst allegations of voting irregularities from the 'Chris4AGS' campaign). Given that the SP had decided to back Chris again and that fellow SP member Janice was going against her party line in standing against him, this raised the question of whether the SP would expel Janice (and her SP supporters in the new PCS grouping, Socialist View). That, or whether Chris would stand again *in opposition* to Left Unity. We will never know, as Janice stood down for health reasons, and Chris4AGS demanded that Chris, who had won 48% of LU votes, should automatically be endorsed, as there was no other candidate. Nice try, but Janice had stood in the first place after PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka publicly came out against Chris Baugh, who has been AGS since 2004.

Socialist View is a new faction formed to support Janice against Chris. It seems to now have the backing of a majority of SP members - who are also defying the 'party line', as they seem to have supported an alternative Left Unity slate for the national executive (elections for which will be held in April/May), defeating the one put forward by the SP. And Fran Heathcote is their candidate for PCS national president - she defeated the candidature of Marion Lloyd, leader of the Chris4AGS campaign. Given Janice's ill health, LU is now seeking a new candidate for AGS, and Socialist View is now campaigning for LU members to vote for Stella Dennis, an unelected full-time officer since 2005. She says she can work with Mark Serwotka, who has previously implied that any LU candidate would be better than Chris.

Unfortunately for Stella, another unelected full-timer has announced she is now to stand for AGS - but not for Left Unity. Lynn Henderson, national officer for Scotland and Ireland, president of the Scottish TUC and a PCS full-timer for 14 years, claims *she* has the support of Mark! And now, another PCS faction, Independent Left, after campaigning for years for more women to stand within the union, is backing ... a man: John Moloney, who is promising not to take the full £90,000 salary for AGS if elected. A similar (winning) pledge was made by Mark Serwotka when he first stood for general secretary.

As for Left Unity itself, it is conducting another internal election to select its AGS candidate - votes must be in by January 25. Chris4AGS seems confident that its candidate will win the nomination this time round, and is demanding more oversight of the vote-counting process.

Once the LU candidate is elected, we will have three socialist candidates vying in a left-led union for the AGS post (maybe four if whoever loses the latest LU candidate selection vote stands anyway!). Left Unity has now become Left Disunity - this in the absence of any organised rightwing grouping in PCS.

The LU conference also endorsed the Socialist View-dominated Democracy Alliance slate - an unprincipled electoral pact between LU and the tiny PCS Democrats. Originally formed to 'keep out the right', it has continued for years despite the absence of a rightwing faction today. It really serves to keep out the 'awkward' left (Independent Left and independent socialists not in LU) - so much for 'Left Unity'.

## Pay

We are expected to believe that all this is not personal, but is political, and supposedly centres on Chris Baugh being for disaggregated ballots over pay by individual departments (with each PCS departmental group being able to add other demands they think members will vote for). The other candidates support a ballot of all departments (or at least the largest departments) for the PCS national 8%-10% pay claim. The union failed to reach the new Tory-imposed 50% turnout threshold for legal strike action last year. After a huge effort 41% cast their vote. The 2018 claim was for 5% or £1,200, whichever is the greater.

But the campaign to reach the 50% threshold in the next ballot concentrates on simply getting more members out to vote in the poorly organised areas, and ignores another key point: you need a strategy members think will win. Lodging a bigger pay claim does not automatically translate into more members voting to strike. Some unions have reached the new threshold and some have not. Where the failure is not due to poor organisation, it must be due members' disbelief in the strategy.

What is more, a percentage claim without an underpinning minimum simply *increases* the pay gap between departments (following delegated pay bargaining imposed by the treasury), not reduces it! It is total hypocrisy for

AGS candidates to condemn Chris for supporting disaggregated departmental ballots (rather than risking losing one national civil service ballot), when the current PCS consultation of members and branches (which closes on January 25) actually asks them if *they* prefer a national ballot for the whole civil service or departmental ballots. This amounts to farcical and dishonest posturing.

A disagreement over tactics cannot seriously justify splitting the left like this. For all the arguments over strike tactics, the AGS position does not have the power or sole responsibility to deliver a strike vote. PCS conference sets the industrial action policy, which the NEC implements - though it is usually what Mark suggests *should* be the strategy via NEC motions to conference each May.

We know the preference of the *Weekly Worker's* Peter Manson is for the candidate who will most move PCS to affiliate to the Labour Party (ideally) or deliver votes for Labour in the next general election - he previously declared for Janice ('Support the Socialist View slate', November 15 2018). Peter may now prefer Lynn Henderson, who wrote a full-page article in the *Morning Star* (January 15), which gushed support for Corbyn and a Labour government.

But nowhere does she mention that past TUCs have agreed on united action by public-sector unions over austerity and pay, but that such joint action was not carried through by the largest unions - all affiliated to the Labour Party. PCS is not affiliated to any party and conferences have decisively rejected calls for that to change.

Lynn claims that PCS is "strengthening the organising vigour in every workplace" - typical hyperbole from a full-time officer. If this is the case, why did we only get a 41% turnout in last year's ballot for industrial action? As president of the STUC, she sets out her close working relationships with other trade unionists, but

fails to explain why these unions have not delivered any united public-sector action against the austerity cuts or pay cap and why they sold out the pensions dispute following Britain's biggest strike since 1926 on November 30 2011.

Lynn cites Labour's manifesto pledges, made by Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell to PCS conferences, to warm applause from delegates. She states that, for the first time in her lifetime, a radical Labour government can be elected on a socialist programme. Few left papers, including the *Weekly Worker*, agree that Labour's programme is at all radical or socialist. I wonder whether Lynn voted for those of previous Labour governments that were not radical or socialist? So many long-serving Labour Party members who are now avowed Corbyn followers are simply long-standing Labour ultra-loyalists who will support the Labour Party, whoever leads it, whatever its programme.

In a thinly veiled reference to the AGS election (she does not mention it or her candidature), she states that "some sceptics try to claim PCS is in danger of aligning itself too closely to Labour". This is clearly aimed at Chris Baugh, as all the other candidates support the Labour Party. Lynn then says: "... the reality across the country is that working class people, including PCS members, look to Corbyn to make a difference".

I paid twice to help Corbyn get/stay elected as leader of the Labour Party, but have been, like many others, increasingly disappointed at his capitulations to the Parliamentary Labour Party right. A man who will not stop the witch-hunts against socialists in his own party, who caved in over manufactured hysterical claims of deep anti-Semitism in the party, who refuses to back mandatory reselection of MPs, who changed his lifelong opposition to the European Union cartel to become a 'remain' supporter clearly does not have the backbone to stand up to the capitalists or their press.

Lynn makes this comment: "Even with Corbyn and McDonnell in government, PCS would be required to make the case for urgency and priority of

public-service workers' interests, among all the Tory wrongs that Labour will try to right." Contrast this with her ending comment: "... who can doubt that it is in the interests of PCS members for us to be negotiating with McDonnell as chancellor of the exchequer and with a prime minister not afraid to call himself a socialist?"

Er, I doubt this - as do many, if not most, PCS members. It is utopian nonsense to imagine that one of Labour's first acts on its election to office will be the award of a large public-sector pay rise. We will see - just as with New Labour, expect a Corbyn government to accept the need for 'fiscal prudence'. We will be told we have to wait and wait and wait for pledges to be delivered. Once again, the major unions will argue that Labour is our government and we must be patient - we must not take industrial action against a Labour government for fear this will let the Tories back in.

