

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**

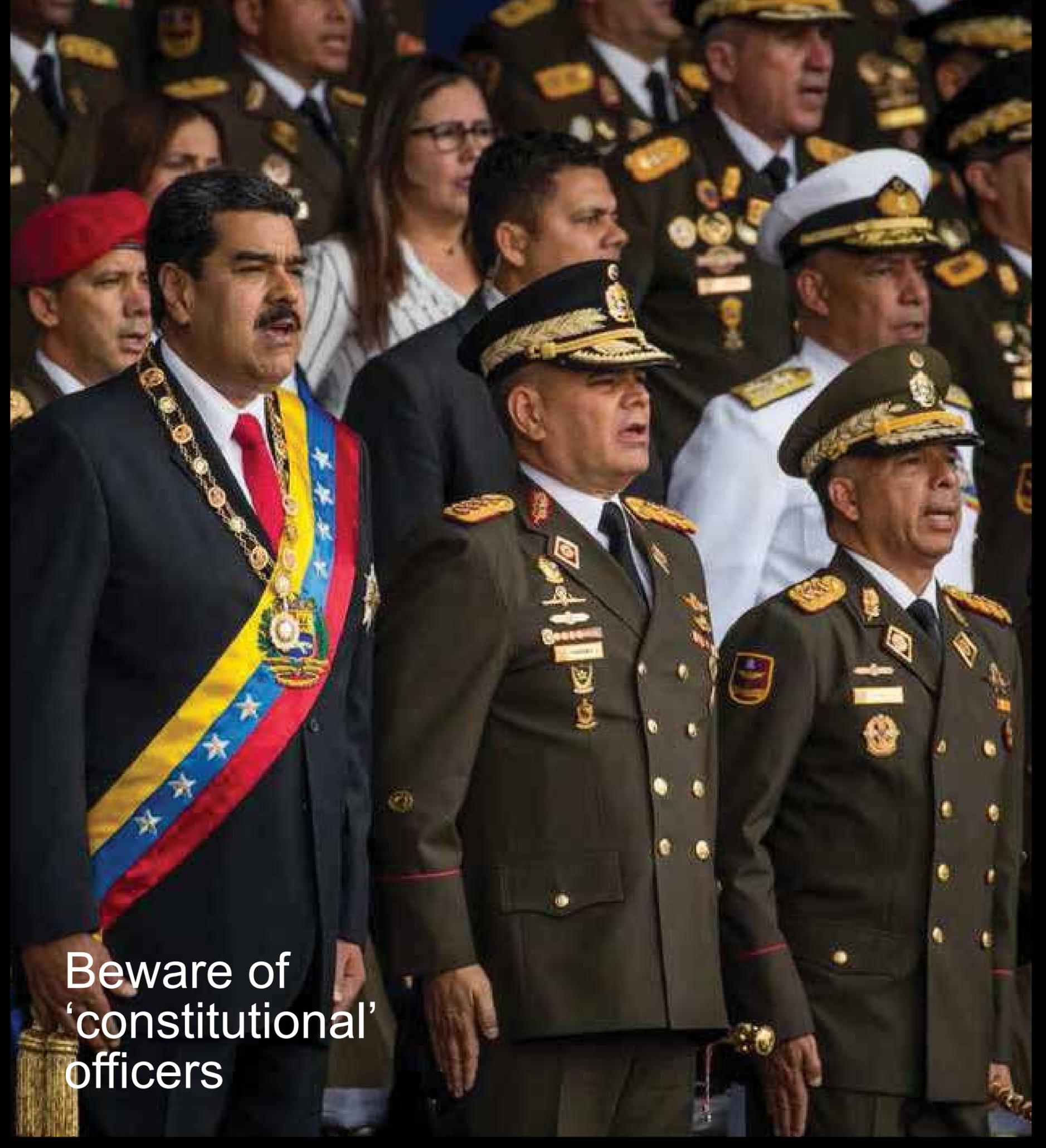
Jackie Walker opens LAW conference with resounding attack on the inhuman witch-hunt in Labour Party

- Letters and debate
- Brexit agony
- Chartalism v Marxism
- Amos Oz, 1939-2018

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Beware of
'constitutional'
officers

LETTERS



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

Two letters

Gerry Downing's letters made me laugh (January 24, January 31). Quite clearly he is incapable of critical thinking. All he can do is parrot tired formulas, distort and misrepresent. Eg, in 1905 Lenin sought a bourgeois revolution, while in 1917 he came over to the view that there had to be a socialist revolution. What fun. What nonsense.

Instead of answering Gerry Downing point by point, I ask him to consider Lenin's October 1921 article marking the fourth anniversary of the October revolution (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 33, Moscow 1977, pp51-59). Here we find Lenin assessing the significance of 1917: "The direct and immediate object of the revolution in Russia was a bourgeois democratic one." Namely, destroy the survivals of medievalism, purge Russia of barbarism and remove obstacles to progress. Lenin takes some considerable pride in the achievements made over four years.

The anarchists and petty bourgeois democrats (Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries) are incapable of understanding the "relation between the bourgeois democratic revolution and the socialist (that is, proletarian) revolution". Experience has "proved to the hilt that our interpretation of Marxism on this point" - an interpretation which as I have comprehensively demonstrated goes back to the summer of 1905 - "were correct". Lenin says: "We have consummated the bourgeois democratic revolution as nobody has before." "We are *advancing* [in October 1921] towards the socialist revolution consciously."

What was the content of the bourgeois democratic revolution? Dealing with the monarchy, social estates, landed property, the second-class legal position of women, national oppression, the grip of the Orthodox church. All had been swept away within the space of just four years.

Fulfilling the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution were a "by-product" of the struggle for proletarian power. The first develops into the second. The second, "in passing", solves the problems of the first. "The second consolidates the work of the first".

