

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly 
worker

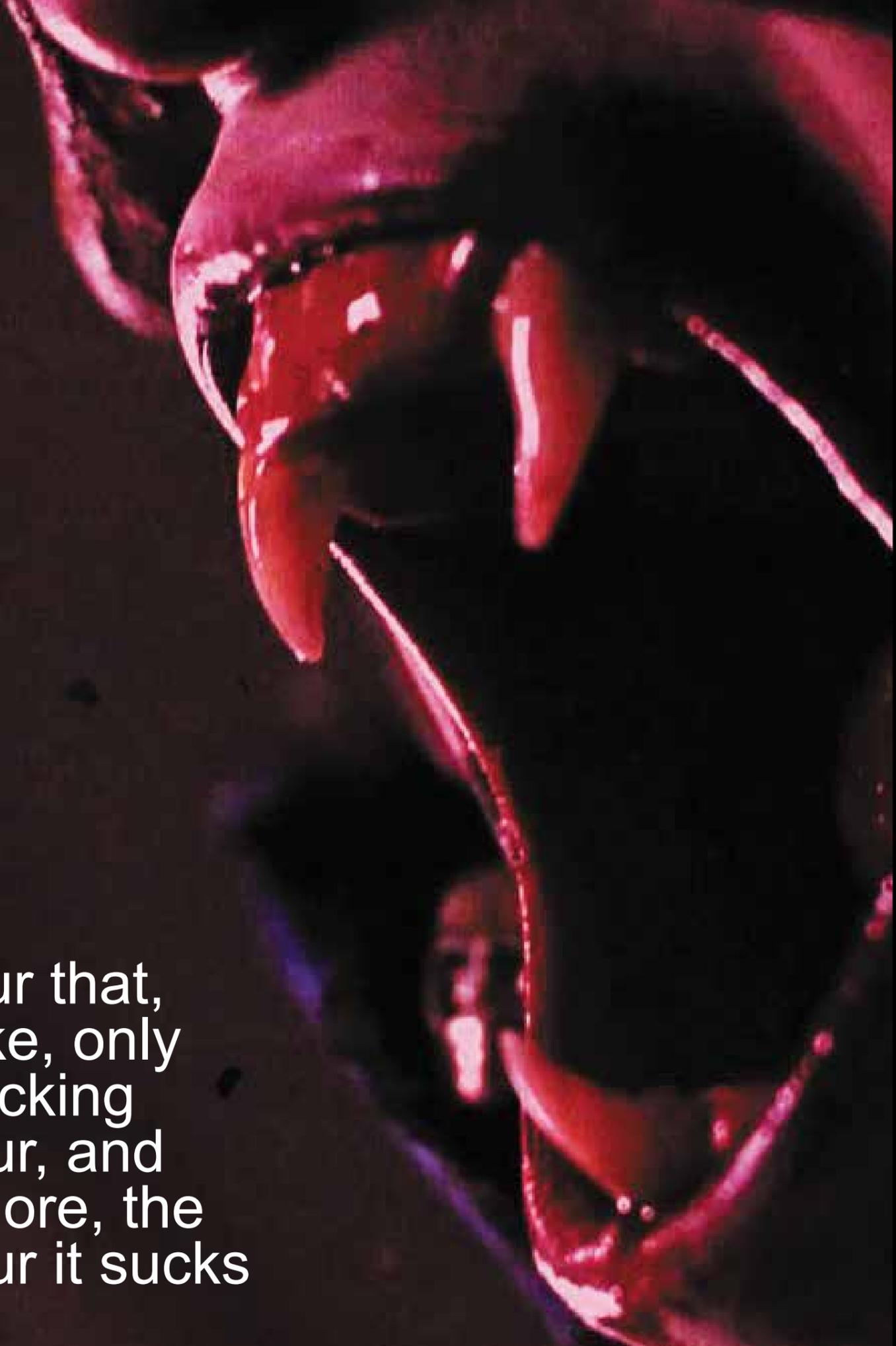
**Tory interpretation of history
is institutionalised in the UK,
argues Mike Macnair**

- Letters and debate
- South African elections
- PCS AGS election
- Brexit votes

No 1236 Thursday January 31 2019

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

£1/€1.10



Capital is
dead labour that,
vampire-like, only
lives by sucking
living labour, and
lives the more, the
more labour it sucks

LETTERS



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

Value forever

It really would have been useful had Paul B Smith actually read what I wrote about value and exchange value, before he responded to what he claims I said (Letters, January 24). That would have saved him simply repeating all of the same errors that John Bridge had made in confusing and conflating value and exchange value, that I had actually dealt with in my article ('Subjective and objective value', January 17).

Smith says: "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." That is to assume what he has to prove, which is that value is and only ever can be exchange-value: ie, the form that value takes in a society based upon the production and exchange of commodities. That is not what I argued, and it is not what Marx argues, as the numerous quotes from Marx and Engels that I provided illustrate.

Smith's argument is directly contradicted by Marx's argument in *Capital* volume 1, that the example of Robinson Crusoe tells us all we need to know about value and the law of value. Marx is clearly not describing value as depending upon commodity production and exchange, because Crusoe only ever produces products for his own consumption. It is precisely this calculation of individual value that enables the primitive community to engage in a division of labour, so as to reduce the value of the products it produces for its own requirements, and thereby to increase its output of use-values, thereby increasing its welfare. But none of this has anything to do with commodity production or the production of exchange-values.

Smith begins his argument by assuming what he has to prove, ie, that value is only ever exchange-value, and is only thereby a product of commodity production and exchange, which contrary to his assertion puts him, not me, firmly in the camp of those that fall foul of commodity fetishism, and leaves him agreeing with the proponents of subjective value, that value is only ever a product of exchange. That is precisely what Marx sets out to disprove in his arguments in *Theories of surplus value*, chapter 20.

But, Smith's confusion is even greater than that. He says: "... the measurement of labour-time expressed in a value relation presupposes the commodification of labour-power." This is absolute nonsense. Labour-power is only commodified as wage labour, and wage labour is a feature of capitalist production. But, as both Marx and Engels describe, commodity production and exchange goes back something between 7,000 and 10,000 years, predating capitalism by almost the same amount of time. It is precisely in the period when commodity production is dominated by individual peasant producers and artisans, and when their labour-power is not a commodity, that the expression of value in the form of exchange-value takes its most pure form, in the prices of those commodities.

Smith says: "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."

This is just a silly inversion of the truth. It is Smith that insists that value is and can only ever be exchange-value, not me! Indeed, it is Smith who claims that value can only be a consequence of commodified labour-power: ie, of capitalist production! It is Smith who argues that value is premised upon wage-labour and so it is capitalist production that turns exchange-value into an eternal and natural form of society.

Smith says: "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." Nonsense. Abolition of the wages system, and the implementation of much greater use of fixed capital will raise productivity, and the gradual implementation of planning of production on a wider scale will increase efficiency, but it in no way removes the influence of the law of value on workers, any more than if Robinson Crusoe decided to work half as many hours that would remove the effect of the law of value on him!

The only way in which the law of value can cease to operate is if, in some future society, the level of social productivity is raised to such a fantastically high level that general abundance exists, as Marx describes in the *Critique of the Gotha programme*, and therefore no effective choices have to be made over the way available social labour-time is allocated between alternative uses.

Arthur Bough
email

Misunderstood

Arthur Bough objects at some length to my analysis of the left positions on Brexit (Letters, January 25). In one matter, he seems to have simply misunderstood me; on other points, he seems to misunderstand matters of substance.

On the first point, the comrade writes: "[Demarty] 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." He then rebukes me to the effect that fear of the right did not matter very much in the 1970s to left opposition to the European Economic Community. It should be clear from a brief glance at the context of my statement that I was only referring to the 2016 referendum and its lengthy preamble. I do not claim for a minute that fear of the far right was a matter of concern for the left in the 1970s so far as Europe was concerned.

Comrade Bough gets into stickier waters than a mere careless error of reading comprehension, however, when he appears to deny that this is implicated in leftwing remainism today. "In fact," he writes, "the driving force today behind Brexit is not the far right ... it is the reactionary wing of the Tory Party, representing all of those small-trader capitalists." Here he does not quite exhaust the logical possibilities, and fails to acknowledge that the Tory party's "reactionary wing" (as opposed to its progressive wing?) is part of the far right. It is merely that the grossly undemocratic British electoral system forcibly attaches the far right to the centre-right, such that British Poujades are commonly lashed to our de Gaulles in fractious party unity (not invariably, as the heyday of UKIP demonstrates).

Thus, also, an ambiguity in his short class analysis (small-trader capitalists) of this wing. We are instead dealing with rogue professionals (politicians) exercising hegemony over a large section of the petty bourgeoisie and also - alas! - another large slice of the proletariat. This is where the 'fear of

the far right' stuff comes in. Comrade Bough may support a 'remain' position on the basis that the EU is a progressive phenomenon relative to the UK state, but I have to wonder if he has ever discussed this with comrades. A straw in the wind: Alan Thornett and the Socialist Resistance majority went over to 'remain' explicitly on the basis of preventing a far-right surge in 2015. At the same Left Unity conference where he made that argument, two ex-Militant comrades - almost in tears - spoke movingly of their fear that their infant granddaughter would be deported should the vote go the wrong way. The phrase, 'carnival of reaction', was uttered a lot. It is my anecdote against Arthur's; but I do wonder where he is getting his conversation partners if he dismisses it out of hand now.

Because the left has failed to stake out a serious independent profile in this period, however, it has ended up with its political choices radically constrained. Comrade Bough is right about Lexitism and socialism in one country; but he is too free with the word 'progressive', and does not understand that taking a position where George Osborne is to be commended, from the point of view of world history, over Jacob Rees-Mogg is exactly the sort of trap the bourgeois mainstream has set for the left - in most cases, if not Arthur's, by manipulating fear of the far right.

Paul Demarty
London

Dearth of quality

Dave Walters gallant attempt to exorcise the ghost of peak oil haunting the corridors of power misses the main point (Letters, January 17).

Not too long ago, when those in the peak-oil camp predicted that oil prices were heading towards \$50 per barrel, they were dismissed and laughed out of court by those who thought they knew better. History has confirmed that the peakists were right. But, when the peakists made that prediction, what they had in mind was a booming economy. In this respect they were wrong, because a booming economy led to oil prices soaring to \$147 per barrel, which triggered the 2008 recession. Peak oil is really about the price of oil based on supply and demand. Economic growth is dependant on cheap oil. This is the point Dave Walters and other anti-peakists are overlooking.

Economic growth is basically a function of cheap energy. As Jeff Rubin points out in his important book, *Why your world is about to get a whole lot smaller*, "We shouldn't be looking at oil prices as the effect of the recession. They are the cause." The shocking thing is that the global economy slowed down and oil is still hovering around \$50 per barrel. What is going to happen if the economy begins to boom again? Or, even more relevant, will the economy ever boom again?

The price of energy, particularly oil, is the most important determinant of economic growth and, as the leading petroleum engineer and one of the founders of the Association for the Study of Peak Oil, Colin Campbell, pointed out in his book *Oil crisis*, "The world's experience over the past century has been one of unprecedented growth made possible by the abundance of cheap, oil-based-energy" (p228).

It is this fact which the critics of peak oil theory ignore: economic growth is related to cheap energy. High-cost energy hinders growth. Cheap energy is becoming a thing of the past, as the Hubbert curve asserts itself. When Walters calls the Hubbert curve "nonsensical", this reveals his lack of understanding of Hubbert. By

the way, it's important to point out that the Hubbert curve relates to what is called regular or conventional oil. In 1956 he accurately used the curve to predict the peaking of conventional oil production in the United States by 1970. He used the curve again to predict the global peak in the period between 2000 and 2010. In 2008 the world was plunged into recession, as the price came close to \$150 per barrel. I conclude Hubbert was right again.

The anti-peak oil supporters believe that the enormous quantities of non-conventional oil which remain have rendered peak oil an obsolete theory. For instance, shale oil production in the US has raised oil production above the Hubbert peak. The exploitation of shale oil has been made possible by the high price of conventional oil. But shale oil doesn't help to bring down oil prices and, even if it did so, its exploitation would no longer be profitable. Walters recognises this when he points out that if oil prices drop to, say, \$30 per barrel non-conventional oil production will grind to a halt. In fact some investors say anything below \$50 will begin to impact non-conventional oil production.

The Hubbert curve relates to the peak and decline of conventional, cheap oil production. The interrelationship between this process of depletion, combined with the emergence of non-conventional oil, is complex, but suffice to say that new oil extraction technology depletes oil faster, together with the fact that the depletion rate of non-conventional oil is quicker than regular oil. So the question is, are we moving to a world of cheap energy as in the past, or a world of rising energy prices? Peakists are not saying that non-conventional oil is irrelevant, because they know it will play an important role in mitigating the effects of the decline in cheap energy. What they are saying is non-conventional oil will not return us to the era of cheap energy, at least as far as it is based on hydrocarbons. In other words, peak oil is one of the long-term causes behind rising energy costs. Peak oil remains important because of the ongoing depletion of conventional oil and also because it is one of the most important explanations for the long-term tendency of oil prices to rise.

Finally, Dave Walters claims that the website *The Oil Drum* was closed down because they realised that Peak Oil discussion was dead and gone. This is totally incorrect because the site was not launched only to discuss peak oil, which was only one issue. Various reasons have been given for closing the site (although it remains as an archive). One reason was server cost, and another was a dearth of high-quality submissions.

Tony Clark
email

Two Lenins

Jack Conrad mentions Stalin's *Short course* and complains that Stalin also spread lies about Kamenev and Zinoviev: "It is more than ironic then that, with the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) - short course* (1939), we find Stalin - widely accepted as the main author of this notorious work of truths, half-truths and downright lies - pirating Trotsky's account of 1917" ('Marxism versus holy script', January 10).

He wasn't "pirating Trotsky's account of 1917": he was telling the truth, because it suited his purpose; he was justifying executing them both in August 1936. And Stalin did tell the truth, when convenient. He summarised Trotsky's role in 1917 in *Pravda* on November 6 1918 and in 1934, before he had consolidated his bloody, totalitarian regime with the great purges, which

begun with his assassination of Kirov in December, this quote was still there in his book *The October revolution* (it did not appear in Stalin's *Works* of 1949, of course):

"All the work of practical organisation of the insurrection was conducted under the immediate leadership of the chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, Trotsky. It is possible to declare with certainty that the swift passing of the garrison to the side of the soviet and the bold execution of the work of the Military Revolutionary Committee the party owes principally and above all to comrade Trotsky."