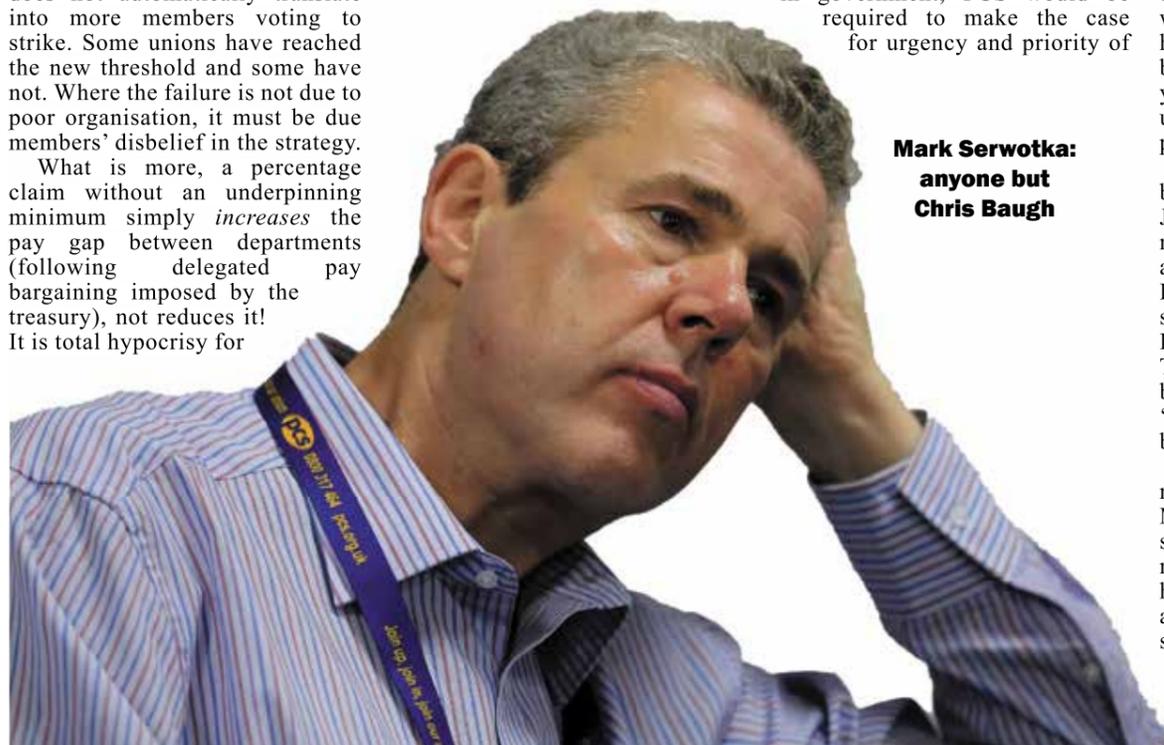
## Control-freakery

As I have said, Lynn is a very well paid, unelected full-time official, seeking to be an even better paid assistant general secretary, and has far more job security than most of the members she represents. John Moloney calls for all full-time officers to be elected - will Lynn, as well as Stella Dennis and Chris Baugh, support this democratic demand for more accountability? Note that this is SP and SWP policy, but seems to have been quietly dropped when their own members get a chance to become an unelected officer - whenever PCS conference tries to debate such a demand, they argued against it!

The acrimony between the contending candidates and their supporters will continue long after the AGS election, whoever wins. The fact is that the opposition to Chris Baugh was started and is driven by Mark Serwotka's stated, open desire to see him replaced. It is unacceptable for a general secretary to so publicly interfere in the election of another senior officer and for so-called socialists to back him in this. What next - will Mark tell the factions who he wants on the NEC slate? Why bother with conference when you have a cabal of elected and unelected full-timers in your pocket?

Those in the SP who initially broke instructions and supported Janice to keep in with Mark must now be stunned to see that Mark's apparent support for 'anyone in Left Unity but Baugh' has now seemingly become support for Lynn - who is not in Left Unity. They were prepared to let LU become an organisation based on 'whatever Mark wants' and have been left high and dry.

The principled socialist stance now is to take a stand against Mark's control-freakery (and I say this as someone who urged my branch to support Mark from his very first election contest and all subsequent ones) and support either Chris Baugh or John Moloney. On the question of PCS's relationship with the Labour Party, I favour Chris over John ●



**Mark Serwotka:**  
anyone but  
Chris Baugh

# BREXIT



**Humiliated ... but sticking to the same script**

## National government real danger

With Theresa May paralysed, neoliberal MPs are preparing to 'take back control'. Paul Demarty looks at Britain's unfolding constitutional crisis

Insanity, it is said, consists in doing the same thing again and again and expecting different results.

There are, no doubt, many uncharitable souls who, observing the absurd course of bourgeois politics in this country, will convict Theresa May of madness on just that basis. Having cobbled together an offer to the European Union negotiators, her fragile cabinet disintegrated when she put it to them at her Chequers retreat in July 2018. By that time, with the rapid-fire resignations of David Davis and Boris Johnson, the thing was already a dead duck. But she soldiered on, deciding to put it to parliament before the Christmas recess, and was so convinced of inevitable humiliation that she cancelled the vote at the last minute, humiliating half her ministers, who were sent off around the media circus to argue that the vote was going ahead when they knew full well - as, even, did the Europeans - that it was already cancelled. Surely that was enough, but no - the same deal finally faced the music last week, and suffered an historically unprecedented defeat.

So what now? Well, we already knew, didn't we, dear reader? A much trailed statement to parliament on January 21 turned out the only way it could possibly have done - with no movement or tactical adjustment whatsoever on the part of the doughty, robotically reliable PM. She laid out six 'lessons' she had allegedly learned as a result of the vote the previous week, but no less than five of them were merely restatements of her existing policy. The remaining one - the waiver of a £65 fee for EU nationals applying for permanent residency in Britain after the

Big Day - was a gesture so minuscule that it cost her nothing whatsoever: even Jacob Rees-Mogg, knight-errant of true-believer Brexitism, argued in favour of it a few hours before on an LBC phone-in. Because it cost her nothing, it will get her nothing either, although it may annoy 'Spreadsheet' Phil Hammond - we assume doing so remains a hobby of hers. Another parliamentary showdown looms on January 29, and there are no signs that May is prepared to relent from any of the rules she has imposed on herself.

Having raised the possibility of mental imbalance, however, we must insist that there is - as is often the case - more than crazy stubbornness at work. The primary mitigating circumstance is that the government is always far more disadvantaged by an ongoing shit-show than opposition parties. The latter have the luxury of not having their plans put immediately to the test; but that luxury has long been converted, by all parties in their wilderness periods, into a very good reason to hold back on having any remotely concrete plans at all. It is sufficient merely to project the image of greater competence; and, by the nature of events, hardly a challenge usually to do so. It is the government of whom action is demanded, with the ever cruel turn of the political screw; their failures must turn out more frequent and obvious than those in the hostile Greek chorus on the other side of the Commons.

Theresa May does have plans; or, rather, a plan. For all its obvious deficiency, it must be said that the demands on any such plan are very severe; something that satisfies the core EU powers' view that no advantage must fall to Britain on account of Brexit. Then

there is the Irish government (backed by the EU) and its need for unrestricted access to its oldest foreign market, the Democratic Unionist Party's fanatical loyalism, City-loyal Tories' concerns about a hard Brexit, Rees-Mogg types' concerns about soft Brexit ... If May has failed, it is surely no more than inevitable. She failed the moment she effectively lost the 2017 election, leaving her hostage to a great many people who were happy to take hostages.

That 2017 election strategy, it will be remembered, began with pushing through article 50 in advance. Having done that, two approaches were dilly-dallied between - the first, associated with her then closest advisors Nick Timothy and Fiona Hill, was to tack in a right-populist direction and sound some Trumpian notes about the plight of working people. As the campaign got underway, the world's least successful electoral genius, Lynton Crosby, took command, and the message became 'May, the safe pair of hands, versus the chaos of a Corbyn government'. So tinned was this that a polling advantage of some 20 points was squandered and a slim Tory majority was lost. The article 50 clock, however, kept ticking.

### Amendments

May now looks a laughable 'safe pair of hands'; but the question remains: whose are safer? The chatter in the press, ahead of next week's votes, is about two amendments: one advanced by the former attorney-general and occasional would-be leader of the feeble Tory 'remainer' resistance, Dominic Grieve; and the other by rightwing Labour creep Yvette Cooper.

They look like this. Grieve wants to move a point of order that

would suspend the standing orders of the Commons, under which the government decides what business is to be put to the house. Instead, parliament would be able to schedule its own votes. The idea is that a series of indicative votes would be held on different Brexit outcomes; if any commands a majority in the house, the government would be able to take that to the Europeans as a basis for renegotiation - and, indeed, would be under severe pressure to do so, with refusal inevitably seen as defiance of parliament.

Cooper's scheme is simpler. It starts the same way - overturn the government's control of Commons business. Then a bill is debated that would rule out categorically a no-deal exit from the EU, effectively obliging the government (in the absence of some skulduggery of its own) to extend the article 50 period until it has a deal acceptable to both the Commons and the EU 27.

The trouble with both schemes is that they do not coerce the government as much as they would hope. Grieve's scheme has all the deficiencies of the old 'indicative votes' idea: quite apart from the chance of every vote losing (as happened to Tony Blair over Lords reform), the government may just brass on and ignore it - and who would put it past the robotically consistent May to do so? Cooper's bill to prevent a no-deal is harder to bat aside, but since it would potentially oblige the treasury to spend money on membership (that £350 million, again!), the government could decide that it was a finance bill and instruct the monarch to veto it. *The Times* reckons this would cause a constitutional crisis, which is rather quaint in its implication that we are not

having one of those already. Certainly the scheme is no sure way out of the crisis, but instead likely to exacerbate it.