Showing the significant retreats forced upon the Bolsheviks by civil war, imperialist intervention and the failure of the revolution in the west, crucially Germany, Lenin can no longer refer to a workers' and peasants' regime. Instead, in a country dominated by small-peasant agriculture, he holds out the prospect of building "gangways to socialism by way of state capitalism". His plan is to form "a small peasant economy" via "state capitalism to socialism". That "course" has proven "much longer and much more difficult than we would have liked". But despite "disaster, famine and ruin - we shall not flinch", declares Lenin.

Without revolution in Europe there was bound to be first counterrevolution within the revolution and then counterrevolution within the counterrevolution. The first developed into the second. The

second consolidated the reverses of the first.

Sad to say, Gerry Downing will not grasp much of this. He is not only an advocate of the socialism of fools, when it comes to the "overrepresentation" of Jews in the ruling class. He is an advocate of the Trotskyism of fools, when it comes to Lenin, the Bolsheviks and the October revolution.

Jack Conrad
London

Off beam

Arthur Bough states that in *Capital* volume 1 the example of Robinson Crusoe "tells us all we need to know about value and the law of value" (Letters, January 31). He goes on to argue that this example proves that value does not depend on commodity production and exchange, "because Crusoe only ever produces for his own consumption".

Bough is surely correct, if by 'value' he means 'labour time', that Crusoe produces use-values that have taken a certain amount of time to make (given the average or normal rate of the expenditure of his labour-power). This proves the trivial point that all use-values, regardless of whether they have the historically specific social form of a commodity, take a certain amount of labour-time to produce.

It does not follow, as Bough seems to think, that within every conceivable mode of production all products of labour possess value, because they have taken a certain time to make. At the level of logic, this is a clear example of the fallacy of affirming the consequent - if value entails labour-time and this is a product of labour time then it has value.

However, the point goes beyond logic to a substantive difference of interpretation. As Marx stated of Adam Smith and Ricardo, they failed to discover the "form under which value becomes exchange value". This was not just because they were both "entirely absorbed in the analysis of the magnitude of value", but because they overlooked the "*differentia specifica* of the value form" as the "most universal form taken by the product in bourgeois production" (*Capital* Vol 1, pp52-53, footnote 2).

The same can be said of Bough. Like Smith and Ricardo, he too is preoccupied with the magnitude of value expressed in quantities of labour time. He also ignores the historically specific social form of value peculiar to bourgeois production. This is the form that socially necessary labour-time takes as homogeneous abstract labour.

These preoccupations lead Bough to misread Marx's purpose in the Robinson Crusoe example. Marx uses Crusoe's relation to the products of his labour to illustrate the effect that commodity fetishism has on the social form that value takes within bourgeois society. This is the opposite intention from the one Bough imputes to him. Marx does not use Crusoe as an example of the natural, eternal nature of relations of value, but of the simplicity and transparency of the relationship between the production of use-values and labour-time in the absence of generalised commodity production.

Did Bough go off beam when he read that Marx states that the "simple and clear" relations that Crusoe has with the objects he has created "contain all that is essential to the determination of value" (p48)? I guess he did. I guess he read the phrase as a confirmation of his position on the eternal nature of value. However, the keyword in the phrase is "determination", not "value". The

phrase is read more properly as a contradiction to the complexity and opacity of value relations within bourgeois society.

To use a biological analogy - the presence of sperm and an egg are essential determinants of life, but they have to be brought together through a process of fertilisation if life is to come into being. Similarly the presence of use-values and labour-time are essential determinants of value, but they had to be brought together in the process of commodity production before value can come into existence.

Paul B Smith
Ormskirk

Not absolute

Arthur Bough wants to argue that for Marx communism was almost too fantastical to ever be real. Bough claims that abundance is equal to abundant social labour-time, but even a moment's thought will tell you this proposition is anti-materialist and actually physically impossible. There can be no unlimited time where every possible option is available, rendering no need for actual planning or choices!

Bough appears to argue that abundance means infinity. I beg to differ! And I claim there can be no near infinity, where abundance becomes so great that it might as well be infinity. Boffy slips in a few caveats to pretend he is not talking about something infinite, but I claim he really is, logically speaking. So even abundance, as Marx clearly understood it, does not mean the end of economy of time!

Abundance is a relative and not an absolute concept.

Maren Clarke
email

Venezuela

Any UK public demonstration or march in support of the Bolivarian revolution will include myself in its numbers. A march organised anywhere or by whomsoever, that is - but preferably by yourselves and other communists, and urgently so.

Lying behind this commitment are the usual motivations, but high amongst them is one created by the abject/criminal failures in this arena from Corbyn's Labour Party. The fact that a dribble of carefully metred support only equivalent to cowardly silence is the best that Corbyn and crew can muster is a *deeply* despicable outrage - all as part of their bourgeois parliamentary calculation and other such electoral 'triangulations', it must be noted.

Labour's *de facto* collaboration and enablement - all integral within that phony anti-capitalism/quasi-socialism of theirs - will be judged by history. Their so-called progressive policies and actions will be exposed as utterly treacherous/poisonously diversionary to both the national and international needs of the working class.

Of course, the Bernie Sanders-style/Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez permutation of this despicable shit should be chucked in for good measure. Where is their 'democratic socialist' voice on this finitely seminal matter of the assault on Venezuela?!

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

Kill the deal

Politics is living through a 'ratification crisis', lasting over a period of months, when nobody knows who, how or whether the

crown's withdrawal agreement with the European Union will be ratified or not. The crisis began in December when May pulled her deal out of a Commons ratification vote. It continued on January 15, when it was massively rejected by 230 votes in the Commons.

Such a major defeat should have sunk any government, got May sacked and brought about a general election. But Brexit has blown away any 'normality'. There are two ways out of the ratification crisis - getting ratification by parliament or by the people. May is strongest in parliament and Corbyn has more strength amongst the people. So why would Corbyn tie himself to a contest in parliament instead of taking his ratification case to the people?