Because Trotsky had been elected chairman of the Petrograd Soviet (the post he had held in 1905) on October 8, signifying the victory of the Bolsheviks over the Mensheviks and all other opponents, only he had the authority to lead the practical work of the insurrection - a fact Stalin was forced to admit in 1918, but lied about in 1936. His *Short course* tells an entirely different, completely distorted account of these great events:

"On October 16 an enlarged meeting of the central committee of the party was held. This meeting elected a party centre, headed by comrade Stalin, to direct the uprising. This party centre was the leading core of the Revolutionary Military Committee of the Petrograd Soviet and had practical direction of the whole uprising."

EH Carr, in his *Bolshevik revolution* part 1 (pp106-07), does record the formation of this centre, consisting of five leading Bolsheviks: "Sverdlov, Stalin, Bubnov, Uritsky and Dzerzhinsky, which was to form part of the military-revolutionary committee of the Petrograd Soviet [led by Trotsky - GD] ... contemporary records make no further mention of the centre ... and, like the 'politburo' appointed a week earlier [on October 10] never seems to have come into existence." So much for Stalin leading the revolution.

The *Short course* was drafted by Vilhelms Knorinš, Yemelyan Yaroslavsky and Pyotr Pospelov, beginning in 1935. The unfortunate Latvian, Knorinš, was arrested in the great purges and executed on July 29 1938. The other two, now joined by Vyacheslav Molotov, had already got the message and wrote what Stalin told them - and each new edition had changes to damn those executed in the meantime, who had been praised in the previous edition.

Curiously comrade Jack then gives an accurate account of these events and asserts that it must be lies because Stalin said so. But it is the truth and the account of hundreds, including Lenin, John Reed, Tony Cliff, EH Carr, Trotsky and ... Stalin. He tells us: "When it comes to 1917 the *Short course* is a palimpsest of *Lessons of October*." And don't you like that the bit where he says: "the letter immediately fell into the hands [my emphasis] of *Novaya Zhizn* (a daily paper associated with the leftwing writer, Maxim Gorky)?" What had happened then? Zinoviev was walking out of a meeting; the document fell out of his pocket and a Gorky agent happened upon it? Lenin said that this was strike-breaking and treason: they had handed it over in a bid to stop the insurrection.

And then there is comrade Jack's extended paean in defence of Kamenev and Zinoviev - who were only a bit cautious and careless, as comrade Jack tells us, in seeking to defend the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry', which Lenin had consigned to the dustbin of history. But comrade Jack is still trying to revive it: Lenin "had failed to fully grasp the actual state of play in Russia", because of his exile in Switzerland apparently. All that Lenin had failed to grasp was details about tactical consideration: he had a strategy totally opposed to the

rightists. The 'Letters on tactics' should really be called 'Letters on strategy' - a differentiation the Bolsheviks were later to emphasise strongly in the debates on the united front in the first four congresses of the Comintern.

Comrade Jack writes: "But then we find, soon afterwards, Lenin and Kamenev joining together in opposing the leftist slogan of 'Down with the Provisional government', as raised by the Petrograd committee of the RSDLP (a continuation of the crude politics of the Alexander Shliapnikov and Vyacheslav Molotov type). Circumstances were not yet ripe for the overthrow of the Provisional government in April-May 1917. Hence, together with Kamenev, Lenin insisted that the 'correct slogan' was 'Long live the soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies'."

But, clearly, comrade Jack is using the tactical mistakes of Shliapnikov and Molotov here in calling for the immediate overthrow of the Provisional government as a cover for rejecting the importance of adopting just that strategic perspective for the Bolsheviks, which Lenin's April theses succeeded in doing so well.

And what are we to make of comrade Jack's charge of the "politically limited abilities of Alexander Shliapnikov and Vyacheslav Molotov", the editors of *Pravda* ousted by Kamenev, Stalin and MK Muranov mid-March? *Pravda* under Shliapnikov and Molotov was with Lenin and absolutely anti-war and for the overthrow of the Provisional government. The line was immediately changed to support for the war and the Provisional government. The same Molotov was very useful to Stalin later because he and Shliapnikov had championed Lenin's line (as they understood it). This gave a measure of continuity to the degenerate Stalinised bureaucracy, despite Molotov's later appalling personal and political degeneration. He died in his bed an old man because of his great flexibility.

Here he is on the Hitler-Stalin pact of August 1939: "In any case, under the 'ideological' flag there has now been started a war of even greater dimensions and fraught with even greater danger for the peoples of Europe and of the whole world. But there is absolutely no justification for a war of this kind. One may accept or reject the ideology of Hitlerism as well as any other ideological system, that is a matter of political views. But everybody should understand that an ideology cannot be destroyed by force, that it cannot be eliminated by war. It is, therefore, not only senseless, but criminal to wage such a war as a war for the 'destruction of Hitlerism' camouflaged as a fight for 'democracy'."

In fact, this confusion of strategy and tactics has led comrade Jack to a defence of the 'treason' of Kamenev and Zinoviev in October in a manner that questions the wisdom of the October revolution itself. If they had such a good case before April and in October, does it not follow that the leaders of the revolution, Lenin and Trotsky, were just audacious; Zinoviev and Kamenev just cautious? Often it is better to be cautious rather than audacious. The Lenin of April 1905 was seemingly correct against the April theses Lenin of 1917 - to attempt the socialist revolution in Russia was foolish.

Lenin wrote in 1905 in defence of 'the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry': "By participating in the Provisional government, we are told, Social democracy would have the power in its hands; but, as the party of the proletariat, social democracy cannot hold the power without attempting to put our maximum programme into effect: ie, without attempting to bring about the socialist revolution. In such an undertaking it would, at the present time, inevitably come to grief, discredit itself and play into the hands of the reactionaries. Hence, participation by social democrats in a provisional revolutionary

government is inadmissible. This argument is based on a misconception: it confounds the democratic revolution with the socialist revolution, the struggle for the republic (including our entire minimum programme) with the struggle for socialism."

But between 1905 and 1917 came Bukharin's 1915 *Imperialism and world economy*, to which Lenin wrote the very profound foreword and his own *Imperialism, the highest state of capitalism* in 1916. It was now to a worldwide socialist revolution and a worldwide class consciousness of all workers that Lenin turned resolutely.

But the Russian Revolution was a big mistake apparently. Lenin should not have changed his mind and lashed up with that scoundrel, Trotsky. Only a bourgeois revolution was ever possible in Russia back then and subsequent events have proved this correct. QED - comrade Jack Conrad. Strangely my old Workers Revolutionary Party comrade, Cliff Slaughter, has now come to the same conclusion under the tutelage of István Mészáros. He even deliberately misquoted Trotsky to prove this (see 'A political obituary to Cliff Slaughter as a Trotskyist' on the *Socialist Fight* website). Strange bedfellows indeed!

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Proud symbol

The letter from your very occasional correspondent, Bruno Kretschmar, was interesting (January 24). I think he made a very insightful point in identifying that, while the modern capitalist state has unprecedented and unparalleled means to manipulate and control people's thinking and controls ultimately devastating forces for civil and military oppression, it is nonetheless highly vulnerable to a genuinely mass, democratic movement opposed to it.

I think such a mass movement could arise - apparently out of nowhere, but in truth unnoticed to date - and grow extremely rapidly, using ideas, mass communication and self-organisation, and very quickly represent a significant challenge to both the existing modern capitalist state and the order it seeks to defend. We recall Lenin's observation that sometimes "there are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen".

Whether such a movement would be authentically or explicitly socialist or communist is probably doubtful. But one could easily imagine that such a movement would be inherently progressive, and perhaps inspired and motivated around the big issues and challenges of our time.

We are not talking of "surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small, conscious minorities at the head of unconscious masses" (Engels, in his introduction to *Class struggles in France*), of coup d'états, revolutionary or otherwise. Faced with a surging, mass democratic, oppositional movement, one can easily imagine modern capitalist states being simply and easily swept aside or atomised if they tried to resist.

Bruno makes a further insightful point about the diversity and range of settings, roles and occupations you will find in the modern working class, but then makes a completely daft point about wanting to abandon the traditional communist symbol of the hammer and sickle. He thinks it is not only old-fashioned, but represents wage-slavery. Absolutely wrong. The vaguest knowledge of the history of the workers' and communist movement should tell you the hammer and sickle is a symbol of proletarian unity, an alliance between industrial and agricultural workers for socialism, for peaceful, cooperative labour for the common good. It is a symbol of the emancipation of labour, not its oppression. I accept it may be a little old-fashioned, but I do not accept,

as Bruno claims, that the use of the hammer and sickle is the reason why thousands are not flocking to join socialist or communist parties.

Communists should be extremely proud of our history and what was achieved especially over the past hundred years. Yes, mistakes and errors were made - we acknowledge, learn and correct going forward. "The communists disdain to conceal their aims and views" - or our history and record. No-one would be fooled by cosmetic changes to our symbols and designs. People would hold us in contempt for even trying to do so. In this modern world of global mass, instant communication, where billions of items of information are in circulation, it is actually really important that communist parties are able to carry symbols and icons which immediately identify who and what we are, our tradition, and what we stand for.

Bruno may well be surprised, but the younger, modern generations do seem to have a basic, instinctive understanding that communism is opposed to and aims to supersede capitalism, that we stand for a society run by working people in the interest of working people, that the Soviet Union and other socialist countries managed to combine strong national security states, able to protect themselves and keep law and order, with very high levels of social provision and protection for the whole of the working population - far more universal, beneficial and guaranteed than anything under capitalism. They tend to understand the basic concepts and values of solidarity, equality and common endeavour and to associate these with communists.

Whether they are interested in the Trotsky-Stalin split in the 1920s, the great purge of 1937-38, the removal of the anti-party group in 1957, the replacement of Khrushchev in 1964 ... probably not, but nor should they be. These have no bearing on our critique and challenge to capitalism, and our basic case for its overthrow of capitalism and replacement by socialism and ultimately for a world communist society.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Socialist Fight

In his January 14 letter, Gerry Downing informed us that the two main London bookshops selling leftwing journals, Housmans and Bookmarks, have refused to continue supplying *Socialist Fight*.

This is a disgraceful capitulation to the witch-hunt aimed primarily at Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour left, whose main weapon has been the conflation of anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism (both shops have stated or implied that *Socialist Fight* is an "anti-Semitic" publication). This criticism applies particularly to Bookmarks, which is, of course, run by the Socialist Workers Party.

SF recently adopted a 'theory' which claims that a central reason for imperialist support for Israel is the "overrepresentation" of Jews within the bourgeoisie (ie, there are 'too many Jews' at the top), and it is true that this idea is highly problematic. SF's own conflation of anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism in this way was the reason Labour Against the Witchhunt voted to exclude it a year ago.

But exclusion from a political campaign or faction is totally different from a refusal to sell a leftwing publication or engage with its politics in any way. LAW, of course, had a full debate with SF comrades before reaching its decision. The best way to defeat reactionary or mistaken ideas is to take them on and try to persuade those who express them why they are wrong, not attempt to suppress them.

We urge both Bookmarks and Housmans to reconsider their decision.

Peter Manson
Weekly Worker editor

LONDON COMMUNIST FORUM ACTION

Sunday February 3, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimitz's Lenin's electoral strategy from 1907 to the October Revolution of 1917. This meeting - chapter 2: 'The Fourth Duma'; section: 'The Prague conference'. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday February 5, 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: 'Sharing like sisters: ritual, egalitarianism and the morality of cosmetic exchange'. Speaker: Elena Fejdiova. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

Labour Against the Witchhunt

Saturday February 2, 10.30am to 5pm: Conference, Askew Road Church, Bassein Park Road, Hammersmith, London W12. Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt: www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org.

Stop Birmingham arms fair

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

Robert Tressell memorial

Sunday February 3, 11am: March. Assemble Noonan Close, Liverpool L9 (next to Walton station). In commemoration of writer Robert Noonan, better known as Robert Tressell, author of *The ragged-trousered philanthropists*. Speakers include Dan Carden MP. Organised by Liverpool Walton Labour: www.facebook.com/events/1143258535837664.

Stop arming Saudi, stop bombing Yemen

Public meetings
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.

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.

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.

Whatever happened to liberation theology?

Saturday February 9, 1pm: Talk and discussion, Old Burnt Barns, 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.

Confronting racism on campus

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

Trump and war in the Middle East

Saturday February 16, 2pm: Meeting, Amnesty International UK, 25 New Inn Yard, London EC2. What lies ahead for the anti-war movement? Speakers include Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP and Tariq Ali. Tickets £3 (£0). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/events/2226590284295617.

Stand Up To Racism

Saturday February 23, 10.30am to 5pm: Trade union conference, NEU, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Discuss, debate and organise against the far right on the streets and institutional racism in the workplace. Tickets £11.25 (£5.92). Organised by Stand Up To Racism: www.facebook.com/events/346086039308173.

Our history

Tuesday February 26, 7pm: Meeting, first floor, The Wellington pub, 37 Bennetts Hill, Birmingham B2. 'The National Leftwing Movement: the Labour left in the 1920s'. Speaker: Lawrence Parker. Organised by Birmingham Socialist Discussion Group: ser14@btinternet.com.

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.

SOUTH AFRICA

Heading for another victory

With the ANC consolidating its position, there is a huge vacuum to its left, observes **Peter Manson**. But who will attempt to fill it?

While the date for the South African national elections has not yet been announced, they are expected to take place in May, after the five-year term of the current parliament ends. In 2014, the African National Congress won 249 seats in the 400-seat national assembly, having gained 62.2% of the vote. In the country's totally proportional system, in which there is no minimum threshold for election, each 0.25% won by a party gives it one MP. As a result, the 22.2% recorded by the main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, gave it 89 seats, while the then up-and-coming Economic Freedom Fighters had 25 (6.4%).

For a long time - especially during the last couple of years of Jacob Zuma's presidency - it looked as though the ANC would face big losses in 2019, with both the DA and especially the EFF expected to make gains. There was even speculation that the ANC could end up with less than 50% of the national vote, thus losing its parliamentary majority.