The way out is a *change of government*; but as long as - *pace* Fiona Bruce - the two main parties are neck and neck in the polls, who would risk a general election? If next week's two votes serve any purpose, then, it will be to see who breaks ranks with their party leaderships, thus indicating the outlines of a potential national government.

Alternatively, if Jeremy Corbyn can be made to carry the can for a delay or abrogation of Brexit, then all the bourgeoisie's Christmases will come at once. For it is clear from the polling data that - whether or not people's "faith in our democracy" will be shaken, as Theresa May warns - their faith in the anti-establishment credentials of Corbyn will evaporate immediately. A general election could then be called and fought by the Tories on a narrative of national betrayal, and the crushing victory they promised themselves two years ago achieved. Our simple-hearted 'remainer' comrades, alas, remain blind to this danger.

Either which way, May's occupancy of No10 is an obstacle. A cynic might think that her unyielding commitment to her miscarriage of a deal - far from being a matter of mental imbalance or full-throated democratic principle - is instead down to how dispensable she will be when it is out of the way. Thus there will be no redemptive arc to the May saga, and she will shuffle out of politics, to be remembered only as a humiliated failure. Whatever the case, more excitement is likely to follow next week's vote ●

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## LITERATURE

# Stalinophiles and ignoramuses

Rex Dunn examines a selection of fiction that deals with Stalinism and anti-Stalinism

This article is about western literature on Soviet 'communism'. I will look at works that even glamorise its monstrous character, whilst ignoring its betrayals of the class struggle. That started with the fellow-travellers in the 1930s and has reappeared in the nostalgia of the present. For reasons of space, I can give only a few examples, because I also want to look at those who are critical of Stalinism.

In the past many writers were imbued with the 'fellow-traveller spirit', choosing for moralistic and romantic reasons to side with the Soviet Union, 'warts and all', which they falsely believed to be building socialism. In the face of fascism and later American imperialism, this was considered to be the only progressive stance to take. Yet even within this distorted prism, some novels are better than others; including those written from the perspective of a bourgeois journalist, who is supposed to be 'non-partisan', as opposed to a committed 'leftist'. In this regard, for me, Graham Greene's cold war novel *The quiet American* (1955) is superior to Ernest Hemingway's Spanish civil war classic, *For whom the bell tolls* (1940).

But today Stalinophile literature has taken a more 'sophisticated' turn. This is a reflection of three things. Firstly, it is part of the rise of the professional writer and the fact that writing novels is now big business. Secondly, there is the drive to develop the novel form. On the one hand, this involves research-based writing (as opposed to writing 'from the heart', à la Hemingway, Greene and Roth); on the other, it has become *de rigueur* for post-modernist writers to play around with narrative structure, so that we end up with 'multiple voices' (which is fine), but also "many meanings" (to quote one recent book review) - which lets the reader off the hook, when it comes to working out what the story is really about.

It is a sign of the times: ie, the narrative structure has to become more complex as a means to reflect the increasing complexity and fragmentation of modern life. The rise of writing courses as a discipline within higher education has contributed to this trend. If you are good at stringing words together, and have the money, why not try your hand at a 'creative writing' course - especially if you do not have the experience of life or an 'inner urge' to write fiction. But to what degree can one teach creative writing, if this particular aptitude is not already innate within the individual?

Thirdly, there is a growing sense of nostalgia for the certainties of the past - in particular the binary nature of the cold war period, when there was a basic choice between 'good' and 'evil', between freedom and tyranny, western democracy and 'communism'. Today, especially in the age of Trump, the world appears to be turned upside-down. For example, the CIA is at odds with its commander-in-chief, whilst the latter argues that America can no longer continue as "the world's policeman" (really?). All is confusion. The future is uncertain, so let's look back to the certainties of the past - even if by being pig-ignorant, you end up distorting them.

Writing has become a glamour profession. But for callow youth, including those who want to write about the 'communist' period, you have to start by researching the archives, in the hopes that this can provide the author with an authentic background, within which the drama can unfold, along with the emergence of a few convincing characters. Hence

the author is obliged to include an 'acknowledgements' section. By contrast, Hemingway's and Greene's novels usually begin with a quotation which establishes a central theme (see below), but neither need to provide acknowledgements, since their creative juices are not driven by research (the same could be said for Philip Roth). Rather, they were able to rely on their own experience, along with their own creative imaginations, in order to turn an historical event into a work of fiction.

Hence we have the possibility that fiction can lead to a clearer vision of the truth, whereas now, in the age of the fiction industry, the balance appears to have been reversed. Today's authors are so closeted within their own social media bubble, they have to do a lot of homework: ie, systematic research. A writer needs to learn the tricks of the trade, but there is no substitute for experience and imagination.

Finally, there is the category of the novel, which is driven by commercial considerations. In some cases the author seeks to make use of a 'good' education, wherein both writing and research skills become a means to make money, or become a TV celebrity, which keeps the money flowing. The main thing is to produce a riveting page-turner, which brings tears to the reader's eyes, as a distraction from mundane reality! Who cares about the truth? The historian and novelist, Simon Sebag Montefiore, is a prime example.

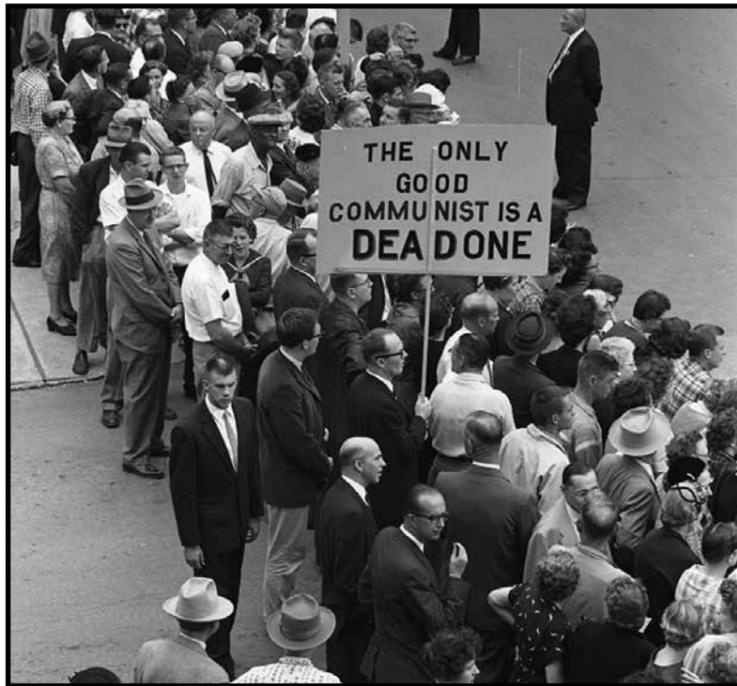
## Hemingway

The background to what is arguably Ernest Hemingway's most famous novel is as follows. In 1937, he agreed to report on the Spanish civil war for the North American Newspaper Alliance. He arrived in Spain with Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens [who] was filming the *Spanish Earth*, a propaganda film in support of the Republican side. He wanted Hemingway to replace John Dos Passos as screenwriter, since [the latter] had left the project when his friend, José Robles, was arrested and executed. The incident changed Dos Passos's initially positive opinion of the leftist republicans, creating a rift between him and Hemingway, who later spread the rumour that Dos Passos left Spain out of cowardice.

Late in 1937, while in Madrid with Martha [Gellhorn, his second wife], Hemingway wrote his only play, *The fifth column*, as the city was being bombarded by Franco's forces. he returned to Key West [in Florida] for a few months, then back to Spain twice in 1938, where he was present at the battle of Ebro, the last republican stand, and he was among the British and American journalists who were some of the last to leave the battle, as they crossed the river.<sup>1</sup>

*For whom the bell tolls* was published in 1940. It takes its title from John Donne's famous poem: 'No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main ...' Unfortunately, this theme of internationalism was understood only at a rudimentary level by most of the thousands of brave men and women who volunteered to fight for the International Brigades. On the other hand, Moscow merely paid hypocritical lip service to it, given that the bureaucracy always acted in its own self-interest.