If May had any idea about democracy, she would logically appeal over the heads of the Commons to the people. She would put her withdrawal agreement to a ratification referendum. Will the people back May's deal and overrule the Commons? But May is no democrat.

What could be worse than allowing the working class to have a vote? Every minister of the crown understands the danger of subcontracting their powers to the people. Look what happened to Cameron! So May fights by parliamentary manoeuvres. She deploys all the powers of the crown in secret deals, manipulation, bribery and corruption, etc.

By these means May can still emerge triumphant from the current debacle. She has switched tactically to the right after her heavy defeat. The chance of a 'no deal' option has enthused the Tory right. They are so desperate that they fell over themselves to believe the 'good news'. May was listening 'seriously' to them after all! How disappointed or angry will they be?

The next step is for May to run the clock down until one minute to midnight. Then comes some cosmetic changes from her Tory friends in Europe. Next, by tacking to the 'left', get it through the Commons with the help of Labour MPs without the Democratic Unionist Party. Finally the knockout blow: if her withdrawal deal is ratified, she will gamble on a triumphant Falklands-style general election in June.

A 'great' national leader, like Churchill and Thatcher, had saved the country against all the odds. Hitler and Argentinean generals were beaten. Now May can big up as the Iron Lady taking on the German Reich. Meanwhile Corbyn could be further destabilised by demands for a second EU referendum and the stepping up of the anti-Semitism row (or 'Israel', as some perceptively see it).

If Corbyn doesn't have an answer to the ratification crisis, then he will be defeated. He has tried everything and failed. He called a vote of no confidence. Then he wants a general election. Then he refused to meet May unless no deal was taken off the table. Then he met her anyway and demanded no deal. That did not work either. So he has to take his case on Europe to the country through a ratification referendum.

May has set her face against any referendum. But 'no' always means 'possibly' if there is no other way out. Meanwhile there is a wide open goal for Corbyn to shoot at. Even Arsenal wouldn't miss such an opportunity. He has tried every other

tactic to overthrow May's deal except a ratification referendum. If we have eliminated everything else it's the only thing left.

Corbyn cannot overthrow May by parliamentary means. He cannot win a vote of no confidence nor take 'no deal' off the table until it is too late. Asking or demanding May abandon her main 'no deal' weapon, which keeps her afloat, is never going to work. Demanding a general election while her withdrawal agreement is still alive is a waste of time. May has shown that if she cannot get her deal through parliament she can fight on. But if she cannot get it through a ratification referendum then she is as dead as Cameron.

Corbyn should confound May and all his liberal critics in the Labour Party. He should champion the people's right to decide on May's deal by proposing a ratification referendum. He should totally reject any idea of a second repeat/remain referendum. It is the only way we can get to a general election before May gets her deal through the Commons and then fights an election on the ground of her own choosing.

Steve Freeman
email

Writers

Rex Dunn is obviously well educated ('Stalinophiles and ignoramuses' *Weekly Worker* January 24). He brims with thoughts and ideas. However, at least from my experience, he sometimes gets things a tad wrong.

He paints today's *commercial* fiction writers as coining it economically. Well, not if my little circle of friends and contacts is anything to go by. They barely scratch a living. No surprise, this report: most fiction writers earn "nothing or very close to nothing" (<https://medium.com/@shauntagrimes/what-is-the-average-income-for-a-fiction-writer-4589bee55959>).

Then there is the question of worth. Your esteemed art correspondent equates commercial motivation with worthlessness. His heroes - George Orwell, Graham Greene, Philip Roth, etc - wrote from first-hand experience and for the sake of writing. His villains write for money and produce rubbish (eg, Simon Montefiore).

Art does not conform to such a neat binary formula. Life is far more complex. William Shakespeare was a hack. He wrote for money. His plays were performed before wealthy patrons, true, but common folk too - apprentices, porters, servants, artisans. The cheapest price at the Globe theatre was one penny (= a loaf of bread). Shakespeare was typical of the *commercial* writers of his age. But he also happened to be a genius.

Not that he had first-hand experience of Henry V's military campaigns in northern France, Julius Caesar's populism, Scotland's murderous aristocratic rivalries, nor Athens and its midsummer night's dreamings.

There are other such writers too: Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, Oscar Wilde, HG Wells, Dashiell Hammett, Dalton Trumbo, Isaac Asimov, Roald Dahl, etc. All quintessentially commercial writers. But what they produced is often far and above their now forgotten 'art for art's sake' contemporaries.

Stephanie Just
Canterbury

ANTI-SEMITISM

Still weapon of choice

The PLP as presently constituted will never be appeased, argues **Carla Roberts** of Labour Party Marxists



Not about anti-Semitism

The Parliamentary Labour Party is doing everything it can to undermine Jeremy Corbyn - and 'anti-Semitism' is still their weapon of choice, as was shown vividly at this week's meeting of the PLP. This was dominated by the news that of the hundreds of Labour Party members suspended and investigated over anti-Semitism, 20 had been "allowed to remain in or return to the party" - in the last four months!

That includes, for example, a member in Sheffield whose only 'crime' consisted in sharing a montage of the Jobcentre sign with the words *Arbeit macht frei* imposed on it. You see, because the Nazis used the slogan over some of their concentration camps it follows *ipso facto* that the comrade must be anti-Semitic. This is so absurd, it beggars belief. Clearly, the comrade was accusing the government of acting like Nazis in their treatment of the unemployed and disabled. It is a disgrace that she had to wait months to be cleared.

Not only that: her name (and those of others cleared) was then leaked to the outraged *Daily Telegraph*, adding more distress to the comrade and her reputation - and giving the right more ammunition. As disciplinary cases are supposed to be treated confidentially, it seems that somebody on the NEC had leaked the info. Unfortunately, there are too many suspects to start guessing - the list includes, unfortunately, Momentum owner Jon Lansman and his close allies, who have thrown themselves into the campaign to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. Perhaps his low point - which cost him the last bit of respect he had commanded on the Labour left - came when he implied his former comrade, Pete Willsman, was anti-Semitic, removing him from Momentum's recommended list of NEC candidates (he was re-elected anyway).