The left-populist EFF was shaping up to make big gains, taking advantage of the growing discontent in view of the continuing mass poverty, on the one hand, and the flourishing corruption under the Zuma regime, on the other. Even the DA, which originated in the whites-only Progressive Party in the apartheid era, looked like gaining seats under the black leadership of Mmusi Maimane.

But now things look rather different for two principal and not unconnected reasons: firstly, both of the two main opposition parties have been hit by their own corruption scandals and subsequent splits; and, secondly, sections of the bourgeoisie have been looking to the new ANC leadership under president Cyril Ramaphosa to root out the endemic state corruption inherited from his predecessor, simultaneously laying the basis for a recovery of South Africa's ailing economy and a rise in profitability.

The EFF, with its left jargon, red berets and opportunistic exploitation of allegations of racism, is, despite the critical support it won from sections of the revolutionary left, in reality black-nationalist. Its leader, Julius Malema, the former president of the ANC Youth League, has been hit by allegations of corrupt self-enrichment and the sexual exploitation of EFF women, leading many to abandon it in frustration.

As for the DA, it too has suffered a split following the crisis resulting from the rebellion against the then Cape Town mayor, Patricia de Lille, over - you guessed it - allegations of corruption. Having been ousted by the Western Cape DA, de Lille announced in December that she would be forming a new party, called 'Good', which will be contesting the election. It says a lot about the state of South African politics that some people seriously believe that, if the new party has that name, former DA voters will accept that its policies will live up to it.

But other sections of the DA milieu see things rather differently: for example, Lennit Max, who was elected as a DA representative to the Western Cape provincial legislature in 2014, has announced his defection to the ANC: "The election of Cyril Ramaphosa as president has heralded a new dawn for South Africa," he said.¹

This is a reflection of a wider

mood amongst the bourgeoisie, which has always viewed the ANC as problematic because of its revolutionary past and especially its association with the South African Communist Party. The SACP, together with the SACP-led Congress of South African Trade Unions, have been the two other historical components of the ANC-led Triple Alliance. It is well known that just about every major figure in the ANC had been closely associated with, if not a member of, the SACP. That includes Nelson Mandela, of course.

However, Ramaphosa is an exception. True, he spent almost a year in solitary confinement in 1974 and was the first general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers, appointed in 1982. But he soon became a careerist, who has taken every opportunity since the fall of apartheid to feather his own nest. A capitalist with substantial business interests, he is today South Africa's 12th richest man (and the richest black man).

And now sections of the establishment are looking to Ramaphosa to help transform the ANC into a reliable pro-capitalist force, gradually distancing itself from SACP and union influence. Typical is South African *Sunday Times* columnist Peter Bruce, who has come out for an ANC vote. He argues: "The DA is as fatally compromised and divided as the hopeless ANC is." However, "You have to trust a small group around Ramaphosa to pull us out of our dive." He adds:

The fact is that our best future is a coalition of the constructionalists in the DA and the ANC, but until the DA is the 'bigger' party it won't contemplate such a thing. So in the absence of more information I'm going to back Ramaphosa.²

Working class

The SACP has always insisted that what is taking place under the ANC is a "national democratic revolution" (NDR), which is "the most direct route to socialism in South Africa". During the NDR what is apparently happening is that we are gradually overcoming the "racialised inequality" inherited from apartheid and thus strengthening the forces for socialism.

Well, how does that match up to the reality? Unfortunately South Africa is now officially the most unequal country in the world, with approximately 10 million people out of a population of 56 million living in shacks. What about the conditions of the working class? Well, Ramaphosa's government has just introduced a minimum wage (the first time there has ever been such legislation), which has been

set at R20 (£1.12!) an hour. But even this pathetic minimum caused an outcry amongst employers and, as a result, a series of exceptions were introduced.

For a whole range of 'qualifying companies' the figure was reduced to R18. For farmworkers it has been set at R16.20 (91p) and for domestic workers R15 (84p) - which can be lowered still further to R13.50 (76p) if a household is exempted. But there were still complaints from employers. For instance, Louis Mentjes, president of farm-owners in the Transvaal moaned: "There is big financial pressure on farmers and I am sure many will have to retrench some of their workers in order to comply with the minimum wage." As for the SACP-led Cosatu, while it acknowledged the minimum wage was 'insufficient', it regarded it as a 'step in the right direction'.

It is against this background that two seemingly positive developments in relation to working class organisation have recently taken place.

Firstly, at its July 2017 congress, the SACP agreed that, in view of the Zuma corruption scandal, it was time for a "reconfigured alliance", whereby the party would begin to contest elections under its own name instead of as a component of the ANC, and strike a deal afterwards between ANC and SACP MPs: "... the SACP will certainly contest elections," announced the central committee immediately after the congress.³

Secondly, there was great excitement over the announcement in May 2018 that two major trade unions expelled from Cosatu for their opposition to ANC and SACP rightism would be amongst those setting up the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP), which would contest the forthcoming elections.

But much of that optimism has dissipated since then. Following Ramaphosa's election a year ago, all mention of the SACP contesting elections was quietly dropped and instead the party contended that the new situation would allow the ANC to provide leadership for the "second, more radical, phase" of the NDR. A couple of weeks ago SACP general secretary Blade Nzimande "called for the defence of Ramaphosa and the ANC from those who were fighting against the clean-up of state institutions ... which he said was being done through the formation of new political parties" (like the SRWP?).⁴

Nzimande confirmed "our support for the ANC in the forthcoming general election" and this support would help build "the already agreed alliance reconfiguration process", he claimed.⁵ So the alliance is to be

'reconfigured' by leaving it as it is! All this comes at a time when the bourgeoisie is now holding out hope of transforming the ANC into a reliable vehicle for capital.

I wonder what the result of this back-tracking will be in terms of the SACP membership, which had almost doubled in two years to 284,000, according to figures released at its 2017 congress. A good section of those 'members' (in reality most are mere supporters, who have done nothing more than fill in a form) had been drawn towards the SACP precisely because of its radical, Marxist jargon, plus the talk of *opposing* the ANC in elections.

What about the SRWP? Its launch had been scheduled for October 2018, then November, but instead a "pre-launch conference" was held on December 14-15, attended by 1,100 "delegates". The SRWP national convenor, Irvin Jim (who also happens to be the general secretary of South Africa's largest union, Numsa, with its 338,000 members), declared that the SRWP "interim national leadership will create a 2019 elections commission to organise and prepare us to contest the upcoming elections".⁶

While the SRWP has officially registered for that purpose, it has not yet even set up a website, let alone announced that the new party now officially exists or published anything resembling a programme. The most we have are individual statements like that of Jim, published as an online article on January 29:

The Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP) will put the working class first and will pursue an agenda in its interests. More than two decades of ANC capitalist rule has shown us that deviating from this has disastrous consequences.⁷

Racism

To state that the ANC has 'deviated' from 'putting the working class first' is something of an understatement, of course. Like the EFF, instead of focusing on the mass poverty of the 10 million shack-dwellers and the six million unemployed, it prefers to blow up and exaggerate accusations of racism.

An example occurred at around sunset on December 23, when two employees of a private security firm began instructing (or advising, depending on which version of the story you read) people to leave

Clifton beach, near Cape Town. Unfortunately for the firm (and for the DA, which runs the local council), one of those asked to leave this public beach was Faiez Jacobs, secretary of the Western Cape ANC. For Jacobs, this meant that "the ghost of apartheid returned", as Clifton is "where some of the richest people in our country play. The majority of them happen to be white ..."⁸

It is not claimed that only non-whites were asked to leave ('for their own safety'). No, everyone there was approached, no doubt on behalf of those who own the houses bordering the beach, who were concerned by what some people might get up to alongside their property, once darkness fell. In other words, it was a case of the rich looking after their own interests. Yes, it is true that, as Jacobs says, most of them are still white, but what does the ANC (supported by the SACP) propose to do to change this? Simply arrange things through bureaucratic means so that a greater proportion of the wealthy minority are black, of course.

A couple of days later, the Black People's National Crisis Committee, supported by the EFF, organised a protest, whereby a sheep was slaughtered on the beach to "exorcise the demon of racism". That should do the trick. It did not matter that this took place in front of families (of all ethnicities), including young children. This despite the fact that the 2000 Meat Safety Act stipulates that a "person who slaughters animals for indigenous, religious or cultural purpose" must obtain prior permission, which did not happen (in fact after the outcry over the action of the security company, the authorities instructed the police not to intervene).

ANC 'anti-racism' proponents pointed out that any charges against the protestors would have to be brought under the apartheid-era Animal Protection Act, which allows for "a whipping not exceeding six strokes" for animal cruelty. Some hypocritically compared the fact that those who complained about a ritual slaughter were more concerned about that than the daily suffering of the millions of shack-dwellers. In fact it was 'racist' to object to this traditional custom.

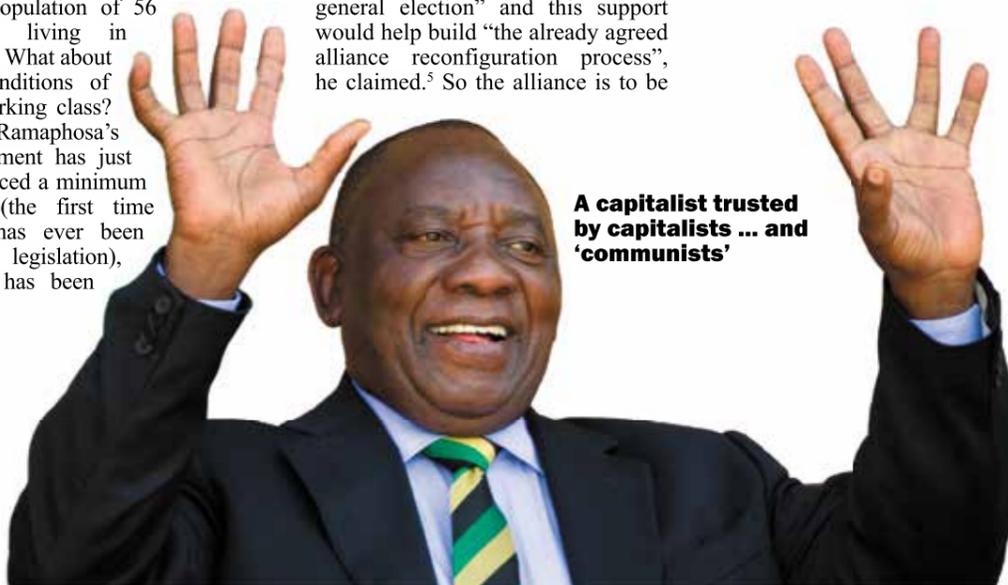
Stories like this feature heavily in the South Africa press - thanks, of course, to the influence of the ANC, which the SACP still insists is leading the 'national democratic revolution'. Meanwhile, where is the working class response in the shape of independent organisation?

There is a large vacuum to the ANC's left, which up to now the black-populist EFF has attempted to fill. Will the SRWP finally get its act together? Or will the SACP rank and file rebel against the leadership line? There certainly remains a fight to be had ●

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Notes

1. *Cape Times* December 31.
2. *Sunday Times* December 23.
3. 'Declaration of the 14th Party Congress', July 15 2017.
4. *Cape Times* January 7.
5. www.politicsweb.co.za/archive/sacp-stands-for-a-qualitatively-different-growth-p.
6. www.facebook.com/OfficialSRWP.
7. www.newsclick.in/socialist-revolutionary-workers-party-vows-resist-south-african-governments-privatisation-move.
8. *Sunday Times* January 6.



A capitalist trusted by capitalists ... and 'communists'

ECONOMY



Same in the west, same in the east

Pots and kettles

Yassamine Mather asks who is really responsible for incompetence and corruption

Every time the issue of sanctions against Iran - or this week Venezuela - is mentioned, commentators rightly point out that the dire economic situation in these countries, the large-scale hunger and destitution, is not just because of sanctions, the aggressive US foreign policy and plans for regime change from above. These conditions exist because of incompetence and corruption of the rulers of these countries.

However, a comrade reminded me this week that in making such statements we should also consider the fact that one of the aims of sanctions is to encourage incompetence and corruption. Severe sanctions on an economy under a semi-dictatorial regime allows those with access to power to accumulate huge fortunes - they use advantageous rates of foreign exchange, available only to high-ranking government officials, to take advantage of the black market or the problematic distribution of overpriced goods. In other words, sanctions themselves are a cause of corruption.

Let me start with the issue of competence. One could argue that the in current situation governments in power in Europe and in the United States are not showing much sign of that. In the United Kingdom, the Tory administration has spent two and a half years negotiating withdrawal from the EU, leading to what can only be described as a totally uncertain and chaotic situation - mainly as a result of the negotiations carried out under a prime minister and cabinet whose main concern is trying to hold the Conservative Party together.

Their incompetence was particularly highlighted when we heard that a firm with no ships had

been granted a contract worth millions of pounds to run extra ferries in the event of a 'no deal' Brexit. It has not previously operated a ferry service and is not planning to do so until close to the UK's scheduled departure date from the EU. If the leaders of Iran's Islamic Republic had made such a decision there would have been no end to discussions about their ability to rule! Or was it 'competent' to spend money on the simulation of traffic for the same purpose? Around 150 lorries were brought together in a disused Kent airport.¹ I think most people, including in 'third world' countries, would have been able to tell UK ministers that these days you can buy software to simulate traffic flows!

Last week three airports in New York faced temporary closure as a result of the government shutdown, because air traffic controllers could not guarantee the safety of air passengers. Is the Trump administration an example of competent government - one that countries like Iran should emulate?

Of course, none of this excuses the kind of very real incompetence we have seen in Iran - or for that matter Venezuela. My point is that it is hypocritical to go on about incompetence in 'third world' countries whose regimes meet with the disapproval of the imperialists, while ignoring everyday occurrences in Whitehall or Washington.