That said, Hemingway's themes of romantic heroism - sacrifice for a just cause in a faraway country - within which the tragedy of love and death unfolds, is the reason why the novel



**New Deal and wartime alliance with USSR saw thousands join US Communist Party: in the 1950s things unravelled**

is still popular today, almost 80 years after it was written. This is how it is pitched on the Amazon website:

High in the pine forests of the Spanish sierra, a guerrilla band prepares to blow up a vital bridge. Robert Jordan, a young American writer, has been sent to handle the dynamiting. There, in the mountains, he finds the dangers and intense comradeship of war. And there he discovers Maria, a young woman who has escaped from Franco's rebel [forces]. Like many of his novels adapted into a major Hollywood film, *For whom the bell tolls* is one of the greatest novels of the 20th century by one of the greatest American writers.<sup>2</sup>

But it fails miserably, when it comes to the idea that serious writing - whether fiction or autobiography - really should offer a clearer understanding of what actually did happen.

## Orwell

George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) is an autobiography which tells the truth; because 'the general' is in 'the particular' (his own personal experience as a volunteer in the civil war). More importantly Orwell analyses this from the standpoint of dialectical and historical materialism.

On reflection, he realised that the struggle for Barcelona against Franco's rebel fascist forces was betrayed by the bitter fruits of Stalin's popular front strategy. The alliance between the Communist Party and the bourgeois government that had won the elections in 1936 (the republican government) had to be preserved at all costs. On the other hand, those who supported the idea that a social revolution in Spain was both necessary and possible were starved of weapons. If the revolutionary factions refused the leadership of the government in Madrid, then they had to be destroyed - either by the Republican secret police or Russian agents.

The above provides a basic outline for Orwell's description of the battle for Barcelona a year or so later: The Spanish communists (ie, the Stalinists) had taken over the Catalan government. But they were not doing enough to save the Catalan people from the fascists. Meanwhile,

Police spies were everywhere. The

jails were jammed with prisoners ... always, of course, anarchists and POUM [Trotskyites] ... no-one was ever charged ... not with anything as definite as Trotskyism; you were simply flung in jail and kept there ... Foreigners from the International Column and other militants were getting in jail in greater numbers.<sup>3</sup>

At this point Orwell begins to have doubts about what being a communist really means. He also sums up the whole dilemma which revolutionaries face when up against a powerful counterrevolutionary enemy, which also calls itself 'communist':

If I were a coalminer, I would not care to be known to the boss as a communist [since] the notion of 'liquidating' or 'eliminating' everyone who happens to disagree with you does not seem natural. It seemed only too natural in Barcelona. The 'Stalinists' were in the saddle and therefore it was a matter of course that every 'Trotskyist' was in danger (p189).

The seeds of *Animal Farm* had now been sown.

## Greene

Grahame Greene's *The quiet American* (1955) is one of the great cold war novels. It is partly inspired by a Byron quote:

This is the patent age of new inventions  
For killing bodies, and for saving souls,  
All propagated with the best intentions.

The story reads like a script for a *film noir* (which Greene was good at doing). It is 1954, Fowler is an ageing *Times* war correspondent stuck in Saigon, as the war is hotting up; he is also an opium addict. Although he is morally flawed, in the end he does the right thing for the wrong reasons: from being a disengaged journalist, he becomes engaged; he takes sides with the national liberation movement led by the Stalinist Viet Minh. This was during the last days of French rule in Indochina, just as the Americans are moving in. But Fowler is motivated by green-eyed jealousy rather than opposition to American imperialism

- a man called Pyle has just seduced Phuong, his beautiful Saigon mistress. Not only is he a younger man, who has more money, he also happens to be working under cover for the CIA; because now only the Americans can 'save the east from communism'.

Fowler is also troubled because his Catholic wife will not divorce him. Yet she says: "I suppose like the rest of us you are getting old and don't like living alone."<sup>4</sup> But what is the nature of Fowler's love for Phuong? He tells the idealist Pyle, "You can have her interests. I only want her body. I want her in bed with me" (p58).

Fowler witnesses some terrible things (as Greene did too during a stint as a journalist in Vietnam):

The canal was full of bodies: I am reminded now of an Irish stew containing too much meat. The bodies overlapped, one head, seal-grey, and anonymous as a convict with a shaven scalp, stuck up out of the water like a buoy. There was no blood: I suppose it had flowed away a long time ago (p172).

This would become emblematic for the crimes of American imperialism in future wars of aggression, right up to the present. Later Fowler has a conversation with himself: "Sooner or later one has to take sides, if one is to remain human" (p172).

Greene also uses irony to great effect. In a crucial scene, the American attaché is about to send one of those telegrams to a young man's parents, which begin with the words:

Grieved to report your son died soldier's death in cause of Democracy ... The Economic Aid Commission doesn't sound like the army" [says Fowler]. Do you get purple hearts?" (p30).

Unlike Hemingway, Greene gets away with it, because his Byron quote applies to American imperialism. Stalinism only plays a peripheral role in this story. Besides the Stalinised national liberation movement (the Viet Minh) was only able to defeat imperialism by defying the Stalinist hand which fed it (at least in the short term). But the human cost was enormous. With hindsight, given the fact that Vietnam has now returned to capitalism, we are entitled to conclude that the millions of Vietnamese who were sacrificed to the cause died in vain. But that is not Greene's concern. Then there is the quality of his writing.

## Roth

Philip Roth is an intelligent left liberal critic of communism (which he confuses with Stalinism). Arguably this makes him better than a fellow-traveller. Once again, he is a great writer. Following the precedent of Hemingway and Greene, *I married a communist* (1998) starts with a declaration, a Russian song for the working man sung by the Red Army choir. There is no acknowledgements, because this is a work of the author's imagination, based on his own experience. It is history re-enacted through the eyes of his fictional characters and their circumstances.

Set in the late 1940s and 50s, the story is personal as well as an 'American tragedy'. It takes its cue from the thousands of Americans who joined the US Communist Party. They were encouraged by the 'new deal' and the wartime alliance with the Soviets, which led to the defeat of fascism. But capitalism continued to exploit the American working

man, while blacks were still being lynched in the deep south. President Truman was threatening World War III. So there had to be a communist revolution in America.

Henry Wallace - Roosevelt's former vice-president, now leader of Progressive Party - offered the way forward. But in order to pursue this popular front strategy, in McCarthyite America, communists were forced to adopt their own personal 'front'. For Roth's larger-than-life main character, Ira Ringold, it was acting in a national radio show, *The free and the brave*. His marriage to a famous actress also helped.

But things begin to unravel when Eve Frame discovers that her husband is not just unfaithful: he is also a communist! In a jealous rage, she turns informer and outs Ira to the "zealous anti-communist cause". The listener in this story, Nathan Zuckerman (one of Roth's alter egos), who is Ira's friend, also feels betrayed.

Like Roth and his alter ego, Ira is Jewish. He also joined the Communist Party because he believed that the revolution could also guarantee his assimilation into American life. But, when Stalin started his anti-Semitism campaign in 1948, his obedience to the party was tested to the limit.

But how does Roth approach the question of communism? On the one hand, he does not see it through rose-tinted spectacles: his narrator tells us that in the Soviet Union the secret police kill their own people. On the other, Roth is not a Marxist (but he is not obliged to be either). He makes one or two references to Trotskyism, but he decides to leave this "can of worms" unopened - which is a pity! Whist Roth is not a fellow-traveller, he is sympathetic to all those Americans who lived the communist dream - even if this was a "crazy fairy tale".

Later he muddies the picture. Was Ira really a card-carrying working class communist? In the end, Nathan says that nothing makes sense - neither Karl Marx, Stalin nor Trotsky ... or even himself! There is only the universe - "the vast brain of time, a galaxy of fire set by no human hand".<sup>5</sup> It appears that this is a tragedy which extinguishes all hope. There is no chink of light.

## Montefiore

Simon Sebag Montefiore is an Oxbridge graduate, who is also "an English banking scion with a playboy reputation" (*Vanity Fair*), who went on to become a popular historian and TV presenter - as well as turning his research into best-selling novels, which means that he is laughing all the way to the bank.

It is appropriate to begin with his most successful work, a biography called *Stalin: the court of the red tsar* (2003). In the introduction to his acknowledgements, it is clear that he makes no attempt to establish a historical context. The events which led to the rise of Stalin are not seen in terms of the degeneration of the revolution. The latter was not the result of the imperialist counterrevolution from without - which allowed the Stalin faction to mount its own counterrevolution from within. Hence Montefiore talks about "Stalin's struggle with Trotsky" in a sort of vacuum, implying that it was the latter who was the would-be usurper of Lenin's mantle! So what we get is an irrational view of history, which is driven by individuals, either good or bad, who are simply 'men of their time'. Thus Montefiore writes:

My mission was to go beyond the traditional explanations of Stalin as 'enigma', 'madman' or 'satanic genius' and that of his comrades as 'dreary sycophants' ... [by] deploying the archives and unpublished memoirs, my own interviews [etc]. I hope Stalin

becomes a more understandable and intimate character, no less repellent. I believe that placing Stalin and his oligarchs in their idiosyncratic Bolshevik context as members of a military religious order of sword-bearers explains much of the inexplicable.<sup>6</sup>

What a waste of research skills! It merely leads to a popular historical biography which sells well - to all those who do not see the need for independent critical thought.