Whoever leaked this info, it was a welcome weapon for the PLP, which is, of course, still totally dominated by the right. A motion was "unanimously supported" that criticises the party leadership and particularly general secretary Jennie Formby and asks them "to adequately tackle cases of anti-Semitism, as failure to do so seriously risks anti-Semitism in the party appearing normalised and the

party seeming to be institutionally anti-Semitic".²

This is utter nonsense, of course: the party has become so oversensitised to the issue that knee-jerk investigations are being launched left, right and centre against anybody criticising Israel or the Zionist lobby (often, evidence for these investigations has been collected by software that automatically scans Facebook posts to find particular words like 'Rothschild' or 'Zionist'). By trying to appease his critics - rather than stand up to them - Jeremy Corbyn has allowed things to get this far. Every time he lets the right take a step forward, he is being pushed two steps back.

Formby has been given seven days - until February 11 - to tell the PLP "how many complaints of anti-Semitism levelled against members remained unresolved". Actually, we would love to see that figure too: judging by the number of vexatious complaints we have seen, it will be absurdly high - probably in the thousands.

Formby's written answer to the PLP is as bland and conciliatory as could be expected. She promises, for instance, that she is "committed to implementing a world-class education programme on anti-Semitism", and that "it's essential that this is done with the support of Jewish organisations, to ensure our education programme commands their confidence and support."³ We somehow doubt that anti-Zionist Jewish groups like Jewish Voice for Labour or the Jewish Socialists Group are among those she is thinking of.

More interesting, however, was her speech to the PLP (which has naturally been leaked to the media too): she quite rightly stated that she will not be able to comply with the request for reasons of confidentiality and, after all, she only answers to the NEC anyway, not the PLP. That must have gone down like a lead balloon. She then went on to say that it is "impossible to eradicate anti-Semitism and it would be dishonest to claim to be able to do so".⁴

That is a rare admission of the political reality. As long as prejudice and racism exist in society, they will find reflection in a tiny minority of Labour's mass membership. That

kind of prejudice is best fought with education through open and transparent debate (not by 'rehabilitation' lessons organised by the Zionists in the Jewish Labour Movement or the Board of Deputies).

Needless to say, the right is not really concerned about anti-Semitism, Islamophobia or any other kind of racism or prejudice in society. They have joined forces with the Zionist lobby simply because it suits their agenda: getting rid of Jeremy Corbyn at all costs. They have discovered that charges of anti-Semitism stick best - because Corbyn has allowed them to stick. And so the most ardent rightwingers have reinvented themselves as courageous fighters against anti-Semitism (a bit like the three eccentric Britain First supporters outside Labour Against the Witchhunt's conference, who accused attendees of being 'Nazis'). The Labour leadership bears a huge responsibility for this topsy-turvy, Orwellian situation.

This includes John McDonnell, who was asked during a radio interview this week why the "team around Jeremy Corbyn" was not standing up to the "smear campaign that paints Jeremy Corbyn as an anti-Semite and which needs to be confronted head on". His answer was as disappointing as we have come to expect of him in recent years: there's "no smear campaign I've seen the evidence of", he said. "We've got to root it out: having one anti-Semite in the Labour Party is not good enough."⁵

John, you just do not get it. The day the right stops going on about the 'anti-Semites' in the party is the day when you and Corbyn have finally been defeated. Time to stand up to them ●

Notes

1. Or, as the Skwawkbox writes, it was not actually voted upon, but left unopposed, as, ridiculously, frontbenchers are apparently not allowed to speak in PLP meetings: <https://skwawkbox.org/2019/02/05/excl-what-really-happened-in-mondays-plp-no-vote-but-a-scurrilous-attack-on-formby>.
2. *The Guardian* February 5.
3. <https://labourlist.org/2019/02/eliminate-the-evil-of-antisemitism-from-our-movement-that-is-my-mission-says-jennie-formby>
4. *The Daily Telegraph* February 5.
5. <https://amp.lbc.co.uk/radio/presenters/iaindale/john-mcdonnell-rebukes-labour-anti-semitism-smears>.

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday February 10, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimtz's *Lenin's electoral strategy from 1907 to the October Revolution of 1917*. This meeting: chapter 2, 'The "revolutionary upswing" and *Pravda*'.
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 12, 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: 'Kinship and human origins'. Speaker: Mark Dyble.
Organised by Radical Anthropology Group:
<http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

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>.

Fighting for democracy in Turkey

Saturday February 9, 11am to 4.30pm: Annual SPOT conference, NEU, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Build international solidarity against Erdoğan's authoritarian regime.
Organised by SPOT - Solidarity with the People of Turkey:
www.facebook.com/events/284864915550515.

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 (by entrance to Barras), 179 London Road, Glasgow G40.
Speakers: Alan Stewart (Scottish Republican Socialist Movement) and Brian Quail (Scotland CND).
Organised by Scottish Republican Socialist Movement:
www.tapatalk.com/groups/scottishrepublicans.

Bahrain 'Day of Rage' anniversary protest

Thursday February 14, 2pm: Protest at the Bahraini embassy, 30 Belgrave Square, London SW1. Eight years since the movement for democracy and social justice was crushed by the Bahraini regime with the support of the Saudi Arabian military.
Organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade:
www.facebook.com/events/248138279411370.

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.

Britain is broken - we can't afford the Tories

Saturday February 16, 2pm: Rally, Carnegie Room, Northampton Central Library, Abington Street, Northampton NN1. Oppose austerity, cuts to public services and council tax increases.
Organised by People's Assembly and Save Northants Services:
www.facebook.com/events/328809567975727.