Sultans

When it comes to corruption, probably few countries can compete with the various factions of Iran's Islamic Republic. Recently a member of Iranian majles (parliament) asked president Hassan Rouhani about his relationship with the 'sultan of

bananas' - a reference to Rouhani's son-in-law. The news agencies reporting this reminded us that the same gentleman is also known as the 'sultan of apples' - both titles refer to his role in controlling the monopoly on importing these fruits into Iran.² Inside the country, the website *Saten* tells us of all the corrupt owners of monopoly distribution of goods, known as the 'sultan of ...' - ranging from fruit to steel and gold coin. Most have made their fortune thanks to their connections with those in power - and sanctions, of course.³

In other words, sanctions - both during the time of president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (in particular after 2009) and also during the more recent wave under Donald Trump - have played a crucial role in the rise in the levels of corruption in Iran. So, although it is easy to blame such corruption - in Iran, Venezuela or any other 'third world' country - on local rulers, the real picture is more complicated and such glib comments are often hypocritical.

Moreover corruption is not just a 'third world' phenomenon. As Richard D Wolff points out, "Corruption is endemic to the capitalist system". He writes:

What chiefly drives this sort of political corruption today is capitalism's structure. For many capitalist enterprises, competitive and other pressures exist to increase profits, growth rates, and/or market share. Their boards and top managers seek to find cheaper produced inputs and cheaper labour-power - to extract more output from their workers, to sell their outputs at the highest possible prices and to find more profitable technologies. The structure provides them with every

incentive of financial gain and/or career security, and advancement to behave in those ways. Thus, boards and top managers seek the maximum obtainable assistance of government officials in all these areas and also try to pay the least possible portion of their net revenues as taxes.⁴

Guy Standing reminds us in his book, *The corruption of capitalism: why rentiers thrive and work does not pay*: "There is a lie at the heart of global capitalism. Politicians, financiers and global bureaucrats claim to believe in free competitive markets, but have constructed the most unfree market system ever."⁵

Of course, the multifaceted dictatorship under the competing factions of the Islamic Republic has given special impetus to the thriving of corrupt leaders and their relatives. However, the situation is not as unique as supporters of 'regime change from above' would like us to believe. Most of them do not seem to realise that the model country they name as an example of democratic, free-market, capitalist development - South Korea - is in fact another one of those corrupt regimes. In October 2018, the former president, Lee Myung-bak, was sentenced to 15 years in prison for corruption. He was just the latest in a succession of former presidents and senior officials in South Korea who have faced corruption charges soon after leaving office.

The other characteristic of 'third world' dictatorships is nepotism and hypocrisy. Iranian social media is full of stories about sons and daughters of ayatollahs (many of whom are prominent in shouting 'Death to America' both at state-sponsored demonstrations and Friday prayers, and are currently studying

or working in the United States). I know of a Twitter hashtag addressed to senior politicians, asking them to declare where their offspring live or work. Again we do not need to look far to find parallels. Ardent Brexit supporter Nigel Farage has apparently secured German passports for his sons, while, according to *The Guardian*, Jacob Rees-Mogg has already established investment funds in Dublin to allow his business interests to continue to benefit from EU rules and regulations.

Some on the fringes of the Iranian left have joined royalists and other supporters of 'regime change from above' in praising the Trump administration's hard line against Venezuela. They hope the kind of aggression US is threatening against Caracas will soon be repeated in Tehran. Someone should remind them that in the 21st century most Iranian are conscious of the global situation. Not only are they familiar with aspects of what I have mentioned above, but they also know about attempts at regime change in other countries of the region: Iraq, Syria, Libya, Afghanistan.

That is why any talk of the threatened Venezuela-style intervention in Iran only strengthens the current regime ●

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Notes

1. <http://inews.co.uk/news/brexit/government-lorry-test-prepare-no-deal-brexit-traffic>.
2. <https://twitter.com/rezahn56/status/1087731243607822338>.
3. <http://saten.ir/112778>.
4. <https://truthout.org/articles/political-corruption-and-capitalism>.
5. www.bitebackpublishing.com/books/the-corruption-of-capitalism.

HISTORY

The Tory interpretation

Mike Macnair argues that there is an institutional bias in the teaching of history. It is a bias that suits the agenda of those who believe in inequality, the natural order and firm government¹

begin with the 1933 case *Bonar Law Memorial Trust v Commissioners of the Inland Revenue*.² The issue in this case was whether a trust to educate activists and organisers in Conservative Party principles by holding education sessions at a country house which was part of the Trust property was charitable. The ruling was that it was not, for the reason that political objects cannot be charitable.

However, despite this ruling, the Conservative Party found a way to make the teaching of Conservative Party principles compulsory in schools and universities, whether charitable or state-funded. The means by which they did so was through history methodology courses, taught to undergraduate historians - which then, of course, fed through to the choices made by history teachers in schools. The underlying basis of it is that it has become compulsory to denounce the 'trap' of Whig history.

The late Christopher Hill said towards the end of his career that he was not sure that you could do any sort of history without Whig history. I am not that sure that line of argument it is quite right. But it is, I think, worth considering how the mechanism works: how denouncing 'Whig history' makes compulsory 'Tory history'.

Notoriously, one interpretation of Marxism is that it is 'historical materialism' or 'dialectical and historical materialism' - whatever these things mean. Either way, however, Marxism has a substantial part which is about history. This means that we cannot treat the fight about historical method between so-called 'Whig' historians and self-styled 'anti-Whigs' as not our business. Questions of historical method matter to us as Marxists.

The starting point of the condemnation of 'Whig history' is Herbert Butterfield's 1931 book *The Whig interpretation of history*.³ Despite the title, which has stuck, this was actually in substance not a denunciation of Whig historians writing in the late 17th and 18th centuries - like revolutionist James Tyrrell (1642-1718), Williamite bishop Gilbert Burnet (1643-1715), or 'republican virago' Catharine Macaulay (1731-91). Rather, it criticises 19th and early 20th century Liberal historians. Particularly Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-59), John Dalberg-Acton, Lord Acton (1834-1902) and George Macaulay Trevelyan (1876-1962), and various other people who wrote in that frame of mind. The idea was that the 'Whig historians' had an image of history as something which inexorably and inevitably led to the present - or more precisely, inexorably and inevitably led to modern liberal England.

Butterfield in *The Whig interpretation of history* was concerned to argue that history did not inevitably lead to liberalism, or to 19th century England, or to modernity or any of these things. He wrote this book as a young man and it was one of those iconoclastic texts read by everybody. But it was not immediately picked up as a *foundational* text for history methodology. Ten years after writing it, Butterfield himself abandoned in substance the whole argument in *The Whig interpretation of history*.⁴ But it became a big-deal text that was taught to undergraduate historians. It



Not street protests, but quiet lobbying by important people brings change. Or so we are told

was one of the things you had to read. And from the 1960s on, it began to be the case that you had to hat-tip to it, whether you had read it or not.

In the 1960s, 'anti-Whig' arguments were further developed by GR Elton, the famous conservative historian, whose historical narrative was one of the growth, not of liberty, but of state power. G Kitson Clark in his 1967 *The critical historian* extends Butterfield's arguments on methodology (incidentally drawing on the modern Jacobite historian, JG Muddiman, for critique of sources relied on by the 'Whig' historians). I do not know whether history departments still make undergraduates read *The Whig interpretation of history*, but there were generations of undergraduates who had to. Elton, interestingly, commented in 1984 that "*The Whig interpretation* proves on rereading to be really perilously thin - truly an essay lacking in substance, and in particular lacking in history."⁵

It has now become the case that you just have to do a hat-tip to rejection of 'Whig history'. Many, many historians - especially younger ones recently out of research training - do indeed give that mandatory hat-tip. Googling the phrase produces around 71,700 hits, many of them 'hat-tips' of this sort. More senior historians may have a little more liberty on this front.

Invisible

If there was a Whig, or indeed a Liberal, interpretation of history, it should follow that there is also a Tory interpretation. If we went back to the time of *real* Whigs, as opposed to 19th century Liberals, we would, indeed, find such explicit texts - for example, Roger North's 1740 *Examen*. There have been people who have written about the Tory interpretation of history. But, in modern times, 'Tory interpretation of history' gets only around 4,240 hits on Google. It is as if the partisan quality of Tory historians has been made invisible.

From these, the nearest to what I am talking about, I think, is Jennifer Hart, writing back in 1965 against Kitson Clark in her article, 'Nineteenth century social reform: a Tory interpretation of history'.⁶ Kitson Clark and other Tories essentially argued that the social reforms of the 19th century - slum clearance, the introduction of urban water supplies and so on - were all basically introduced by Tory governments under the influence of

the Church of England and that activist campaigning for social reforms (or indeed for the vote) if anything slowed up the progress of social reform. Hart argues resoundingly, just on the basis of technical 19th century legal and political sources, that this was not true.

Richard Evans' 2011 article, 'The wonderfulness of us (the Tory interpretation of history)', in spite of its title is in fact a Butterfieldian critique of Whig history. But it calls Whig history 'Tory history'. The reason for doing so is that some people, writing about the run-up to the anniversary of Magna Carta, had started redeploying the Whig interpretation of history in favour of a certain sort of Toryism.⁷

Michael D Gordin's 'A Tory interpretation of history' is a review of a 2012 book by Hasok Chang: *Is water H₂O?* Chang argues that we should not be teleological about the history of science, that we should take the old theory of phlogiston (discarded in the early 19th century) more seriously. He said we should not have the teleological view that, because something is current chemistry, the older, rejected chemistry must have been wholly wrong. This is, in a sense, a rejection of what would commonly be called Whig history. But Gordin argues that Chang is himself Whiggish, because he is looking for features of phlogiston which are helpful to today's scientist. Gordin argues on this basis for what he calls a Tory interpretation of history: one which absolutely refuses judgments on the past, whether moral or scientific or about what has led to the present.⁸

Evidence

None of these are quite what I am talking about in relation to the Tory interpretation of history. And my starting point is something which is about modern history, including Marx. Modern history is based on evidence: it is not simply a narrative spun out of thin air. There is a famous 1979 book by TP Wiseman called *Clio's cosmetics*. Clio is the muse of history and Clio's cosmetics are the rhetorical devices and fictions which ancient historians used to make their writing agreeable and plausible. *Clio's cosmetics* is about the way in which ancient historians transmitted stories from one historian to another as a form of decoration, and invented speeches which they never heard, and cast them in terms which fit with the language of their own time.

The same happened in pre-modern English historical writing. Just for a single example, quite a lot of people have tended to use Shakespeare's history plays as a source for popular history. In reality, Shakespeare's history plays are literary transmissions from prior chronicle sources, which address late 16th and early 17th century concerns.

We shifted away from that very literary form of history writing into more modern historical techniques between the 17th and 19th centuries. And the way in which we made that transit is through historians beginning to adopt *legal* tests for the assessment of evidence. These tests are of Roman origin. Roman legal sources contain random bits of advice about how to assess evidence. These are mainly from the jurist Callistratus's book on criminal prosecutions, written around 200 CE, quoting extracts from 'rescripts' - which are letters of advice to junior judges from the emperor Hadrian (117-38 CE).

Hadrian seems to have given a good deal of advice to junior magistrates on how to assess evidence and the weight of evidence. Callistratus then quoted it in his book. The emperor Justinian in the late 520s-530s got a commission of academics and practising lawyers to make extracts from all the law textbooks and treatises then in existence, which is called the *Digest*. The original books were then suppressed; but the *Digest* survived, and medieval lawyers developed their ideas on the basis of this, and other elements of Justinian's project - the *Code* of imperial decisions, the *Institutes* or first-year introductory text, the *Novels* (Justinian's legislation between 535 and 565).

And so we have the following fragments of advice to Roman magistrates - to summarise:

- Assess the status of the witnesses; witnesses of higher status are more reliable.
- Are they enemies of the people they give evidence against or friends?
- Do they speak simply, do they keep to a premeditated story - that is a reason not to believe them - or give likely answers to your extempore questions - that is, if the judge, cross-examining them, gets a plausible answer.
- The truth can sometimes be found without recourse to public records. Sometimes the number of witnesses, the repeated corroboration of the story makes it plausible. Sometimes their dignity and authority. In other

cases common knowledge familiar to everybody settles the truth.

- Hearsay is not acceptable.
- The burden of proof is on the person who makes a positive claim, not the person who denies it.
- The burden of proof is on the claimant, not the defendant. The burden of proof in the criminal trial section is on the prosecutor, not on the defendant.⁹

These very disorganised fragments in the Roman texts were then systematised by medieval legal writers.¹⁰ The systematised version of the medieval legal writers then became, in the 17th century in particular, popularly adopted by people in the physical sciences. The Royal Society and similar societies elsewhere are big on adopting the legal tests for evidence in relation to judging the stories of witnesses. Theologians, writing about stories of miracles, came in the end to the conclusion that, while there were miracles in the time of the *Bible*, there were no miracles in modern times. They started with the proposition that things which are consistent with the ordinary course of nature, such as water running downhill, do not need many witnesses to support it. But if you want to show that water may flow uphill a lot of witnesses are required. Similarly, if a man was raised from the dead, to show that he was actually dead you are going to need a lot of evidence.¹¹

Historians also started to use these tests - and continue to do so. For example, we think that an eyewitness to an event is *prima facie* more reliable than someone who tells us about it some time later. This is just from Hadrian. But then again there may be considerations of bias involved. And so on.

Just to give an example: the Roman 'Twelve Tables' from 450 BC say that someone who *qui malum carmen incantasset* (literally, 'sings a bad song') is liable to the death penalty. Cicero, a republican politician and civil and criminal trial advocate, writing in the 40s BCE, says that this was a prohibition against defamatory songs and satires. 'And quite right too,' he says, 'because our reputation should be subject to the courts and not to the poets and dramatists.'

Pliny, author of the book *Natural history* about a hundred years later, says that it was a prohibition against witchcraft. Now Cicero is 400 years after the event and Pliny 500 years, so *prima facie* Cicero is closer to the event. On the other hand, if we look at Cicero's biases, which is another aspect of Hadrian on witnesses, Cicero was heavily targeted by satirists and he was a conservative type who wanted to introduce censorship for reasons other than suppressing defamatory poems and songs.

So Cicero's biases lead us to prefer Pliny's point of view despite the fact that it is further from the event. Moreover, looking at analogies, most pre-modern legal orders recognise witchcraft as a crime, and it usually attracts the death penalty. So we are balancing the fact that Cicero is closer to the event - that is in his favour - against his biases - that is against him. Pliny is further from the event - that is against him. But what he has to say is more consistent with the ordinary course of events - that is in his favour.