When it comes to his 'creative' side, clearly Montefiore has raided his own research material: viz his trilogy: *Sashenka* (2009), *One night in winter* (2013) and *Red sky at noon* (2016). Perhaps he sees himself as a latter-day Boris Pasternak, who wrote *Doctor Zhivago*, or the Stalinist, Mikhail Sholokhov, author of *And quiet flows the Don*. Like them, he uses the revolution and the civil war as a backdrop to a romantic melodrama, centred around his key characters - except that he continues the story into the period of Stalinism, ending with the Battle of Stalingrad.

In a conventional sense, he is very good at narrative structure - not too complicated - as well as writing convincing characters, both historical and fictional, who interweave seamlessly. Stalin takes pride of place. But in order to humanise him Montefiore shows that he can sometimes behave like an avuncular uncle or father figure, who likes nothing better than to relax from the burden of being the great leader of the revolution. In *Sashenka*, Stalin attends a party where, thanks to some good wine and music, he is able to impress everyone around him with his warmth and good humour; he can even sing! I have only read the first in the trilogy, so it behoves me to defer to the author himself. Then readers can judge for themselves as to the literary quality of his fiction, let alone its veracity.

In an interview about *Red sky at noon*, he said:

I wanted to write something very different to the other two novels in the Moscow trilogy ... This book is more physical action, it's more violent and the movement is sudden and surprising, and I wanted to write that sort of book. It has the great love affair, it has the ominous figure of Stalin in Moscow, but really we are living with this tiny posse of riders, their horses, the hot plains, the terrifying killers on both sides, the jerk of sudden events, the unleashing of grotesque monsters and, all the time, the aspiration to stay alive, to survive, to do good, to preserve your humanity.

In some ways, this is a homage to the great western writers such as Larry McMurtry of *Lonesome dove* and others who understand that a western adventure is sometimes a good way to look at what makes us humans different from the animals ... I hope you enjoy this novel. I've loved writing it.<sup>7</sup>

## Szalay

David Szalay belongs to a new breed of young, professional full-time writers of fiction. *The innocent* (2009) is his second novel, which is about life in the Soviet Union. His later novels are about young, middle class people trying to make sense of living under capitalism in the 21st century, wherein life is more fragmented and atomised than ever. *Turbulence*, which has just been published, evolved from a BBC commission to produce 12 short pieces for Radio Four - they are really a series of short stories, which are interconnected.

So we are presented with a character who literally flies from one place to another, where he meets another character; thus setting up

another story. As a review in the *Financial Times* says, "The narrative baton passes between protagonists, and the reader's sympathy shifts, as perspectives change."<sup>8</sup> In an accompanying interview, Szalay opined: "Only by juxtaposing multiple stories was it possible to create something meaningful."

Not only does the juxtaposition of different story lines appear to be his preferred narrative structure, but there is the danger that this will become more important than the creation of an imaginary world, within which the characters interact, where the reader is made to think about the real one, both past and present.

At least in *The innocent* we have a principal character; so there is a tighter narrative structure, even though it jumps around in time and place. Aleksandr is a KGB officer, who is also a decent man - he is just trying to do his job in a professional manner (as Szalay sees it). The story begins in the 1930s, leading up to the great purge of 1937-38, when the 'service' had to work night and day. (Really they should have had an independent trade union, so that they could take industrial action!) But then it jumps forward to 1948 (omitting the 'Great Patriotic War'). Aleksandr ('Aleks') is assigned to one particular case: the investigation of a Soviet doctor - the 'innocent' of the title - and his patient (who is now a vegetable, after being shot by the KGB).

In the next fragment, the time frame switches to 1972, which becomes another nodule for the story. For reasons which I do not understand completely, Aleks and his brother are first heard discussing the Munich Olympics - marred by the massacre of Israeli athletes. Then we move on to the world chess championship between challenger Bobby Fischer of the United States and defending champion Boris Spassky of the Soviet Union (Fischer's victory ended 24 years of Soviet domination of this cerebral sporting contest). Finally the author touches on the notorious ice hockey match between the USSR and Canada, which ended in another defeat for the Soviet Union, thus denting its superiority in the propaganda war between the two superpowers (the USSR was now losing its early lead over the USA in the space race). But what is the point to all this, really?

The narrative structure of *The innocents* also juxtaposes a third-person account between these events with a first-person account. In the latter, Aleks confesses to his ex-wife about what happened and reveals that he is consumed by feelings of guilt - firstly because he knew from the start that he was responsible for the arrest of an innocent man, who was sent to the Gulag, where he died an early death from overwork; secondly, this is compounded by his affair with the doctor's wife, which ended his first marriage.

The main problem with Szalay is that his research-based writing draws on the work of the Sheila Fitzpatrick, a social historian, whose special interest happens to be the Soviet Union during the Stalin years. As a result, she describes life from the standpoint of 'everyday Stalinism'; as opposed to a Marxist account of the period. We are invited to accept things as experienced by the ordinary individual, who has no higher knowledge - just an atomised view of the world. So things are what they are and there is no alternative. Hence Aleks was a bright student who wins a place to study law at a higher school controlled by OGPU, the secret police:

1930, a sense of excitement about everything ... it seemed that the revolution was fully underway, with the end of private manufacturing and trade,

industrialisation and the first five-year plan, the establishment of the *kolkhoz* system [of collective farms] and the formation of a new Soviet working class and intelligentsia ...<sup>9</sup>

From this standpoint, history is on our side. Socialism can be built in a single country. But the people have to make tremendous sacrifices, even if millions of innocent people die from being worked to death - traitors, of course, have to be mercilessly exterminated. As the old Russian proverb says, "When chopping wood, chips must fly!"

The head of the OGPU school tells his diligent students that the civil war "did not end in 1921 - it did not end at all". There was a conspiracy of white remnants and their supporters - the "rightists" - to undermine the party and the state, in order to destroy the achievement of communism.

Szalay writes:

They have now turned to wrecking violence, murder, terrorism ... They listened in sober silence while [the chief] listed the plots that had been foiled that year, all of them involving party members - even some members of the central committee ... [These included] Trotsky's conspiracies with his supporters still in the USSR ... and his letter to the CC, written from his hiding place in Mexico, in which he explicitly threatened the Soviet state with terrorist violence (p144).

For those who do not know what really happened, they are encouraged to believe that Trotsky was a counterrevolutionary. Thus Szalay contributes to the Stalinist school for the falsification of history.

But all this begs the question: once the Left Opposition had been destroyed, following the great purge of 1937, after Trotsky had been assassinated by a GPU agent, and so on, why did the Soviet Union collapse? Why were Stalin's successor's the first to usher in the restoration of capitalism in Russia in 1990? That is the problem with a novel based on Fitzpatrick's 'everyday Stalinism' approach. Write a research-based novel about the history of the Soviet Union by all means. But, for the sake of the ignorant, the writer is obliged to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth! Julian Barnes's fictionalised biography of Shostakovich, *The noise of time* (2016) is a case in point.<sup>10</sup>

## Fact and fiction

Here are some more facts, which Szalay omitted, and which should be of particular interest to American readers.

Firstly, Stalin ignored Marx, who pointed out that capitalism is a world system; therefore socialism in one country could not work. Therefore Stalin had to build up a huge apparatus of repression, because he needed millions of workers and peasants as slave labour. If you complained about being overworked in the factory, then you would be sent to the Gulag. At the same time, the bureaucracy needed to have scapegoats for the run of economic failures: kulaks, party managers and party members, including old Bolsheviks, were particularly vulnerable.

In his book, *The forsaken* (2009) Tim Tzouliadis writes:

The NKVD guards remained convinced that they were not murderers, but righteous executioners ... who became passionless slaughter men, too busy for introspection ... Each ... executioner was paid special rouble bonus for killing people in the 'zones' ... The Gulag ran

as high as 30 million over its lifespan ... between January 1 1935 and June 22 1941 there were approximately 20 million arrests and eight million deaths ...<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, in the 1930s, thousands of American workers - many of them Communist Party members - went to the Soviet Union as volunteer workers. Many of these also gave up their American citizenship. When they realised this was a mistake, they went to the American embassy in Moscow to apply for a new one:

Meanwhile, lurking outside the embassy gates, the NKVD agents were waiting for the emigrants to emerge. Many Americans ... were arrested in this way, on the pavement just yards from the embassy (p105).