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.

!No Pasaran!

Saturday March 2, 9.30am to 5pm: International conference, Bloomsbury Central, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2. Join activists from across Europe organising to confront the rise of the far right. Speakers include Ken Loach and Tariq Ali. Tickets £5 (£0).
Organised by Transform UK: <https://pruk.org/category/events>.

Campaign for Labour Party Democracy

Saturday March 9, 11.30am: AGM, Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1. To decide the CLPD's tactics and strategy for the forthcoming year. Entrance £3 in advance, £5 on the day (£2).
Organised by CLPD: www.clpd.org.uk.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

LAW

Standing up to the right

David Shearer of Labour Party Marxists reports on the threats, debates and decisions



The first national conference of Labour Against the Witchhunt, which took place in London on February 2, was a success, with 50 comrades from around the country attending.

That, of course, is not a huge figure, but in view of the various attempts made to sabotage the event, it was excellent that so many were determined to come along, despite the snowy conditions. The conference was originally to have taken place in a church hall in west London, but, just two days before the agreed date, the booking was cancelled. The normal threats and accusations of anti-Semitism were made. According to the email received by LAW, the venue was "not really appropriate for such a conference, bearing in mind safeguarding and security issues".

It goes without saying that the anti-Semitism allegations are totally false. It is true that among those attending were comrades who had been *falsely* accused of anti-Semitism, in the witch-hunt driven by the Labour right and backed by the establishment, but no such allegations have been upheld against any of them. In fact Moshé Machover - an Israeli Jew who was summarily expelled from Labour in 2017 for writing an article noting the collaboration that occurred between German Zionists and the Nazis - was quickly reinstated following the outrage this caused.

Another speaker was Tony Greenstein - a Jew accused of anti-Semitism because of his staunch *anti-Zionism*. But in his case too that allegation was quietly dropped - although he was eventually expelled from the Labour Party under the catch-all charge of "bringing the party into disrepute" - basically for being 'rude' online. Then there was Jackie Walker, whose case has not yet been heard (see below).

Fortunately LAW booked an alternative venue, but, in order to avoid further malicious threats, the location was not publicised. It comes to something when a democratic campaign has to keep details secret - comrades were asked to meet outside a nearby tube station. Unsurprisingly, however, people were followed. We had a little reception committee, including a well-known member of the far-right Britain First. One his Zionist

chums filmed herself screaming, "Why do you call Jews Nazis?"

Extremist

Opening the conference was LAW chair Jackie Walker, who has recently been named by the neoconservative Henry Jackson Society as an "extremist figure", comparable to Tommy Robinson. She described this as a "hate campaign that puts my quality of life at risk". In other cases, she said, people had lost their jobs, and at least one person had even attempted suicide.

Suspended from Labour since November 2016 merely for saying she had not heard, in the training session she was taking part in, a definition of anti-Semitism she could work with, comrade Walker - another Jewish comrade (she pointed out that there was a disproportionate number of Jews who were victims of the witch-hunt) - has now learnt that her disciplinary hearing is finally expected to take place on March 26-27. But she still does not know what exactly she is accused of and who her accusers are.

Despite the disgraceful nature of this campaign, comrade Walker noted, some on the left had been complicit - not least Momentum owner Jon Lansman. She predicted there would be a "miraculous change" if the right succeeded in removing Jeremy Corbyn - Labour's 'anti-Semitism' problem would suddenly disappear.

Our first session discussed a motion entitled 'The slow coup against Jeremy Corbyn', which was introduced by comrade Machover and investigative journalist Asa Winstanley of *The Electronic Intifada*, who emphasised how false claims of anti-Semitism have been weaponised in order to get rid of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader. As comrade Winstanley put it, "They're trying to defeat the man by demoralising, splitting and defeating the left movement supporting him."

Comrades Winstanley and Machover were both supposed to be introducing the steering committee motion, but, in my opinion, it was unnecessary to have two people doing that job. Comrade Winstanley in particular took up a lot of time going back to the beginning of the anti-Corbyn campaign, which began three years ago.

Jeremy Corbyn should have nailed the Zionist campaign from day one. His silence is a self-defeating form of complicity

Jackie Walker: targeted by Labour right, named an extremist by the neo-conservative Henry Jackson society, abandoned by much of the Labour 'left'



He highlighted the role of the Israeli government and described Labour Friends of Israel and the Jewish Labour Movement as "proxies for the Israeli embassy". He quite rightly pointed out that such people should have no place within Labour.

Comrade Machover talked about Corbyn's "big mistake" in not challenging the smear campaign. Yes, of course, there are *some* anti-Semites in the party, he said, just as no doubt there are some paedophiles, but it is definitely not the major problem it has been portrayed to be. Corbyn should have said right from the beginning, "This is clearly not about anti-Semitism". Comrade Machover went on to point out that Israel and Zionists claim to speak on behalf of all Jews, but we need to combat that through political education, and not react against the Zionist lobby in a way that could be interpreted as anti-Semitic.

When the debate was opened up to the floor, one comrade pointed to the positive signs - at the Labour conference, Palestinian flags had been raised on numerous occasions in the hall - and the members knew what the truth was, he said. In the end McCarthyism was discredited in the United States and surely the same would happen with the parallel campaign here in Britain. In reply to this, comrade Walker agreed that support for the Palestinians within Labour was positive, but that did not mean that the mass of delegates were strongly opposed to the witch-hunt.

For his part John Bridge of Labour Party Marxists also warned against any complacency. Anti-Semitism had now been redefined to mean 'criticism of Israel' - Labour's national executive has gone along with that by adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) so-called 'definition' of anti-Semitism - including all 11 of the "examples", seven of which relate to criticism of *Israel*. Comrade Bridge concluded that what we are seeing could be "only the beginning": we might even see legislation based on the IHRA definition, which would *criminalise* such criticism.