What has been done is to borrow

tests for evidence from law. The reason for doing it is that a historian, like a lawyer in court, is interested in working out what happened. Did the defendant stab and kill the victim or did somebody else do it? If the defendant did stab the victim, was it intentional, was it accidental or was it in self-defence? We want to find out what happened. That is the same sort of exercise that a historian undertakes, except historians are usually doing it at greater distance in time. In the 2000 case of *Irving v Penguin books and Lipstadt* they were arguing about the truth of the holocaust in court: history becomes a legal issue; but in fact an ordinary trial about a murder or a road accident is investigating (recent) history.

Presumptions

However, the legal tests depend on the burden of proof and presumptions. We start, as I summarised above, with the proposition that the person who asserts the positive has the burden of proof. Mere denial does not. In criminal cases, the prosecutor has the burden of proof, not the defendant. We choose that for a moral and political reason about the state.

But equally, as I said in relation to Cicero and Pliny, it is easier to believe Pliny when he tells a story which is consistent with the ordinary course of events than somebody who tells a story which is inconsistent with it. For people who want to say that a miracle happened we demand more evidence than for those who say it did not.

We can extend it further. In *Byrnes v Boadle* in 1863, a man is walking down the street and a barrel falls out of an upstairs window on his head and he sues the owner of the property for negligence. The defendant's counsel says: 'But you haven't proved that anybody was careless.' The judges say, 'Barrels don't usually fall out of upstairs windows without somebody being careless.' It is a presumption. There is a Latin tag which is commonly applied to this sort of case: *res ipsa loquitur* - 'the thing itself speaks'.¹²

So the ordinary course of events is foundational to our ability to allocate the burden of proof and also to assess the standard of proof. And it is the ordinary course of events which founds these presumptions. There is a standard argument used by early modern English legal authors: a man is seen coming out of a house with a bloody sword in his hand and immediately afterwards a person is found in the house, stabbed to death. This is a 'violent presumption' of guilt. The accused now has to offer some explanation as to how it came to be the case that he did that.¹³

Herbert Butterfield's objection to Whig historians was that they presumed there was progress in history. And that because they presumed there was progress in history they failed to recognise that the more probable outcome was actually that such progress would not happen and that the progress that actually happened was an unlikely outcome. Equally Kitson Clark argued in the 19th century that Liberal and left historians failed to recognise that protest movements rarely achieved their aims. That social change is usually achieved by quiet lobbying by important people and not by street protest movements. It is a claim about what usually happens.

The Whig historians were presuming that there is progress in history, and moreover - and I think this is right - that resistance, street activism, revolts, demonstrations, strikes and so on could lead to progress.

So what are the Tory historians presuming? You cannot do without presumptions altogether. It is inevitably the case that you make

assumptions about what the ordinary course of events is. There are bases for those assumptions, but they are not necessarily going to be straightforwardly 'accumulation of instances' bases.

What are the Tory presumptions? I will list them, very roughly as I understand them from reading Tory historians (which means most anti-Whig historians) in the light of the 'normal politics' of the Tory Party, from its foundations in the 1670s-80s down to Brexiteering.

1. *'The rape of the lock', or the underlying triviality of historical causation*: 'The rape of the lock' is a poem written by Tory poet Alexander Pope in the reign of Queen Anne (1712) and is a satire on politics being about totally trivial, backstairs gossip. Women gossiping among themselves - this is Queen Anne and Sarah Duchess of Marlborough, as per the film *The favourite*, and other such stuff. The basic idea of the Tory historians is that there is not progress. Rather humans just go on much the same way. Historical causes are usually and mostly accidents. Most historical events are accidents. Most historical events arise from relatively trivial phenomena.

2. *Leviathan* (Thomas Hobbes), the theology of the fall and the centrality of government: Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden and god told them not to eat the apple from the tree of knowledge. A serpent tempted Eve, who went on to tempt Adam. They ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge and god evicted them from the garden. This was the original sin, according to Christianity. To be very precise, according to orthodox Catholic Trinitarian Christianity, this was original sin from which god's son, Jesus, redeemed us all by dying on the cross.

The conclusion from this is that, because we are fallen beings, we are fundamentally immoral. We inherit from Adam and Eve this propensity to sin and crime, which comes across in the state of nature that would, in Hobbes' terms, be a war of all against all, and "the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short". And, we escape from that by handing over all authority to the absolute monarch, the state, Leviathan: in modern terms to the *government*, which is why Tory leaders denounce any attempt to reduce government control of the Brexit process. There is no right to resist, as the right to resist would take us back into the state of nature. This 'fall theology', the sinful quality of humanity, and hence the necessity of the 'smack of firm government', is again presumed by Tory historians.

3. A government of men and not of laws: the Whigs certainly talked about the idea of the government of laws and not of men; or - the more modern expression for it - the 'rule of law'. Tory history asserts that all government is the rule of some humans over other humans. Moreover, part of being fallen is natural inequality and natural ambition.

The ideas of natural inequality go all the way back to the pupils of the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle. They argued that slavery was due to the fact that, for example, north Europeans did not get enough sunlight and as a consequence their brain did not develop properly. So they needed somebody from southern Europe, who did have enough sunlight for their brain to develop, to tell them what to do.¹⁴

The underlying idea that hierarchy in society is the product of natural inequality is one which also implies natural ambition. People push and shove. People are 'aspirational'. The result is that people are sorted into their natural hierarchies. There are the *menu peuple*: the led people. (I am sorry to say, some on the left are

reinventing this idea when they talk about 'the sheeple'). Then we have 'knavery': people who ought to be subordinate, but try to persuade the *menu peuple* that they ought to be able to lead themselves and not be subject to their natural superiors. 'Knavery' means Whigs and in modern times, liberals, socialists and communists.

4. *Patriarcha* (Robert Filmer): Filmer wrote *Patriarcha* in the 1630s in favour of absolute monarchy; it was published in 1680 as part of the polemic against the early Whigs and of the early development of Toryism. In it the family is the natural order of society, and in the family the natural order of things is that the father is in charge. The father being in charge is reflected in the king being in charge. And, going along with this, the only genuine solidarity is that of family. We see continuing Filmerism reflected in Maggie Thatcher's 'no such thing as society'.

5. In this context there is also a lot of talk amongst historians of the *natural conservative majority*; and, in tension with this, JCD Clark's argument that a section of the upper classes engaged in a class betrayal in 1828-32, which had disastrous consequences. The unwashed masses were let into politics and 'proper Tories' have never been able to successfully push them out again.¹⁵ There is a little inconsistency here, because if there really was a natural conservative majority, letting the unwashed masses in should not have such disastrous results. The point is that apparent majorities for Whiggism, Liberalism, and so on, are never *real* majorities, but merely instances of 'knavery'.

6. Finally, *divisos ab orbe Britannos*. This is a quote from the Roman author, Virgil, writing in the 20s BCE: "The Britons utterly separated from the whole world." Virgil says that "even the Britons utterly separated from the whole world acknowledge the authority of Augustus". The ex-chief justice, Sir Edward Coke, in 1628 quoted it in parliament.¹⁶ The idea is that the Channel is a fundamental divide between the Anglo-Saxon culture, 'Anglo-Saxon liberty' and what in the 18th century they called 'popery and wooden shoes'. So, nationalism.

In the early 1700s we get the Tory Party running a campaign for what they called 'blue water strategy'. This meant that the British should not be sending armies to the Netherlands to defend them against French invasion. Instead they should be using the occasion of the French invasion to go and seize French and Dutch colonies overseas. The 'blue water strategy' remained a common theme of the Tory Party through the 1750s, the 1780s and into the Napoleonic wars. It then moved into talk of the common history of the English-speaking peoples: notably Winston Churchill and in modern times talk of the 'Anglosphere', Euroscpticism and Liam Fox's briefing *Empire 2.0* - the name he gave the alternative, non-EU trade strategy (it has not gone over terribly well with people in the former British empire).

A related but separate branch of this: the Tories ran campaigns against Huguenot refugees, French Protestant refugees in the 1680s, as economic migrants. This is right at the foundation of the Tory Party. It resurfaced in a very successful campaign they ran against the naturalisation of Jews in 1753-54. Then another campaign against French refugees as economic migrants with the 1793 Aliens Act. Against Irish 'hoolliganism' in the 19th century, but particularly in the 1890s. And, then again, against Jews as economic migrants taking our jobs in the 1905 Aliens Act. And, of course, the rest of the history of Tory anti-immigration will be familiar to everyone.

The form which *divisos ab orbe Britannos* takes among the historians is methodological nationalism - the idea that a heavy burden of proof rests on anyone who wants to demonstrate the influence of French, Dutch or whatever ideas and politics in England - autonomous national development, in contrast, needs little evidence.

So these are presumptions. We never get any significant amount of evidence offered - in support of the idea of either the underlying triviality of historical causation or the fallen nature of man - it is just taken for granted that humans are naturally evil. Nor is it offered in support of natural inequality. Nor in support of the idea that the only real solidarities are those of family against everybody else (aspirational people). Nor in support of *divisos ab orbe Britannos*. It is all assumed, and in consequence rather slight evidence can be used to support it.

A single example on the other side. In my own work I argue quite a lot that the law of proof and evidence from the medieval lawyers working with Roman sources was borrowed into English evidence law in the 17th century. But I have been asked, is there a smoking gun (a bloody sword, in Coke's terms)? It is not enough that people use the same Latin tags as their continental counterparts. Can you show that when they use the Latin tags they were aware that this was the civil law? Could they just have been inventing by themselves the same Latin that was used by continentals?

The same is true, particularly around Brexiteering. The argument is that you have to prove the deleterious consequences which are going to follow from Brexit. It is not enough to say that there probably will be - you need a smoking gun in support of that. Moreover, the fact that no serious adverse consequences followed from just having the vote (*with no legal consequences*) is offered by Tories as evidence that there will be no serious adverse consequences from *actual* Brexit.

My point is, then, that my six listed presumptions are presumptions of Conservative Party principles. They are the root ideas since its 1680s origins. These are fundamental political ideas of the Tory Party. By rejecting the presumptions of the

'Whig interpretation', we commit to teaching the Tory interpretation in universities and schools.

Nobody learns in history methodology class that you have to avoid Tory interpretations of history. They learn that you have to avoid Whig interpretations of history. In this way the Tory Party succeeded in circumventing the ruling in *Bonair Law Memorial Trust v Commissioners of the Inland Revenue*.

By critiquing the Tory interpretation of history, we can begin to think outside the framework of assuming natural inequality, historical triviality, methodological nationalism and methodological patriarchalism. If we think outside of the framework of the assumptions of the methodological requirements of Tory history, which are expressed as rejection of 'Whig history', it will probably actually help us better to understand how to do modern-day politics, not just how to do history ●

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Notes

1. Mike Macnair spoke at Communist University 2018 on 'The Tory interpretation of history'. This is an updated version of his talk.
2. (1933) 49 *Times Law Reports* 220.
3. I have used the 1965 New York edition.
4. This point was originally made by EH Carr in 1961 in *What is history?* Butterfield's response was that he had shifted before 1944, when *The Englishman and his history* was pretty 'Whiggish': N Jardine, 'Whigs and stories: Herbert Butterfield and the historiography of science' *History of Science* Vol 41 (2003), pp125-40.
5. 'Herbert Butterfield and the study of history' *Historical Journal* Vol 27 (1984), pp729-43.
6. *Past and Present* Vol 31 (1965), pp39-61.
7. *London Review of Books* March 17 2011.
8. *Historical studies in the natural sciences* Vol 44, pp413-23.
9. Digest 22.5 *On witnesses* 3. Callistratus, Criminal Prosecutions, book 4; Digest, 22.3 Proof and presumptions 2. Paul, Edict, book 69. Paraphrased from A Watson (ed) *The digest of Justinian Philadelphia Philadelphia* 1985, Vol 1.
10. Starting with the 'canon law' (church court) procedural writers; a selection of early canon law procedural texts has recently been translated by B Brasington *Order in court* Leiden 2016; much more remains in Latin.
11. Particularly useful are Barbara J Shapiro *Probability and certainty in seventeenth century England* Princeton 1983; and *A culture of fact: England 1550-1720* Ithaca 2000.
12. 2 H & C 722, 159 ER 299.
13. Coke upon Littleton (1627) fo. 6b.
14. B Isaac *The invention of racism in classical antiquity* Princeton 2004, pp70-71 (and following).
15. *English Society 1688-1832* Cambridge 1985.
16. Virgil, *Eclagues* Bk 1, l. 1. 66. "et penitus tote divisos orbe Britannos". Quoted by Coke: cited in AM Patterson *Pastoral and ideology: Virgil to Valéry* Berkeley 1987, p149.

Fighting fund

£61 still needed

With one day still to go, as I write, we need just £61 to make our January fighting fund target of £1,750. In other words, a couple of nice donations on the last day of the month should see us home.

The highlight of last week was the cheque from comrade AD, who added no less than £100 to her subscription payment. She urges us to "Keep up the excellent reporting" and adds: "I thought Conrad's response on the letters page to Anne McShane's article on 'The will to liberate' was excellent." It's not often you can say that a letter we publish is worth £100!

Then there was the £50 bank transfer from BK, who described it as part of his "infinitesimally tiny contribution towards painting massively wide socialist horizons"! There's nothing like ambition, comrade. On top of that, we had the usual batch of standing orders - thanks to DG (£60), JT (£50), SS and GT (£15 each), and to PM, RL and AR

(£10). The above-mentioned AR, as usual, made another monthly payment - for £5, this time via PayPal. He was one of only two comrades who chipped in like that this week - the other being ME, who donated a tenner.

All that came to £335, taking us to £1,714 - just a little short of what I was hoping for, despite the generosity of four comrades in particular. But we can still get there if, as soon as they read this, comrades follow the example of two of those named above, either by clicking on that PayPal button or - better still, because it involves no payment charge - making a bank transfer (sort code 30-99-64; account number 00744310).

Let's make sure we start the year with a bang! ●

Robbie Rix

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

PCS

Chris Baugh set for re-election

Left Unity has agreed its candidate for assistant general secretary, reports **Dave Vincent**

Since my article on the Public and Commercial Services union last week, PCS Left Unity have had another membership vote to select its official candidate for the post of PCS assistant general secretary - a 'senior national officer' position filled every five years, for which an election is due very soon. The post is a combination of national treasurer and deputy general secretary.