Because the records have been destroyed, an untold number ended up in the camps, where people were worked to death. This included the notorious Kolyma gold mines in Siberia, originally discovered by American geologists. At the height of its production, Kolyma produced more gold than that of the British empire or America. Given Roosevelt's 'special relationship' with the Soviet Union, much of it was exported to the United States.

## Conclusion

Stalinophile writers, of whatever complexion, do not start out by asking the question, 'Was the Soviet Union under Stalin communist or not?' As a consequence, they contribute to the lie that communism is a bad idea. Hence their preoccupation with the evils which they describe are a form of morbid fascination, little more. This becomes more reprehensible if the author sees their task as primarily an intellectual exercise (how can I make the narrative structure more complex?). But the lowest of the low is when they do it simply for the money, a *la* opportunists like Montefiore.

But Greene and Roth are different. For Greene, the humanist "sooner or later has to take sides, if one is to remain human". For Roth, the left liberal, communism is just a "crazy fairy tale". He does not understand the difference between communism and Stalinism. But - like Greene, above all - he is a great novelist, because he is able to create an imaginary world, which, at the same time, is based on reality. As Roth said in his last interview before his death (2018), "I rub two sticks of reality together to get a fire of reality."<sup>12</sup> This produces a world we can immerse ourselves in.

Yet, at the same time, it makes us think about the real one more critically - which hopefully leads on to the question, 'Things need to change so what is to be done?' ●

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## Notes

1. 'Ernest Hemingway', Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernest\\_Hemingway](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernest_Hemingway).
2. [www.amazon.co.uk/Whom-Bell-Tolls-Ernest-Hemingway/dp/0099908603](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Whom-Bell-Tolls-Ernest-Hemingway/dp/0099908603).
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8. 'Multiple voices, many meanings' *Financial Times* January 6 2019.
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11. T Tzouliadis *The forsaken* London 2009, pp103, 158.
12. [www.bookish.com/articles/zolas-phil-hanrahan-gets-a-preview-of-pbss-philip-roth-unmasked](http://www.bookish.com/articles/zolas-phil-hanrahan-gets-a-preview-of-pbss-philip-roth-unmasked).

**ECONOMICS**

# Will the euro survive?

Michael Roberts looks back at the last 20 years and predicts a rocky future



January 1 was the 20th anniversary of the launch of the euro and the single currency area of the euro zone. It began with 11 member-states, but two decades after its birth membership has grown to 19 countries and the euro-area economy has swelled by 72% to €11.2 trillion (\$12.8 trillion) - second only to that of the US and positioning the European Union as a global force to be reckoned with.

The euro is now used daily by some 343 million people in Europe and a number of other territories also use it as their currency. And another 240 million people worldwide as of 2018 use currencies pegged to the euro, which is the second largest reserve currency, as well as the second most traded currency in the world, after the dollar. As of August 2018, with more than €1.2 trillion in circulation, the euro has one of the highest combined values of banknotes and coins in circulation, having surpassed the US dollar.

That is one measure of success. But it is not the most important benchmark considered by its founders. The great European project that started after World War II had two aims: first, it was to ensure that there were never any more wars between European states; and, second, to make Europe an economic and political entity that could rival America and Japan in terms of global capital. This project, to be led by Franco-German capital, went further and aimed at integrating

all European capitalist economies within a single market to compete with the US and Asia and with a rival currency to the dollar.

## Common currency

Let us first examine whether the euro has been a success for capital in the participating states, and whether it has been good news for labour, before considering whether it will still be here after another 20 years.

How do we measure the success of a single currency area in economic terms? Mainstream economic theory starts with the concept of an 'optimal currency area' (OCA) and the essence of OCA theory is that trade integration and a common currency will gradually lead to the convergence of GDP per head and labour productivity among participants.

The OCA says it makes sense for national economies to share a common monetary policy if they (1) have similarly timed business cycles and/or (2) have in place economic 'shock absorbers', such as fiscal transfers, labour mobility and flexible prices to adapt to any excessive fluctuations in the cycle. If (1) is the case, then a 'one size fits all' monetary policy is possible. If (2) holds, then a national economy can be on a different business cycle with the rest of the currency union and still do well inside it. Equilibrium can be established if there is 'wage flexibility', 'labour mobility' and automatic fiscal transfers.

The European Union has shown a

**Wealth has been flowing from south to north since the global downturn. In a federal state, that could be corrected ... but not in the halfway house eurozone**



degree of convergence. Common trade rules and the free movement of labour and capital between EU countries has led to 'convergence' - when it comes to productivity, it has been as strong as in the fully federal US, although convergence more or less stopped in the 1990s, once the single currency union started to be implemented.

So the move to a common market, customs union and eventually the political and economic structures of the EU has been a relative success. The EU 12, then 15, from the 1980s to 1999 managed to achieve a degree of harmonisation and convergence, with the weaker capitalist economies growing faster than the stronger.

But that was only up to the start of the economic and monetary union (EMU) in the 1992. The evidence for convergence since then has been much less convincing. On the contrary, the experience of EMU has been that of divergence.

The idea that 'free trade' is beneficial to all countries and to all classes is a 'sacred tenet' of mainstream economics. But it is a fallacious proposition based on the theory of comparative advantage: that if each country concentrated on producing goods or services where it has a 'comparative advantage' over others, then all would benefit. Trading between countries would balance and wages and employment would be maximised. But this is empirically untrue. Countries run

huge trade deficits and surpluses for long periods; they have recurring currency crises; and workers lose jobs from competition from abroad without necessarily getting new ones from more competitive sectors.

The Marxist theory of international trade is based on the law of value. In the euro zone, Germany has a higher organic composition of capital (OCC) than Italy, because it is technologically more advanced. Thus in any trade between the two value will be transferred from Italy to Germany. Italy could compensate for this by increasing the scale of its production/export to Germany to run a trade surplus. This is what China does. But Italy is not large enough to do this. So it transfers value to Germany and it still runs a deficit on total trade with Germany.

In this situation, Germany gains within the euro zone at the expense of Italy. No other member-state can scale up their production to surpass Germany, so unequal exchange is compounded across the EMU. On top of this, Germany runs a trade surplus with other states *outside* the EMU, which it can use to invest more capital abroad into the EMU deficit countries.

The Marxist theory of a currency union thus starts from the opposite position to that of neoclassical mainstream OCA theory. Capitalism is an economic system that combines labour and capital, but unevenly. The centripetal forces of combined accumulation and trade are often more

# What we fight for

than countered by the centrifugal forces of development and unequal flows of value. There is no tendency to equilibrium in trade and production cycles under capitalism. So fiscal, wage or price adjustments will not restore equilibrium - and anyway may have to be so huge as to be socially impossible without breaking up the currency union.

The EU leaders had set convergence criteria for joining the euro that were only monetary (interest rates and inflation) and fiscal (budget deficits and debt). There were no convergence criteria for productivity levels, GDP growth, investment or employment. Why? Because those were areas for the free movement of capital (and labour) and where capitalist production must be kept free of interference or direction by the state. After all, the EU project is a capitalist one.

This explains why the core countries of EMU diverged from the periphery. With a single currency, the value differentials between the weaker states (lower OCC) and the stronger (higher OCC) were exposed, with no option to compensate by the devaluation of any national currency or by scaling up overall production. So the weaker capitalist economies (in southern Europe) within the euro area lost ground to the stronger (in the north).

Franco-German capital expanded into the south and east to take advantage of cheap labour there, while exporting outside the euro area with a relatively competitive currency. The weaker EMU states built up trade deficits with the northern states and were flooded with northern capital that created property and financial booms that were out of line with growth in the productive sectors of the south.

Even so, none of this would have caused a crisis in the single currency union had it not been for a significant change in global capitalism: the sharp decline in the profitability of capital in the major EU states (as elsewhere) after the end of the golden age of post-war expansion. This led to fall in investment growth, productivity and trade divergence. European capital, following the model of the Anglo-Saxon economies, adopted neoliberal policies: anti-trade union laws, deregulation of labour and financial markets, cuts in public spending and corporate tax, free movement of capital and privatisation. The aim was to boost profitability. This succeeded somewhat for the more advanced EU states of the north, but less so for the south.