The motion was carried unanimously.¹

IHRA

In the afternoon session, comrade Greenstein introduced the steering committee motion on the IHRA,

whose actual 'definition' is limited to stating that anti-Semitism "*may be expressed as hatred toward Jews*" (my emphasis - yes, that really is as far as the 'definition' goes). The real purpose, stated comrade Greenstein, was to "equate everything but the most benign criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism".

Glyn Secker of Jewish Voice for Labour (JVL) also spoke on the IHRA from the platform, even though he is not a LAW member. He pointed out that he had lost a whole generation of his family in the holocaust, yet he is still accused of anti-Semitism for his critique of Zionism - there is a deep conflict between Zionists and "revolutionary socialist Jews" like himself, he said. Yet, while there was an outcry against such "manufactured anti-Semitism", asked comrade Secker, where was the mainstream campaign against the growth of the far right?

Another comrade, speaking from the floor, thought that "the train has left", in that the IHRA had now been adopted by Labour. So it was best not to continue campaigning against the whole IHRA definition, but to demand the ditching of the examples and their replacement by the JVL's own code of conduct. However, Tina Werkmann - a member of the LAW steering committee - stressed that the IHRA symbolised the political collapse of the Labour left - it had to be opposed "in its entirety". Comrade Bridge agreed and added: "In the middle of a witch-hunt, silence is as good as complicity." That is why we need to be critical of Jeremy Corbyn, he said.

Because the motion drafted by comrade Greenstein quoted a dictionary definition of anti-Semitism in contrast to the IHRA nonsense, conference - quite unnecessarily in my view - spent a long time discussing alternative definitions. Several last-minute amendments were drafted in relation to that. But, as one comrade asked, why does LAW need a definition at all? We are a campaign against the witch-hunt - that is why we are opposed to the IHRA, which equates anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. But that does not mean we have to agree on the precise wording of a replacement definition.

When the vote was taken, however,

all amendments to that effect were defeated - although some minor changes to the wording were accepted and the motion, as amended, was carried unanimously. Two motions from Pete Gregson were also passed overwhelmingly: the first called for support for targeted activists and the second was a model motion on opposition to the IHRA. Once again there were attempts to insert references to a particular alternative definition of anti-Semitism.

Because so much time had been taken by this - and by platform speeches - there was very little time left for what turned out to be the most controversial debate - over LAW's draft constitution. While most of it was clearly approved by those present, there were two alternative and mutually contradictory amendments to the steering committee draft. After the sentence, "The national all-members meeting (including conference) is the highest decision-making body of LAW and it elects the steering committee", comrade Werkmann proposed to add: "A simple majority at any all-members meeting can decide to appoint or recall a member of the steering committee."

Comrade Greenstein's alternative amendment on the steering committee sought to delete, "It elects its own officers and sub-committees" and replace this with a provision for the four main officer posts to be elected by "the annual general meeting". Most controversially, he proposed adding: "Officers can be recalled by a two-thirds majority of the all-members meeting" (my emphasis).

Ironically, comrade Greenstein claimed that we had to guard against LAW being taken over by some sect, which might be able to mobilise its supporters to turn up at a poorly attended members' meeting and vote off the committee a member who had been democratically elected at an AGM. That was why there must be a two-thirds majority to recall an officer or committee member, he contended. In reality, the opposite is the case. Rather obviously, such a requirement would make it *more* likely that the will of the majority of members was thwarted. For example, if we assume that the attendance at Saturday's conference was exactly 50, it would only have needed 17 of those present (whether members of the same 'sect' or not) to veto a decision favoured by a substantial majority, if comrade Greenstein's proposal had applied.

Fortunately, however, it was comrade Werkmann's amendment that was carried (by a narrow majority), which meant that comrade Greenstein's automatically fell. Clearly a good number of comrades have not grasped the benefits of genuine representative democracy and hopefully the article accompanying this one - William Sarsfield's 'Real workers' democracy' (which outlines the case, in particular, against the allocation of individual officer responsibilities by the entire membership, as opposed to the committee itself) - will help bring out those advantages.

All in all, as I pointed out at the start of this report, the conference marked a step forward for LAW - and struck a blow against those who have sought to cow the left in order to return the Labour Party into safe, Blairite hands ●

Notes

1. See www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/190109-Slow-CoupMotion-FINAL.pdf.



Real workers' democracy

William Sarsfield looks at the issues underlying the main point of controversy at the LAW conference

It was interesting that the most contentious discussion in Labour Against the Witchhunt's February 2 all-members meeting was on the question of democracy and accountability in the campaign - specifically the method of election to our leadership group, the steering committee (SC). The political divide took concrete form in two amendments to LAW's proposed constitution. Although not explicitly counterposed, these expressed very different views on a democratic culture in working class organisations, and conference took the right decision to take them together, as mutually exclusive, alternative political approaches.¹

An amendment submitted by Tina Werkmann - LAW's membership secretary - proposed that "a simple majority at any all-member meeting can decide to appoint or recall a member of the steering committee". This was vigorously opposed by leading SC member Tony Greenstein. His own amendment to the constitution draft called on conference to reject the section proposing that the SC "elects its own officers and sub-committees and can appoint new SC members". His alternative substituted the annual general meeting for the SC, delegating its power to "elect a chair, vice-chair, secretary and treasurer, as well as up to four other members of the SC", leaving the committee the power only to "[elect] its own sub-committees and ... coopt up to four additional members".

The real sting in the tail was the suggested benchmark for an all-members meeting to be able to *remove* an SC member - Tony proposed that officers (and, presumably, members of the SC without 'portfolio') could only be recalled after "a two-thirds majority" of an all-members meeting or AGM had been secured.

This is superficially attractive to many - it has the *appearance* of a democratic and inclusive measure. However, in truth, it is anything but.