The original contest within the LU faction featured two members of the Socialist Party - Janice Godrich, long-serving PCS national president, who surprisingly gave up that post to challenge the current AGS incumbent, Chris Baugh (who has held that position since 2004).

PCS Left Unity groups together socialists such as the SP and Socialist Workers Party - and now Socialist View (see below). The Socialist Party had decided to back Chris, but Janice broke the SP line to declare her opposing candidature to secure Left Unity backing, which she narrowly won in an internal LU election - but almost immediately stood down due to health problems. Janice had only stood in the first place after PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka came out publicly against Chris Baugh.

Socialist View is a very new PCS faction, recently formed to support Janice against Chris. It now seems to have the support of a majority of SP members (also defying their party's line) - its own Left Unity slate for the national executive got through, defeating the one put forward by the SP (elections for the NEC will be held in April/May). Fran Heathcote was chosen as the LU candidate for national president, defeating Marion Lloyd, leader of the Chris4AGS campaign.

Given Janice's ill health, Socialist View found an unelected full-time officer (since 2005), Stella Dennis, to stand, necessitating another LU members' ballot for the AGS nomination. When the results came in, it was announced that Chris Baugh had won the official LU backing. Marion Lloyd is now appealing for unity within LU, following all these divisions.

This means everyone uniting around the SV LU slate for NEC, but SV supporters also backing Chris for AGS. (This will also avoid any mass expulsions of SP members who broke the party line.) But I would go further - there is now no principled basis for Socialist View to continue as a faction. Each side has won something and lost something, and Left Unity members have voted and decided on candidates from each side following a very divisive campaign.

The fact that Chris apparently has a different strategy on the PCS pay claim from SV can and should be settled by PCS conference in May - by union activists. There is no basis for SV to continue as a faction on a changing tactical question.

Mark Serwotka, having said he would support *any* LU candidate except Chris, cannot now do so! However, Lynn Henderson - non-Left Unity, unelected PCS full-timer for 14 years, who had earlier claimed she had the support of Mark - is still standing for AGS. Lynn is PCS national officer for Scotland and Ireland, as well as being president of the Scottish TUC.

Then there is the PCS faction, Independent Left, which - after campaigning for more women to



Chris Baugh: not the unity candidate

stand for the NEC and as full-timers - is standing ... a man: John Moloney (who will now be standing *against* a woman, of course). John promises to take only the average executive officer pay and not the £90,000 AGS salary.

So, despite Marion Lloyd's appeal, in a left-led union we will have at least three socialist candidates vying for the AGS post (the nomination process is now open to branches). All candidates will need a minimum of 15 branch nominations - a position clearly aimed at deterring mavericks (or rightwingers).

In her statement of January 26, following the announcement of the LU AGS candidate, Lynn Henderson is playing the woman's card for all it is worth. Lynn has previously mentioned supporting the 'Move Over, Brother' campaign. Why is this acceptable? I am sure Lynn would not support someone mounting a 'Move Over, Black (or Gay, or Disabled) Brother' campaign. Surely a better, more positive slogan would have been 'Step Up, Sister'? Had another sister - Stella Dennis, for example - been chosen by LU members, would

Lynn have withdrawn her candidature to avoid splitting the 'sisters' vote and allowing a man in, or would she have still stood as Mark's 'preferred candidate' - and stood to benefit still further from Mark's male patronage?

One middle-aged, white brother Lynn has never asked to 'move over' is Mark Serwotka himself. Why not? Becoming PCS's first ever female general secretary would surely be a far better breakthrough for women than winning the AGS post.

Lynn also makes great play of being the only candidate to support the 2018 PCS national pay strategy of aggregated ballots of all (or the largest) departments across the civil service, rather than, as Chris Baugh is alleged to back, disaggregated departmental ballots rather than risk losing one national civil service-wide ballot, after which the membership of no individual department would be able to take industrial action, even if 50% of *its* members voted to do so.

Lynn conveniently makes no reference to the NEC's consultation of members and branches, which has just ended (presumably the result will be announced at the February 2

NEC meeting). This actually asked if *they* preferred a single national ballot or separate departmental ones! This consultation - and events between now and May 2019 - may well see the PCS national pay strategy change, and it is for conference to decide policy, which means that Lynn should not be pushing the 2018 position in 2019.

Reserved seats

Continuing to play the women card, Lynn also declares her support for another consultation the NEC has been conducting, concerning a motion carried at the 2018 PCS annual delegate conference (ADC). This was the NEC's proposal to consult branches over whether the 2019 ADC should endorse a rule change to reserve 50% of NEC seats for women.

In the 1980s there was some case, in some unions, for having reserved seats, because there were more union members, more activists; and 100% facility time acted as a force to potentially corrupt some lay officials into not encouraging new activists (whatever their diverse demographics), for fear that they might be opposed and defeated, forcing them to return to the shop floor. Secretive left groups in some corrupt unions used their bloc vote to choose an NEC of fellow-travellers. But now it is 2019, with 'one member, one vote' applying to all union NEC elections by law.

In PCS, with the attacks on facility time, the effect of job cuts and the various voluntary redundancy packages (which tempt many experienced activists to leave without planning who will succeed them), I suspect practically every branch will have executive vacancies and a shortage of officers. Many branches do not send delegates to ADC or even their group conference any longer (attendees have to use up their annual leave, as facility time has been removed by the Tories). In every branch, whether you are black, gay, disabled, young, female or whatever, you are likely to be able to walk onto your local branch executive committee or become a branch delegate to conference - the door is wide open.

The union already has reserved seats for two BAME members, even though election results from day one since the creation of PCS in 1999 showed they were not needed. Even the NEC of the forerunner of PCS, the Civil and Public Service Association, under the control of the right, always had two to three BAME members. Then in 2018 the NEC proposed a motion to the ADC to reserve seats for two LGBT members and one young member - despite, once again, no evidence ever being cited to show that either group had *any* difficulty getting elected.

Strangely the biggest case of underrepresentation is only now being dealt with - that of women, who comprise 60% of the PCS membership.

Hypocritically, addressing this has been delayed for yet another year through a consultation. What is more, whilst the other groups will have reserved seats according to their proportionality, the 50% NEC proposal for women would still see them underrepresented.

However, as with BAME places on the NEC, we have had a female president right back to the days of the rightwing-controlled CPSA and ever since the creation of PCS in 1999.

In 2018 we elected three women to the four deputy and vice-president positions (it could have been all four, had the 'PCS Democracy Alliance' pact not stopped a female Independent Left candidate from getting on). If female PCS members want more women on the NEC, they have the majority vote, so there should be no reserved seats.

The real reason for this delay in establishing reserved seats for women is that the PCS Democracy Alliance pact has had enough trouble finding the current 10 female NEC members, let alone standing 18. And what will happen if candidates cannot be found? Do we have unfilled NEC places, while perhaps experienced and capable men might be excluded? What if the 60% of female PCS members decide they prefer the male candidates standing? Tough, NEC political correctness will soon tell women they can't have what they want.

In reality, right now the only candidates able to get on the NEC, whether BAME, LGBT, young member or women, are those on the PCS Democracy Alliance slate. Not on the slate? Then you must be the wrong kind of BAME, LGBT ...

There has never been any evidential basis for having any reserved seats on the PCS NEC. Lynn knows this, but is playing the diversity game for an election ever fewer members (including fewer women) bother voting in. The 2018 NEC elections saw the *worst ever* membership turnout (7.5%) in this left-dominated union for at least 16 years.

Reserved seats carry the insulting implication that PCS members are prejudiced against BAME, LGBT, young members - or, in the case of women, that perhaps the largest group in PCS are prejudiced against themselves! It is an idea of the 1980s for those unions that needed them. PCS never has and still does not.

Returning to the AGS election, the fact remains that the opposition to Chris Baugh was started and is driven by Mark Serwotka's stated, open desire that anyone but Baugh should be elected. I say again: 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.

Socialist View should now disband and follow the lead of LU members - they want SV candidates on the Democracy Alliance slate and they want Chris Baugh for AGS. (We will soon see whether female PCS members want a female AGS rather than a male one, while they are still allowed that choice - before someone proposes reserved seats for senior officers next.) The supposed massive tactical differences over fighting the pay cap is now for the PCS ADC to decide in May. There is nothing now justifying continuing to split Left Unity by keeping Socialist View going, especially now that Marion Lloyd has urged unity.

I still back Chris Baugh, who has seen PCS through the crisis of the removal of check-off (union subscriptions were no longer automatically deducted from members' pay), who helped bring the PCS left together to defeat the right wing, who organised land registry members to successfully defeat privatisation proposals, who made superb speeches to PCS conferences - before becoming an *elected* (important that) senior full-time officer in 2004 ●

BASICS



Lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks

Marx's theory of value

Far from being natural, value is characteristic of commodity production and capitalism, its most developed form. **John Bridge** upholds Marxist orthodoxy

The English word 'value' refers to: (1) the importance, worth or usefulness of something; (2) morals, principles, standards of behaviour.¹ Suffice to say, what interests us here is the first, not the second set of meanings.

Dating back to the early 14th century, English merchants were already referring to anything that could be brought, sold or bartered in terms of 'worth' and 'value' (not insignificantly words adapted from Old French). Merchants possessed a commanding knowledge of the different prices operating within their particular sphere of trade, and would - using well-honed negotiating skills, guild solidarity and royal patronage - buy cheap in one place and sell dear in another.

That way, often via the mediation of silver and gold coin, English cloth exchanged for French wine, Venetian glassware, Icelandic salted fish, Russian furs and Asian spices. Risks were high. However, profits were considerable. Sometimes fantastic. The richest merchants elbowed their way into the ranks of the high aristocracy.

Medieval society was, though, quite incapable of intellectually comprehending what common substance united cloth, wine, glassware, salted fish, furs and spices. Arriving at the *concept* of value was simply impossible.² Production relations were far too underdeveloped. Most products of human labour remained just that: products, not commodities. Needless to say, the mass of the population were peasants - their labour dispersed, small-scale and patriarchal. The bulk of what they produced was for immediate household consumption (plus the portion allotted to the parish priest, manorial lord and local abbey, as required by the gouging system of tithes). True, better-off tenant farmers produced with the intention of selling on the market. So did artisans. Here, on the margins, there was perhaps, through haggling, the inchoate *notion* of exchanging equal labour-times.

The feudal state concerned itself with weights, measures, coinage and setting just prices. Merchants were, of course, notorious liars and cheats ... and because of that faced widespread moral opprobrium. Their

commodities sold with enormous mark-ups, though they did nothing to work them up or otherwise change them (apart from space and time). In the minds of the religiously pious: "sin always lodged between buying and selling."³

However, the triumph of agricultural and industrial capitalism, circa 1450-1800, swept aside all such holy sentimentalities. Buying and selling assumes universal proportions. Commodity production dominates the entire economy. Therefore the *tendency* towards equal exchange. Paradoxically, despite that, the wealth of the few grows in leaps and bounds. Correspondingly, the many are deprived of any independent economic existence. Social relations cease being customary, personal, direct and founded on the threat of force. Instead, people relate to each other commercially, through commodities. The dull compulsion of securing a wage ensures the subjection of labour to capital.

Under these radically altered circumstances, the likes of William Petty, Adam Smith and David Ricardo - the best representatives

of bourgeois political economy - attempt to discover the common inner substance of commodities. Through trial and error, they establish the labour theory of value. Labour is the common substance that allows for *equal* exchange. However, they never properly explained surplus value, profit, rent, interest, etc. In point of fact, surplus value, profit, rent, interest, etc led them into all manner of blind alleys.

Marx took as his starting point the achievements of classical political economy. On these foundations he developed the concept of "value in general".⁴ In other words, human labour, as embodied in and equalised through commodities; labour as it appears in the value of a commodity and the use-value of a commodity.

Putting aside profit, rent, interest and other such categories, Marx made a necessary abstraction. Given *simple commodity* production, he moves first from the *elementary form of value* (eg, one coat = 20 yards of linen) to the *relative form of value* (20 yards of linen equating the human labour contained in a range of other commodities), to the *equivalent form*

(this logically gives him 'money = the universal equivalent'). The value of each commodity is "directly proportional" to the amount of necessary social labour needed for its production.⁵ As already noted, not only are commodities equalised through exchange: so is labour time. Hence, besides concrete labour, which creates particular use-values, we have another form of labour: *abstract labour*. Commodities embody abstract, or homogenised, labour-time, the value of which is realised through exchange, through a money sale (under mature capitalism, gold served as the universal equivalent). Crucially, when it comes to making profits - ie, turning money into more money - the biggest, most technically advanced and competitive capitalist firms are able to realise the value of the abstract labour produced in smaller, technically backward and less competitive capitalist firms. Value has a fluid quality to it. All of this will, of course, be familiar to anyone who knows *Capital*.

To further his investigation, Marx develops value conceptually. He treats value both independently of

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exchange-value and in relationship to exchange-value. To gain an all-sided view, value has to be analysed in terms of: (1) substance, (2) magnitude and (3) form. In short, the substance of value is social labour. The magnitude of value is labour-time. What about value as form? The most abstract, most universal form taken by the product of capitalist society is exchangeability. Exchangeability stamps capitalist production as a "particular species of social production, and thereby gives that production its special historical character".⁶ Hence, neither value nor value as a social regulator should be treated ahistorically, as natural, as eternal.

The classical school of bourgeois political economy concentrated on the quantitative side of value, on the amount of labour-time embodied in commodities. Exchange was never given its proper due. Marx establishes exchange as the mechanism through which the capitalist system spontaneously moves and brings forth its "golden eggs".⁷ Capitalism is generalised commodity production. Labour-power itself becomes a commodity - as the *norm*, not the exception. The class of workers exchange their ability to labour in return for wages. Labour-power is, though, a special commodity. Having performed their necessary labour, over say four or five hours - which pays for their wages - the rest of the worker's day amounts to surplus labour. Capital mercilessly seeks to extend and, more importantly, intensify the working day. Herein lies the secret of capitalist wealth. Marx, doubtless inspired by Goethe's *The bride of Corinth* (1797), vividly depicts the horrifying reality of everyday capitalism: "Capital is dead labour that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks."⁸

Exchangeability unites labour-power, commodity production and value. And, of course, the social labour necessary for the production of a commodity is not expressed directly, but indirectly, in the "form of value", in the form of commodities which exchange for other commodities.