## Global slump

Then came the global financial crash and the great recession, which exposed the fault-lines in the single currency area. The slump dramatically increased the divergent forces within the euro. The fragmentation of capital flows between the strong and weak euro-zone states exploded.<sup>1</sup> The capitalist sectors of the richer economies like Germany stopped lending directly to the weaker capitalist sectors in Greece, Slovenia, etc. As a result, in order to maintain a single currency for all, the official monetary authority, the European Central Bank and the national central banks had to provide the loans instead. The euro system's 'target 2' settlement figures between the national central banks revealed this huge divergence within the euro zone.

The imposition of austerity measures by the Franco-German EU leadership on the 'distressed' countries during the crisis was the result of the 'halfway house' of euro criteria. There was no full fiscal union (tax harmonisation and automatic transfer of revenues to those national economies with deficits); there was no automatic injection of credit to cover capital flight and trade deficits (federal banking); and there was no banking union with EU-wide regulation,

where weak banks could be helped by stronger ones. These conditions were the norm in full federal unions like the United States or the United Kingdom. Instead, in the euro zone, everything had to be agreed by tortuous negotiation among the various states.

In this halfway house, Franco-German capital was not prepared to pay for the 'excesses' of the weaker capitalist states. Thus any bailout programmes were combined with 'austerity' for those countries<sup>2</sup> to make the people of the distressed states pay with cuts in welfare, pensions and real wages, and to repay (virtually in full) their creditors (the banks of France, Germany and the UK). The debt owed to the Franco-German banks was transferred to the EU state institutions and the International Monetary Fund - in the case of Greece, probably in perpetuity.<sup>3</sup>

The ECB, the EU Commission, and the governments of the euro zone proclaimed that austerity was the only way Europe was to escape from the great recession and austerity in public spending could force convergence on fiscal accounts too.<sup>4</sup> But the real aim of austerity was to achieve a sharp fall in real wages and cuts in corporate taxes and thus raise the share of profit and the profitability of capital. Indeed, after a decade of austerity, very little progress has been achieved in meeting fiscal targets (particularly in reducing debt ratios); and, more important, in reducing the imbalances within the euro zone on labour costs or external trade to make the weaker more 'competitive'.

The adjusted wage share in national income, defined here as 'compensation per employee as percentage of GDP at factor cost per person employed', is the cost to the capitalist economy of employing the workforce (wages and benefits) as a percentage of the new value created each year. Every capitalist economy had managed to reduce labour's share of the new value created since 2009. Labour has been paying for this crisis everywhere.

The evidence shows that those EU states that achieved a quicker recovery in the profitability of capital (Germany, Netherlands, Ireland, etc) were able to recover from the euro crisis faster, while those that did not improve profitability stayed deep in depression (eg, Greece).

One of the striking elements in the fall in labour's share of new value has been emigration. This was one of the OCA criteria for convergence during crises and it has become an important contributor in reducing costs for the capitalist sector in the larger economies like Spain (and smaller ones like Ireland).<sup>5</sup> Before the crisis, Spain was the largest recipient of immigrants to its workforce: from Latin America, Portugal and north Africa. Now there is net emigration even with these areas.

Keynesians blame the crisis in the euro zone on the rigidity of the single-currency area and on the strident 'austerity' policies of the leaders of the euro zone, like Germany. But the euro crisis is only partly a result of the policies of austerity. Austerity was pursued not only by the EU institutions, but also by states outside the euro zone like the UK. Alternative Keynesian policies of fiscal stimulus and/or devaluation, where applied, have done little to end the slump - households still suffered income loss. Austerity means a loss of jobs and services and reduction in nominal and real income. Keynesian policies mean a reduction in real income through higher prices, a falling currency and eventually rising interest rates.

Take Iceland, a tiny country outside the EU, let alone the euro zone. It adopted the Keynesian policy of devaluation of the currency - a policy not available to the euro-zone member-states. But it still meant a 40% decline in average real incomes

in euro terms, and nearly 20% in krona terms, since 2007. Indeed, in 2015 Icelandic real wages were still below where they were in 2005, 10 years earlier, whereas real wages in the 'distressed' EMU states of Ireland and Portugal have recovered.

Iceland's rate of profit plummeted from 2005 and eventually the island's property boom burst and, along with it, the banks collapsed in 2008-09. Devaluation of the currency started in 2008, but profitability up to 2012 remained well under the peak level of 2004. Profitability of capital in Iceland has now recovered, but EMU distressed 'austerity' states, such as Portugal and Ireland, have actually done better and even Greek profitability has shown some revival.

Those arguing for exiting the euro as a solution to the crisis hold that resorting to competitive devaluation would improve exports, production, wages and profits. But suppose Italy exits the euro and reverts to the lira, while Germany keeps the euro. Under the assumption that there are international production prices, if Italy produces with a lower technology level than that used by Germany, there is a loss of value from the Italian to the German producer. Now if Italy devalues its currency by half, the German importer can buy twice as much of Italy's exports, but the Italian importers can still only buy the same (or smaller) amount of German exports. Sure, in lira terms, there is no loss of profit, but in international production value terms (euro), there is a loss. The fall in the value rate of profit is hidden by the improvement in the money (lira) rate of profit.

In sum, if Italy devalues its currency, its exporters may improve their sales and their money rate of profit. Overall employment and investments might also improve for a while. But there is a loss of value inherent in competitive devaluation. Inflation of imported consumption goods will lead to a fall in real wages. And the average rate of profit will eventually worsen with the concomitant danger of a domestic crisis in investment and production. Such are the consequences of devaluation of the currency.

The political forces that wish to break with the euro or refuse to join it have expanded electorally in many euro zone countries. This year's EU elections could see 'populist' euro-sceptic parties take 25% of the vote and hold the balance of power in some

states, such as Austria, Poland and Italy. Yet the euro remains popular with the majority. Indeed, pro-euro sentiment has improved in 13 member-states since they joined,<sup>6</sup> with double-digit bumps in Austria, Finland, Germany and Portugal. Even in Italy, which has witnessed a roughly 25-point decline, around 60% of people still favour sharing a currency with their neighbours. Greeks are still 65% in favour. What this tells me is that working people in even the weaker euro-zone states reckon 'going it alone' outside the EU would be worse than being inside - and they are probably right.

Ultimately, whether the euro will survive in the next 20 years is a political issue. Will the people of southern Europe continue to endure more years of austerity, creating a whole 'lost generation' of unemployed young people, as has already happened? Actually, the future of the euro will probably be decided not by the populists in the weaker states, but by the majority view of the strategists of capital in the stronger economies. Will the governments of northern Europe eventually decide to ditch the likes of Italy, Spain, Greece, etc, and form a strong alliance around Germany, Benelux and Poland? There is already an informal 'Hanseatic league' alliance being developed.<sup>7</sup>

The EU leaders and strategists of capital need fast economic growth to return soon - failing which, further political explosions are likely. But, at the start of 2019, the euro zone economies are slowing down (as are those of the US and UK). It may not be too long before the world economy drops into another slump.

Then all bets would be off on the survival of the euro ●

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

## Notes

1. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2015/07/19/the-euro-train-going-off-the-rails>.
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## Fighting fund

# Back on target

I said last week we were "a little below par", when it came to our monthly fighting fund target of £1,750. But the donations this week have changed things a bit, with the running total for January now standing at £1,379, with a week still to go. In other words, we still need just less than another £400 to get there - definitely within reach.

When it came to standing orders, things were greatly helped by the fact that it's the right time of the month. There were just five of them, but four of them were for at least £50. The most generous was comrade SK's fantastic £230, with PM contributing £100. Then there was MM's usual £75, TB's £50 and a useful tenner from PM. In other words, an extra £465 came our way from just five comrades.

On top of that, there was the £20 note handed to the *Weekly Worker* at last Sunday's London Communist Forum, plus two PayPal gifts - thanks go to MN (£20) and LO (£10). All

that comes to £515 received over the last seven days, with £371 still needed by January 31.

In other words, still time to send us a cheque - we didn't get any of those for the fighting fund this week. But, if you'd prefer to make sure we get your donation more quickly, then you know what to do: either click on the PayPal button on our website or, better still (there's no charge deducted!), make a bank transfer to sort code 30-99-64, account number 00744310.

As I said a couple of weeks ago, let's start the year as we mean to continue. Let's see if we can go way beyond that £1,750 target, and see if we can start building up a reserve of funds in case things don't go quite so well later in the year ●

**Robbie Rix**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# weekly WORKER

**Danger of  
foreign  
adventures  
increases**

## Playing the immigration game

Donald Trump's wall that will never be built and the government shutdown are really about the 2020 presidential elections, writes Eddie Ford

Now over a month long, the government shutdown that began on December 22 is the longest in United States history.