A rough parallel is with the office of president of the USA - which essentially is an elected monarchy able to ignore, denigrate and/or bypass the most representative constitutional institution, the House of Representatives. Likewise, a LAW officer elected to a post by the attendees of a particular national conference (or even as atomised individuals in an online poll, perhaps - à la Jon Lansman's preferred method of bypassing democracy) would be able to disregard the views of others on the leading body; to claim a 'mass' mandate for their position - even if the comrades this person worked with on a day-to-day basis knew from

direct experience that s/he was utterly useless. Electing officials in this way can degrade the selection process to the level of a popularity contest.

Again, these sorts of provisions are introduced in bourgeois 'democratic' institutions as an infrastructure of checks and balances *against* democracy; a method to distance the mass of people from genuine scrutiny and control over their elected representatives. Looking at this form of government in the 19th century United States, Marx branded it a "defiled democracy". As alluded to above, comrade Greenstein was also keen for us to adopt the "defiled" provision of a two-thirds majority vote to remove members of the leadership body - again, a stipulation that resonates with the US requirement of a two-thirds majority in the Senate (the least representative institution in the constitutional framework) to impeach a president.

As exemplified in the turnover of elected representatives and rapid changes of political majorities in the tumultuous revolutionary upheaval of 1917 Russia, our opposition to this hypersensitivity of governmental institutions to the changing outlook of the masses is an essential part of the working class democracy we fight for as Marxists and as consistent democrats. It found its organisational form in soviets, which operated on the basis of simple majorities.

Clearly, comrade Greenstein and the minority that supported his stance did so with the best of intentions. The overwhelming majority of our audience on February 2 were veterans of the British left in its various ideological manifestations. As such, I am sure the comrades could have passed many an hour regaling us with horror stories of the crass bureaucratism that is the cultural norm in the revolutionary sects - let alone the undemocratic monstrosity that was the Labour Party back in the day.

However, the well-intentioned remedy put forward by Tony Greenstein would *foster* the problems of lack of democratic accountability it was meant to guard against. By contrast to what he was proposing, leadership committees in the workers' movement should be accountable working bodies in two ways.

First and foremost, the membership that elected these people to responsible positions must be kept informed of a leading committee's work, its discussions and any important differences of opinion that have emerged. Second, individual members of a leadership are accountable - as well as to the membership as a whole - to the leadership collective. These are the comrades that on a day-to-day basis

are in the best position to closely scrutinise the work of its individual members, to become familiar with an individual's strengths and weaknesses and to hold them to account politically.² Indeed, this has *de facto* been the way the SC has operated since the beginning of the campaign back in October 2017 and, in general, this leading body has worked well (there have been six all-member meetings of LAW since its creation in 2017 - seven national gatherings, if we include the February 2 conference. There have been plenty of robust exchanges of viewpoints, but no serious charges of bureaucratic manipulation by any individual or group. Why change now?)

I reiterate - this approach is in the best democratic traditions of our movement and it was a shame that we did not have enough time to debate this key issue in more depth to properly draw out the full political ramifications of the counterposed motions. In my opinion, too much of the meeting was taken up with top-table speakers rather than contributions from the floor - a problem magnified by the fact that some of these guests were ostensibly billed to speak to specific motions to be considered by conference, but seemed unaware of the fact! This

is not to in any way degrade the calibre of any of these comrades - the contributions of Moshé Machover and Asa Winstanley were particularly useful, I thought. It is simply to regret the fact that the space for some important debates was squeezed.

I also got the impression that many audience members had not actually read the motions until the day itself. This probably accounted for the large number of hastily scribbled amendments that were passed to the top table as the debate on the specific motions was already in full swing. Of course, we should have the space for last-minute, perhaps compromise amendments to be taken. The number we saw on February 2 was excessive - as our slightly frazzled chairperson would no doubt agree ●

Notes

1. www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org/our-positions/motions-to-law-conference-saturday-february-2-2019.
2. The tempo of political work varies, of course, but there have been extended periods when members of the LAW SC have been in constant contact over some new political development or a logistical problem that needed close attention. (For example, a venue for the February 2 all-members meeting was only secured in the 24 hours before the meeting itself after Zionists and extreme-right provocateurs phoned pre-booked venues with threats and slurs against our campaign. Naturally, SC comrades were in close contact throughout that mini-crisis.)

Fighting fund

Near miss

Unfortunately we didn't quite make our £1,750 target for January. We missed it by ... £1! On the last day of the month KC donated £25 via PayPal, added to which VP's monthly standing order for £10 took us to £1,749. Talk about near misses!

Last week I wrongly stated that we still needed £61 - even though I correctly gave the running total as £1,714, which meant the actual deficit was £36. But JM, for one, took me at my word and posted a cheque for ... £62 (no, I don't know what the extra pound was for either). He wrote that he knew he had "missed the deadline", but he hoped that "this helps". It certainly does, comrade.

JM also explained why he thought it was so important to support the *Weekly Worker*, particularly in view of our "general stance on free speech" and other such questions. He particularly approved of editor Peter Manson's "balanced

statement" on *Socialist Fight*, which has been banned from two important London bookshops (Letters, January 31).

Anyway JM's £62 helped get us off to a good start in February. In addition we received 14 standing orders - thanks in particular go to SW, AC and CG, who all donated £30, and to DL, who chipped in with £20. On top of that VR (£20) and BN (£5) clicked on that PayPal button, while DM added £10 to her subscription cheque.

So we start February with £305 in the kitty. But don't forget that February is a short month - as I write, there are exactly three weeks and one day left to raise the remaining £1,445. (I think I've got my maths right this week!) ●

Robbie Rix

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

BREXIT

Return of the unicorns

As time runs out, Theresa May is still trying to square the Brexit circle, writes **Eddie Ford**

Though it often feels with Brexit that we are stuck in a time loop, there are some signs of movement - which might be cause for alarm if you are a hard Brexiteer who wants out of the European Union, regardless of whether there is a deal or not.