Yet, while social labour is the substance of value, socially equalised labour, *not* abstract labour, takes other forms too. Socially equalised labour can take the form of labour organised in a capitalist economy, or the form of labour organised under socialism-communism.

On a number of occasions, Marx also writes of the allocation of labour being a "natural law". That labour is, therefore, applicable to *every* society. Eg, in his famous letter to Ludwig Kugelmann in 1868, Marx says that the "necessity of the distribution of social labour in definite proportions cannot possibly be done away with by a particular form of social production".⁹ Likewise in *Capital*: the "groundwork" that forms the "quantitative determination of value" - that is, the expenditure of human labour-time - applies to "all states of society".¹⁰ Obviously, as a species, we humans require a range of use-values if we are going to successfully maintain and reproduce ourselves. That is nature-imposed and inescapable. So, when it comes to labour, content and form must be categorically distinguished.

Quoting Capital

There are, though, those on the left who insist that for Marx value is natural, and therefore a feature of the past, present and the future. To uphold that claim there is a trivial and highly selective (mis)reading of Marx.

Take Joan Robinson (1903-83), the celebrated left Keynesian economist and admirer of Mao Zedong's cultural revolution. She declares that

Marx, like Ricardo, was a seeker after an "invariable measure of value". In her *An essay on Marxian economics* (1942), Robinson has Marx believing that "under socialism" the "labour theory of value" would at last come into "its own"¹¹ - a contention backed up with some carefully chosen quotes. This from *Capital* volume three:

It is only where production is under the actual, predetermining control of society that the latter establishes a relation between the volume of social labour-time applied in producing definite articles and the volume of the social want to be satisfied by these articles The exchange, or sale, of commodities at their value is the rational state of affairs: ie, the natural law of their equilibrium. It is this law that explains the deviations, and not vice versa - the deviations that explain the law.¹²

Through making a substantial textual cut, Robinson fuses two distinct ideas into one. Under socialism-communism, society *directly* calculates the amount of labour-time necessary to meet the needs of people for various products. No argument. Under capitalism, *commodities*, not products, *tend* towards selling, exchanging, at their value. Value acts as the centre of gravity, towards which the entire system of commodities is drawn. Once again, no argument. However, to conflate labour time with value is a fundamental mistake. And, of course, to state the obvious, it is Robinson's mistake. Not Marx's.

Robinson provides another quote from volume three. Here Marx, discussing market-value, land fertility and differential rent, gives an example in which 10 quarters of wheat sell for 600 shillings. He then says this:

If we suppose the capitalist form of society to be abolished and society organised as a conscious and planned association, then the 10 quarters would represent a quantity of independent labour-time equal to that contained in 240 shillings. Society would not then buy this agricultural product at two and a half times the actual labour-time embodied in it and the basis for a class of landowners would thus be destroyed. This would have the same effect as a reduction in price of the product to the same amount resulting from foreign imports.¹³

But what Marx is trying to establish is that the market-values of commodities, including agricultural commodities, are based on exchange-value, not upon "the soil and the differences in its fertility". Marx is *not* laying down a blueprint for the future socialist-communist society. Suffice to say, communist society neither buys nor sells.

Robinson has another quote, this time from volume two. Marx says that under "socialised as well as capitalist production", workers will use the means of production and the means of subsistence for a shorter or longer period, depending on the nature of their tasks. This arises from the material character of the production process, "not from its social form". Marx is then cited as follows:

In the case of socialised production the money-capital is eliminated. Society distributes labour-power and means of production to the different branches of production. The producers may, for all it matters, receive paper vouchers entitling them to withdraw from the social supplies of consumer goods a quantity corresponding to their labour-time. These vouchers

are not money. They do not circulate.¹⁴

So no money. Nevertheless, society distributes available labour-power according to the various and many tasks. Corresponding to their labour-time, workers may get paper vouchers (doubtless, a transitional measure along the road to full communism and the principle of 'From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs'). In other words, there is still the principle of 'work done': an hour's work by a doctor equalling an hour's work by a hospital porter, etc. Finally, once again from volume three, Robinson gives us Marx, discussing commodity-value, saying this:

[A]fter the abolition of the capitalist mode of production, but still retaining social production, the determination of value continues to prevail in the sense that the regulation of labour-time and the distribution of social labour among the various production groups, ultimately the book-keeping encompassing all this, become more essential than ever.¹⁵

For Robinson this is a clincher. Marx thought that value would continue to operate under socialism-communism. The exact same approach would have had Robinson taking the scattered passages where Marx writes about "capital" in the ancient Greek world and concluding from this that he considered capitalism to be a natural, not a historical, category.

Shorn of its *essential* form, shorn of exchangeability, 'value' will continue under communism, but as nothing more than enhanced book-keeping. Social labour will be allocated through *direct* calculation. But nothing more.

'Trade' too will continue, "in the sense that" use-values will be distributed to meet the various and many needs of each and every individual. But book-keeping is no more value than distribution is trade. Under communism people take from the common repository, based on their needs, not their contribution. There is, in other words, neither value, exchange nor trade.

Disingenuously, Joan Robinson claimed to hold Marx in some high regard. Not that she had any time for the Hegelian "stuff and nonsense".¹⁶ She, therefore, dismisses volume one of *Capital* as metaphysical. However, in contrast, she grudgingly rated volume three as at least making sense. Not surprisingly then, Robinson dismisses the transition from values in volume one to production prices in volume three. She sees only an "irreconcilable contradiction" between two different theories.¹⁷ Put another way, she was simply incapable of grasping Marx's method.

Robinson attaches an appendix, 'Value in a socialist society', to her 'Labour theory of value' chapter. Here we find her dismissing Marx's idea that the common substance which determines the value of commodities is not their colour, chemistry or some other natural property, but their common social substance. Marx, she insists, had to be mistaken. Only their "material nature" can be held in "common". Nonetheless, for Robinson, Marx considers that, while the law of value does not properly function "under capitalism", with socialism it would "come into its own".¹⁸ In the utopian spirit of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-65), Marx is depicted as searching out an "ideal system of pricing", which would allow the realisation of social justice.

Actually, the real Marx never tired of attacking the likes of Proudhon, who not only advocated a morally

based social transformation, as opposed to a violent revolution, but small-scale peasant and worker cooperatives. Hence his dream of a Bank of the People and paper bills allowing the *equal exchange* of one product for another.

Marx never pursued the ideal of equal exchange between values. Indeed, it is perfectly clear that he envisaged society abolishing value and the law of value. In the *Critique of the Gotha programme* (1875) he writes:

Within the collective society based on common ownership of the means of production, the producers do not exchange their products; just as little does the labour employed on the products appear here *as the value* of these products, as a material quality possessed by them, since now, in contrast to capitalist society, individual labour no longer exists in an indirect fashion but directly as a component part of the total labour.¹⁹

Elsewhere, in *Capital*, Marx notes that bourgeois political economy has explored value and its magnitude, and has discovered what "lies behind" these forms (however incompletely). But because value appears to be natural it has never asked the question:

[W]hy labour is represented by the value of its product and why labour is represented by the magnitude of that value. These formulae, which bear it stamped upon them in unmistakable letters that they belong to a state of society, in which the process of production has mastery over man, instead of being controlled by him, such formulae appear to the bourgeois intellect to be as much a self-evident necessity imposed by nature as productive labour itself.²⁰

Not the only one

It is, sad to say, not only bourgeois political economy that considers value to be as natural as productive labour itself. Arthur Bough maintains that value is nothing more and nothing less than productive labour. Hence the contention that value has existed since the dawn of humanity and will exist into the communist future. Presumably, there must have been surplus value too (presented by Marx in terms of commodity production, the accumulation of capital and the formula M-C-M').

To achieve those ends there is a mangling and misrepresentation of Marx (and Engels). Fully in the spirit of Joan Robinson, Bough does much cutting and pasting and joining together entirely separate ideas. All in all, he refuses to actually read what is there in front of his nose. What makes the whole exercise particularly regrettable is that Bough comes to praise Marx, unlike Robinson, not to bury him.

Take this example from *Capital* volume three (for the benefit of the reader I include what had been cut in bold).

Value is labour. **Therefore surplus value cannot be earth. Absolute fertility of the soil affects nothing more than the following: a certain quantity of labour produces a certain product - in accordance with the natural fertility of the soil. The difference in soil fertility causes the same quantities of labour and capital, hence the same value, to be manifested in different quantities of agricultural products: that is, causes these products to have different individual values. The**

equalisation of these individual values into market-values is responsible for the fact that the "advantages of fertile over inferior soil ... are transferred from the cultivator or consumer to the landlord" (Ricardo, Principles, London 1821, p62). And finally, as third party in this union, a mere ghost - "the" labour, which is no more than an abstraction and taken by itself does not exist at all, or, if we take ... [? illegible] [As has been established by later reading of the manuscript, it reads here: 'wenn wir das Gemeinte nehmen' (if we take that which is behind it) - ed], the productive activity of human beings in general, by which they promote the interchange with nature, divested not only of every social form and well defined character, but even in its bare natural existence, independent of society, removed from all societies, and as an expression and confirmation of life which the still non-social man in general has in common with the one who is in any way social.²¹

Everyone knows that *Capital* volume three was put together by Engels, using the hellishly unreadable notebooks Marx left behind after his death. Hence the 'illegible' interpolation. Suffice to say, we are told that the conclusion to be drawn from the above passage is clear: "Value, whether of a product of a primitive commune or under communism, or as a commodity in a commodity-producing economy, is nothing more than an expression of the labour-time required for its reproduction."²²

Well, if one thing is clear, it is that Marx is *not* trying to establish that *all* labour equals value. What Marx is saying is that all values equal labour. The two propositions are hardly the same. Eg, all apples are fruit, but not all fruits are apples. And, having discussed the equalisation of individual values into market values, Marx allows Ricardo to explain how this benefits the landlord class, when it comes to capitalist agriculture. As for labour without any historic specificity, all you have is the expenditure of human energy and the interchange with nature.

If one cannot grasp the concept of value, further confusion must follow. Hence this statement: value and exchange-value are "two logically different and historically divergent concepts".²³ In fact, as argued above, the exact opposite is the case. Value and exchange-value are closely related concepts. Exchangeability is the form that value takes. Without exchangeability there can be no value, no surplus value and no realisation of abstract labour. Hence, far from value and exchange-value being "logically different" and "historically divergent", they are, in fact, logically and historically bound together.

Obviously labour existed in the original communist society. But there was no calculation of individual contribution. A sexual division of labour reigned. Men hunted game. The most successful earned a certain prestige ... but were expected to behave with extreme modesty. Alpha-male bragging would be mercilessly punished with ridicule and mockery. Meanwhile, women cooked, gathered roots, leaves, seeds and insects, and often made the decisive decisions. Everyone took according to need.

Despite the irrefutable evidence from the writings of Marx and Engels, there is outright denial too. An unhappy example is how Engels' *Anti-Dühring* (written in collaboration with Marx) is dealt with (disposed of). Engels is, as the title suggests, busy demolishing the system-mongering of a certain Eugen

What we fight for

Dühring, who likewise argues that “in the future society” the principle of value will be maintained as a “natural law” ... when it comes to distribution. Here is what Engels says in reply:

From the moment when society enters into possession of the means of production and uses them in direct association for production, the labour of each individual, however varied its specifically useful character may be, becomes at the start and directly social labour. The quantity of social labour contained in a product need not then be established in a roundabout way; daily experience shows in a direct way how much of it is required on the average. Society can simply calculate how many hours of labour are contained in a steam-engine, a bushel of wheat of the last harvest, or a hundred square yards of cloth of a certain quality.

It could therefore never occur to it still to express the quantities of labour put into the products - quantities which it will then know directly and in their absolute amounts, in a third product - in a measure which, besides, is only relative, fluctuating, inadequate, though formerly unavoidable for lack of a better one, rather than express them in their natural, adequate and absolute measure: time

Hence, on the assumptions we made above, society will not assign values to products. It will not express the simple fact that the hundred square yards of cloth have required for their production, say, a thousand hours of labour in the oblique and meaningless way, stating that they have the value of a thousand hours of labour. It is true that even then it will still be necessary for society to know how much labour each article of consumption requires for its production. It will have to arrange its plan of production in accordance with its means of production, which include, in particular, its labour-powers. The useful effects of the various articles of consumption, compared with one another and with the quantities of labour required for their production, will in the end determine the plan. People will be able to manage everything very simply, without the intervention of much-vaunted ‘value’.²⁴

So the communist mode of production would “not assign values to products”. Society will dispense with value. Instead, it will apportion labour and use labour-time as the standard unit of account. Definitive, emphatic, unequivocal, one would have thought. But no, we are told that in the Engels passage quoted above the “reference to value is to exchange-value. He uses ‘value’ as shorthand for exchange-value.”²⁵ It cannot mean anything else can it? If, against all the evidence, you dogmatically assert that value is natural, is just another word for labour, what other conclusion could you possibly draw? In the process, of course, rational communication breaks down, theoretical cohesion is lost and Marx and Engels are made to look dreadfully inconsistent, if not complete fools.

The same treatment is meted out to 20th century Marxists such as Yevgeni Preobrazhensky (1886-1937), a ‘left’ communist in 1918 and close ally of Leon Trotsky’s in the mid-1920s. When he says that the “law of value begins to operate wherever the production relations of commodity and commodity-capitalist economy appear”,²⁶ we are innocently informed that what he really meant

is that “from the 15th century commodities do not exchange on the basis of their values, as determined by the law of value”.²⁷ No, what he really meant is what he really said. The “law of value begins to operate wherever the production relations of commodity and commodity capitalist economy appear”.

Besides Preobrazhensky, what about the other sources provided to show the *very broad* consensus that exists between Marxists of every phylum, class and order? To remind the reader:

Firstly, Wikipedia: “When speaking in terms of a labour theory of value, ‘value’, without any qualifying adjective, should theoretically refer to the amount of labour necessary to produce a marketable commodity, including the labour necessary to develop any real capital used in the production.”²⁸

Secondly, a Progress Publishers dictionary definition: “Value: social labour-materialised in commodities.”²⁹

Thirdly, Isaak Illich Rubin, a former Menshevik: “In a primitive communistic community, or in a feudal village, the product of labour has ‘value’ in the sense of utility, use-value, but it does not have ‘value’.