The current situation began when president Donald Trump refused to sign a bipartisan congressional spending plan unless it set aside \$5.7 billion for his mad wall with Mexico - the border being 1,954 miles long and crossing vast deserts and mountains in California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. As a result of the shutdown, an estimated 460,000 employees are still working without pay, and another 340,000 workers have been placed on leave - some of them having to survive on charity and free biscuits from Starbucks. More than 1,500 appeals have been set up on crowdfunding site GoFundMe, seeking a financial lifeline to pay rent or feed their children.

On January 20 Trump's so-called "compromise" proposal was rejected by the Democrats, unleashing the inevitable barrage of presidential tweets. Very generously, or not, the president offered to cease legal action ("extend protection") for three years against roughly 700,000 'dreamers' - who were brought to the US illegally as children and also approximately 300,000 refugees facing an end to temporary legal status. Chuck Schumer, the Senate minority leader, immediately denounced Trump's move as "hostage taking" and, needless to say, his proposal was dismissed out of hand by senior Democrats, even as the president was speaking. Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic speaker of the House of Representatives - where her party now has a majority - described Trump's plan as a "compilation of several previously rejected initiatives" that would not provide lasting security for 'dreamers' and other groups. Democrats are demanding that Trump reopen the government by signing the existing congressional spending plan before any further negotiations on immigration.

At one stage Trump had been talking about declaring a state of emergency in order to bypass Congressional approval for the new border wall - but the president's advisors must have reminded him that this would almost certainly have been shot down in the courts. Slightly crazily, two weeks ago Trump reasserted his belief that Mexico would pay for the new wall by stating it would be done through the new trade bill he had arranged in 2018. But this is for the birds - everyone knows that Mexico will never do any such thing.

### Impasse

Of course, the idea that millions of Mexicans and others are 'invading' the US across the deserts and mountains is total nonsense. In fiscal year 2017, the US Customs and Border Protection agency apprehended 303,916 at the southern border. Of that group, 13% claimed credible fear of returning to their home country, the first legal step in seeking asylum. Putting this into perspective, also in 2017, more than 606,926 people entered the US legally by air or sea - not land - then overstaying their visas and disappearing amongst family and



Trump's wall is designed to keep the Democrats out

friends. By contrast, back in 2000, the CBP detained 1.6 million illegal border crossers. It is important to remember that the Trump administration has a habit of using 'illegal' to describe completely legal actions, such as seeking asylum at the border.

Another important thing to note is that about 654 miles of the southern border already have some sort of barrier, such as fencing - much of it built under the Obama presidency. Indeed, our readers will not be astonished to discover that the Democrats have backed plenty of legislation that restricts immigration. For instance, in February 2018 the Senate voted for a bipartisan plan to spend \$25 billion over 10 years to expand the various physical barriers along the border, but at the same time protect the estimated 3.6 million 'dreamers'. Trump rejected that bill.

Inevitably, Trump's "compromise" offer angered many Republicans and the far right/alt right - his repeated promises to "build the wall" won him many supporters from that milieu during the 2016 presidential campaign. Senior members of the Trump administration have opposed many aspects of the asylum process, working busily to drastically restrict it, despite many of their efforts being blocked in the courts. Fed up by the latest development, however, the far-right commentator, Ann Coulter, tweeted: "100 miles of border wall in exchange for amnestying millions of illegals. So if we grant citizenship to a billion foreigners, maybe we can finally get a full border wall." In the same vein, the anti-immigration group NumbersUSA dismissed Trump's plan

as "a loser for the American workers, who were central to his campaign promises" - arguing that this kind of amnesty deal "will incentivise more caravans, more illegal border-crossers and more visa overstayers at the expense of the most vulnerable American workers, who have to compete with the illegal labour force".

On the other hand, several opinion polls have indicated that a majority of Americans disapprove of Trump's border wall - an average of all the polls compiled by RealClearPolitics currently finds that 55.3% of Americans disapprove of the scheme.

Not one inch of Trump's wall has been built, of course, and probably never will be - the idea that 1,954 miles, or anything like it, will be constructed is pure fantasy. What the government shutdown<sup>1</sup> and wall rhetoric is really about is the 2020 presidential elections, which will be fought on immigration - Trump portraying the Democrats as soft on the question. The president, however, will want to be seen as tough, but 'humane' - the Democrats would rather irresponsibly shut down the government than accept his "generous" offer on the 'dreamers'. We saw intimation of the ugly campaign to come at the beginning of the week, when Trump tweeted that there would be "no big push to remove the 11,000,000-plus people who are here illegally" - before adding: "But be careful, Nancy!" (ie, Nancy Pelosi).

All you can say is that an issue like immigration has serious traction in the US - as it does in Europe and Britain. The single biggest reason, or motivational factor, for the Brexit vote was undoubtedly immigration

(plus giving the establishment a good kicking).

Trump's wall, combined with the shutdown and tough talk on immigration, takes place as we await the imminent arrival of the Mueller report and stories about Michael Cohen being "directed" to lie before Congress (which Mueller claims is inaccurate). The report will have enough explosive stuff for the Democrats to begin impeachment, having a majority in the House of Representatives - but it will not go anywhere, as it requires a two-thirds majority in the Senate, which will never happen. But it shows the febrile nature of present-day US politics that you have a president with impeachment hanging over him who is playing the immigration game for all it is worth.

Just like with Theresa May and Brexit, it is hard to see a way out of the current impasse in the US. Yet, as I write, stories are circulating that on January 24 the Senate will vote on a pair of bills that could possibly end the shutdown. The first, a Republican-backed bill, would meet Trump's demand for a border wall in exchange for "temporary protections" for young, undocumented immigrants. The second would extend funding through to February 8 for the agencies that are currently closed. Senate majority and minority leaders, Mitch McConnell and Chuck Schumer, announced the compromise, if that is what it is, on the Senate floor on January 22 - Schumer predicting, or hoping, that the short-term funding proposal "could break us out of the morass we are in".

However, it is far from certain that either bill can garner enough support to pass the chamber. Democrats - many implacably opposed to granting funding for the wall, as it is a "medieval solution" to a "21st-century problem" - will probably have the votes to block Trump's proposal, while the Democrats' proposed funding extension would have to win the support of at least 13 Republicans to reach the 60-vote threshold. The gridlock could well continue for some time yet.

### North Korea

Given the volatile state of US politics, it is a matter of genuine concern that the president has extensive powers to take initiatives abroad. His domestic agenda may be severely restricted, but, when it comes to taking military action, it is an entirely different matter - even if in theory the president is required to notify Congress within 48 hours of any intention to commit armed forces to military action and needs

Congressional authorisation for action lasting more than 60 days.<sup>2</sup>

But we all know that there was no vote for the US wars in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Rather, in the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident - or fabrication - we were asked to believe that the Vietnamese 'navy' (they had none) had attacked the US navy. The US literally flattened Laos, making it the most bombed country per square-metre on earth - even more than Germany during World War II.

In this context, the prospective summit between Trump and North Korean 'supreme leader' Kim Jong-un is not a sign that peace is about to break out - more like a clearing of the decks for something else to happen, especially as the announcement of the summit more or less coincided with talk from Trump about militarising space with his Space Force. This involves, it seems, sensors "placed among the stars" that can detect missile launches and Trump will demand that the technology is funded in his next budget. On January 17 he said: "Our goal is simple: to ensure we can detect and destroy any missile launched against the United States - anywhere, any time, any place". Naturally, he identified four countries that pose a "missile threat" to Americans on home soil - North Korea, Iran, Russia and China, with North Korea apparently posing an "extraordinary threat".

Trump clearly has the power to start something off, though his most likely target is Iran - just bomb it mercilessly from the safety of the clouds, destroy the infrastructure and maybe sponsor the nationalist break-up of the country. Therefore it is genuinely ominous that the US is sponsoring a summit in Poland for mid-February focusing on the question of Iran, with some 70 countries participating. Mike Pompeo, the US secretary of state, has said that the main aim of the summit is "changing the behaviour" of Iran - which could mean imposing more sanctions or some sort of military action. Seems to be a pattern emerging here ...

For a besieged president, feeling the heat at home, a foreign adventure would be a most welcome diversion - whip up patriotism and get those extra votes to secure the 2020 election ●

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### Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jan/22/senate-republicans-shutdown-bill-trump-plan.  
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War\_Powers\_Resolution.

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