The product acquires value only in conditions where it is a product specifically for sale and acquires, on the market, an objective and exact evaluation which equalises it (through money) with all other commodities and gives it the property of being exchangeable for other commodities. In other words, a determined form of economy (commodity economy), a determined form of organisation of labour, through separate, privately owned enterprises, are assumed. Labour does not, in itself, give value to the product, but only that *labour which is organised in a determined social form* (in the form of a commodity economy).³⁰

We are bluntly told that if that is the consensus, then the consensus is “wrong”. Iconoclasm is welcome, praiseworthy, if and when it breaks an antiquated, unsustainable mode of thought. But an iconoclasm which denies elementary facts, which relies on tortured reasoning, which blithely dismisses serious sources of authority - such iconoclasm is worthless.

Soviet Union

As the reader will know, in his *The new economics* (1926) Preobrazhensky posited the idea that in the Soviet Union there were two diametrically opposed laws operating: the law of value and the law of the plan. Armed with that insight, he pithily declares: “We counterpose to commodity production socialist planned production; to the market the accounting of socialist society; to value and price the labour costs of production; to the commodity the product.”³¹

Along with other Marxists, Preobrazhensky considers that the October revolution allowed a *partial* negation of the law of value. But he knows the enormity of the odds pitted against the socialist regime. It is not just the military power of Britain, France, the USA and Germany that ought to be feared. The law of value was an enemy within and an enemy without: “In the law of value,” he writes, “are concentrated the entire sum of the tendencies of the commodity and commodity-capitalist elements in our economy, and also the entire sum of the influences of the capitalist world market on our economy.”³² In short, the weak post-capitalist economic forms in the USSR confronted 22 million peasant households ... and the outside pressure excreted by the capitalist world market. Needless to say, the Soviet Union was not self-sufficient. It had to import

goods and to pay for them it had to export goods. Their prices being set according to the calculations, requirements and mechanisms of capitalism.

Preobrazhensky envisages superseding the law of value through planning the rapid development of heavy industry. That necessitates an “exploitative” relationship of “non-equivalent exchange” between town and country. Agriculture would provide the surplus to enable “primitive socialist accumulation”. The childhood stage of the law of planning is, therefore, the law of primitive socialist accumulation. Not that Preobrazhensky believes in socialism in one country. By itself the Soviet Union can only go so far. In the last analysis its fate relies on revolution in the west.

Inevitably, given the factional alignments in the Communist Party, there were strong objections to Preobrazhensky’s perspectives. In the name of preserving the worker-peasant bloc, Nikolai Bukharin attacks him for wanting to turn the countryside into a “socialist colony”. Not that Bukharin denies the necessity of transforming the law of value into the “law of proportionality of labour expenditure” (aka the “law of socialist planning”). Others, however, launched themselves against the idea that there were two conflicting economic laws in operation.

According to Preobrazhensky, in the process they revealed “their own naturalistic, non-historical conception of the law of value”. They confused the way the economy is regulated under commodity production with the “regulatory role of labour expenditure in social economy in general: the role, that is, which this expenditure has played and will play in any system of social production”.³³ Later on, in his *The new economics*, Preobrazhensky bemoans what he sees as the miseducation of Soviet youth, when it comes to the ABCs of Marxism:

Ninety percent of all the mistakes, misunderstandings and brain-torturings which occur when our young people study Marx result from a naturalistic conception of the law of value.³⁴

Slaves

Value is a socio-economic category, which is “the most comprehensive expression of the enslavement of the producers by their own product”.³⁵ We can see this even in emergent forms. Take the owners of slaves in the ancient world. As I have argued before, they knew perfectly well how much time and how many hands were needed to perform various tasks.³⁶ To begin with, in the early period, what was produced through slave labour was entirely directed towards the immediate consumption of the household. There was no value, no generalised system of exchange. The slave-owning patriarch is interested himself in use-values. However, if the product was *characteristically* made for others - worked up for sale on the market, for exchange - then the product assumes the well-known dual characteristics of a commodity: use-value and exchange-value. The distinction between use-value and exchange-value allows us to locate the source of the different social relationship that correspondingly arise.

The production of use-values alone could see slaves treated in a relatively benign fashion. Homer provides a touching description of his hero, Odysseus, working alongside his slaves in the fields of his island kingdom of Ithaca. Social relations are direct. Slave-owner and slave have a real bond of affection - doubtlessly sincere for the master; a

necessary pose, as far as the slave is concerned.

Either way, compare Odysseus and patriarchal Bronze Age civilisation with the harrowing, sickening accounts of classical Athens. The *demos* of Athens treated the slaves it set to work in the silver mines of Laurion as mere things, not fellow human beings. Slaves were mercilessly driven to exhaustion and often beyond. Death rates were horrendous. All that mattered, as far as the Athenian state was concerned, was the price of silver, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the price charged by pirate-merchants for the human cargo seized from around the eastern Mediterranean coastline.

Both sets of slaves were exploited; both produced a surplus. In the first case, though, surplus product; in the second, surplus value. As shown, though, radically different social relationships result on the basis of such an elementary distinction. Hence, joked Engels, wanting to abolish money, production for exchange and class exploitation, while retaining value, amounts to abolishing Catholicism by electing a new pope ●

Notes

1. en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/value.
2. “The concept of a phenomenon exists, in general, only where this phenomenon is understood not abstractly (that is, not as a recurring phenomenon), but concretely; that is, in regard to its position and role in a definite system of interacting phenomena, in a system forming a certain coherent whole. The concept exists where the particular and the individual are realised as more than merely individual and the particular (though recurrent) - they are realised through their mutual links, through the universal construed as an expression of the principle of these links” (EV Ilyenkov *The dialectics of the abstract and concrete in Marx’s ‘Capital’* Moscow 1982, p96).
3. D Wood *Medieval economic thought* Cambridge 2002, p112.
4. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, London 1970, p53.
5. *Ibid* p202.
6. *Ibid* p81n.
7. *Ibid* p154.
8. *Ibid* p233.
9. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 43, Moscow 1998, p68.
10. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, London 1970, p71.
11. J Robinson *Essays on Marxian economics* London 1982, p23.
12. K Marx *Capital* Vol 3, Moscow 1971, pp187-88. I have presented Robinson’s quotes from Marx as they appear in the Moscow edition of *Capital* Vol 3. I am not sure what edition she was using, but the rendition of Marx is pretty poor.
13. K Marx *Capital* Vol 3, Moscow 1971, p661.
14. K Marx *Capital* Vol 2, Moscow 1967, p362.
15. K Marx *Capital* Vol 3, Moscow 1971 p851. The cooperative socialist, Arthur Bough, also fields this quote in his attempt, like Joan Robinson, to ‘prove’ that what Marx meant by ‘value’ was nothing more than labour. See A Bough, ‘Subjective and objective value’ *Weekly Worker* January 17 2019. His article was a reply to my ‘Value is a human creation’ (*Weekly Worker* November 8 2018).
16. J Robinson *Essays on Marxian economics* London 1982, p2.
17. *Ibid* pp15-16.
18. *Ibid* p23.
19. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 24, London 1989, p85.
20. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, London 1970, p80-81.
21. K Marx *Capital* Vol 3, Moscow 1971, p815.
22. A Bough, ‘Subjective and objective value’ *Weekly Worker* January 17 2019. It should be pointed out that comrade Bough does not provide many full quotes. In his defence, the editor insisted, understandably given the quality of his argument, on giving him only a single page for his reply to my article, ‘Value is a human creation’ (*Weekly Worker* November 8 2018).
23. A Bough, ‘Subjective and objective value’ *Weekly Worker* January 17 2019.
24. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 25, London 1987, p294-95.
25. A Bough, ‘Subjective and objective value’ *Weekly Worker* January 17 2019.
26. E Preobrazhensky *The new economics* Oxford 1967, p57.
27. A Bough, ‘Subjective and objective value’ *Weekly Worker* January 17 2019.
28. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labor_theory_of_value#Definitions_of_value_and_labor.
29. MI Volkov (ed) *A dictionary of political economy* Moscow 1985, p382.
30. II Rubin *Essays on Marx’s theory of value* Montreal 1990, p68.
31. EA Preobrazhensky *The new economics* Oxford 1967, p183.
32. *Ibid* p168.
33. *Ibid* p24.
34. *Ibid* p170.
35. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 25, London 1987, p297.
36. For a modern-day popular account, see J Toner *How to manage your slaves by Marcus Sidonius Falx* London 2014.

■ 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

After two years of negotiations it has come to this

Brexit in the balance

The Commons vote does not change the bigger picture, notes Paul Demarty

The pre-Socratic philosophers, Parmenides and Zeno, are remembered chiefly for their arguments by paradox that motion is an illusion, and that it is logically impossible for one faster-moving body to catch up with another.

No more recent thinkers have prepared us so well for the limitless toing and froing in the House of Commons at the present time, as it tries to pick its way through the factional interests of various layers of the political class, the state interests of the UK and the widespread suspicion - on the part of 'leave' and 'remain' voters alike - that none of them have a clue what they are doing. There is the clear *impression* of movement, but we rarely seem to have moved terribly *far* - or qualitatively closer to the goal.

The January 29 'crunch votes' were the result of Theresa May's defeat two weeks ago, when the withdrawal deal painstakingly negotiated by her minions with the European powers finally met its reckoning. The question begged was: what next? The answer, apparently, is *déjà vu* all over again. May brought her parliamentary colleagues a motion, purely indicative, about the government's next steps. It has served as a blank canvas for all her opponents (and supporters) to pursue their interests.

In the end, three amendments were pertinent. Firstly, Graham Brady - chair of the 1922 Committee, which represents backbench Tories - proposed to add text about abandoning the existing backstop agreement concerning the Irish border in favour of unspecified alternative arrangements. In such a form it was unacceptable, but many conciliators in the different Tory factions decided to use it as the basis for hashing out a compromise. The one that eventually emerged, and gained the support of No10 and victory on the Commons floor, was Kit Malthouse's version, that offered remainers a longer transition period, and in return declared breezily that technological solutions would be found to avoid a hard Irish border in the event of some disaster.

Secondly, there was Yvette Cooper's and Nick Boles's attempt to table a debate on a bill, drawn up by Cooper, that - if passed - would rule out a no-deal Brexit and prepare the ground to delay the completion of article 50 by nine months. The third, moved by the liberal Tory, Caroline Spelman, explicitly condemned the no-deal scenario, but did not - like Cooper/Boles - commit parliament to discussing legislation ruling it out.

The parliamentary layout began to fall back to the partisan dividing lines, albeit with visible tensions between the parties' respective factions. The Labour leadership came out in support of Cooper's amendment, in line with its public rejection of a no-deal Brexit, but was careful to make known that it would table amendments to Cooper's bill, specifically to shorten the proposed delay.

The Malthouse amendment, meanwhile, did at least have the distinct benefit of actually representing



Mission impossible: heading to Brussels

a real compromise among the various Conservative factions. That must be its only benefit, however. As it gathered support, political pundits multiplied their stories of anonymous "senior Tories" agreeing to it, in despair at getting through the day otherwise, yet fully aware that it would never pass muster in Europe. Hours before the votes actually took place in parliament, the EU 27 had already prepared a statement to be issued in the event of the Brady amendment (and, impliedly, the Malthouse compromise) passing; a firm no to any renegotiations.

Leave it to IT?

One of the aforementioned "senior Tories" claimed that the compromise brought his party from farce back into tragedy - no longer squabbling like children, but uniting on principle and preparing to go down, thus united, in some foreign field.

Yet a recurring impression, as this absurd kabuki dance moves from one step to the next, is how ridiculous the Brexiteers actually are in their aspirations. An IT professional like your humble correspondent can hardly

resist a pop at the purely notional 'technological solutions' to the hard-border problem. There is, if nothing else, the small matter that huge government IT projects - how to put this? - do not enjoy an unblemished record of success. Disasters abound, from the NHS to the ministry of defence. There are successes too; but it is a pretty big chance to take.

On top of that, a computerised system is just peachy when it comes to good-faith border-crossers, but how exactly is it supposed to catch smugglers? That is a pretty hairy AI problem, Mr Malthouse; avoiding it demands either fairly hard borders or a customs union ... Can anyone have imagined that this is the magic ingredient that will convince Messrs Tusk, Barnier and co that the backstop agreement can be radically revised? Yet magic 'technology' has been a mainstay of Brexiteer question-begging since the get-go. We wonder sometimes if Jacob Rees-Mogg has even used a computer: nothing else could account for his naivety on this front.

And indeed, we have to assume that none of this was primarily for a

European audience. Getting the Brady amendment through parliament may look like the final few drops of urine on the grave of May's deal, but it has advantages: it absolves her from the charge of ignoring parliament, which removes one of the preconditions Jeremy Corbyn imposes on her, but not all the world's terrorist leaders, and authorises her to troop off to Brussels, get told 'no', come back and ask her MPs, 'Now what?'

The result - victory for Brady and Spelman, defeat for Cooper - settles nothing in this regard. Indeed, it commits parliament, admittedly loosely, to two sharply contradictory positions: avoiding a no-deal Brexit at any cost, and rejecting the deal the opposing negotiators are actually prepared to make. Something has to break. In spite of no doubt unpleasant encounters to come on the continent, we must consider this a narrow victory for May's government. Corbyn has signalled he will now talk, she has forced her own head-bangers to vote with her, and she has the advantage ... until the next vote.

Fundamentally, however, the posi-

tion has not altered. The government's inability to get a realistic withdrawal deal, from the point of view of the European powers, will lead to continued pressure and more terroristic statements from major industrial concerns. Remainer manoeuvres are seen, by Brexit voters, as sabotage - accurately, as far as these things go. Perhaps the most worrying sign for the British bourgeoisie is how straightforwardly partisan the votes were. The raw materials of a national government of the 'sensible' are there in the Commons, but they quite spectacularly failed to come together - even speculatively - on Tuesday.

Perhaps that *does* improve May's leverage in Europe - marginally. She cannot negotiate her way out of the backstop with 'technology', of course; but she can claim with somewhat greater plausibility that she has forced more of her tormentors to show their hand, and is thus in a better position to get a 'compromise' - even one wholly on her side - through an exhausted parliament. Time will tell ●

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