On February 3 the *Daily Express* ran a story, picked up by other media sources, about how Theresa May has instructed civil servants to begin "serious work" on developing policies predicated on remaining within the EU's customs union - something she has repeatedly ruled out. Of course, this happens to have the distinct advantage of being essentially the Labour Party's position - May met Jeremy Corbyn last week, after which a spokesperson for the Labour leader said the prime minister had shown a "serious engagement in the detail" with his proposals for a permanent customs union and a "close" relationship with the single market.

In many ways this makes perfect sense. Without the support of scores of Labour MPs, even if Corbyn himself still refused to drop his opposition to a "Tory Brexit", May has no chance of getting her withdrawal agreement through parliament - as amply demonstrated last month by her crushing 230-vote defeat. Unsurprisingly, she is coming under increased pressure from cabinet ministers to drop some or all of her self-imposed 'red lines' that have only boxed her into a corner when it comes to negotiations with the EU - ditto the March 29 deadline, as it is now widely accepted that article 50 will have to be extended, even if only to make time for all the necessary legislation to be passed (assuming the EU agrees). Following her parliamentary humiliation, Michel Barnier stated - not for the first time - that the European Council has "always said" that if the UK "chooses to shift its red lines in the future" and "makes the choice to be more ambitious and go beyond a simple free trade agreement", then naturally the EU will be "immediately ready to go hand in hand with that development and give a favourable response". Barnier added, however, that there could be no renegotiation of the actual withdrawal agreement or the dreaded backstop.

What this "serious work" exactly entails is totally unclear, but the broad picture is quite simple - Britain will not be able to strike buccaneering free trade deals here, there and everywhere with countries outside the EU. The final death of the Brexit dream will doubtlessly trigger resignations from the cabinet and backbench outrage from the European Research Group and others - not to mention screams of 'Betrayal!' from the rightwing press. Dominic Raab, the former Brexit secretary, has said that staying in the customs union would be a "flagrant breach" of a manifesto commitment and "suffocate all the opportunities of Brexit". Yes, Dominic, but at least it would probably get through the Commons - almost any deal is better than no deal. How long Theresa May would last is an entirely different matter, of course.

But if we have an 11th-hour commitment to a customs union, hence avoiding a hard Brexit, that means we get the 18-month or longer transition period. Yet the embarrassing political truth is that such an arrangement can only lead to Brino - ie, 'Brexit in name only'. The UK is going to end up a 'rule-taker,



Off to Brussels again

not a rule-maker'. Obviously, this does not mean that Britain will have regressed to a 'colony' or 'vassal-state', as some ERG-types daftly say. But, on the other hand, it is a bit of a humiliating comedown when a former global imperialist power will have the quality of its products and goods - amongst other things - determined in Brussels without any proper input to the decision-making process. In which case, what on earth is the point of Brexit?

Meanwhile, you have Nissan confirming it will be abandoning plans to build a new model for one of its flagship vehicles at its Sunderland plant. Back in 2016 the Japanese car manufacturer announced it would go ahead after receiving "assurances" from the government that it would not be "adversely affected" by Brexit - we now know this involved a previously secret package of state aid to Nissan that could have been worth up to £80 million. Clearly, there were other factors behind the decision, such as falling demand for diesel vehicles. But it is significant when a company cites "continued uncertainty" about the UK's future relationship with the EU as a major worry.

You do not have to be a genius to work out that profound uncertainty will cause companies to think twice about investing millions in the UK.

Compromise

May will be trudging back to Brussels on February 7 with a new 'mandate' after the passing last week of the 'Brady amendment' by a majority of 16 MPs, calling on the prime minister to negotiate "alternative arrangements" for the Irish border backstop.

Three possible options have been suggested: a time limit, an exit clause or the use of unproven technology - but all of these have been comprehensively rejected by the EU. A time limit or unilateral exit mechanism would mean that the backstop ceases to be a cast-iron insurance policy - either you have a backstop or you don't. As for a miraculous technological solution, that has already been suggested ...

and rejected. So there is absolutely no prospect of a breakthrough on the backstop. The fundamental problem is that the government went into negotiations with a set of *impossible* demands, wanting all the benefits of EU membership without actually being a member of the club - free movement of goods without the free movement of people. The EU was never going to consent to the UK having its cake and eating it.

Showing the direction May is heading, she upset Brexiteers with her Belfast speech on February 5. There was no more talk about "removing" or "replacing" the backstop: rather just seeking "changes" to it. Indeed, she insisted, there was "no suggestion" Britain would leave the EU without an insurance provision to protect against a hard border in Northern Ireland - technology could only "play a part" in any alternative arrangements, never be a fix in and of itself. May declared that she would never allow a hard border to be erected, but at the same time it was necessary to get the deal through the Commons.

This follows on from comments made by Arlene Foster, leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, who talked about replacing "the current backstop", as opposed to removing it entirely - something demanded by the ERG. May herself, lest we forget, told parliament that she would be asking the EU for "a significant and legally binding change to the withdrawal agreement" - implying that the actual text would have to change. But it will hardly be a new phenomenon if she says one thing and does another.

Sensing betrayal, as always, one ERG source complained, "Even if she didn't mean what she said, we do." In fact, hard Brexiteers have warned May that the only proposal they are likely to support in order to break the Brexit impasse is a version of the "Malthouse compromise". Named after junior minister Kit Malthouse, who first brokered it, this is a proposal to replace the backstop with alternative technological arrangements to prevent the return of a hard border - yes, the unicorns are back again. It proposes to offer

the EU two options. Plan A proposes an extended transition period, which would remove the backstop thanks to as yet undetermined technological checks - if this fails, plan B would also extend the transition arrangement until December 2021 to allow for a 'managed' no deal. Predictably, one EU official described the plan as "bonkers".

Whatever the fantasies of ERGers, the EU will not restart renegotiations on the withdrawal agreement. Yes, it has come up with last-minute fixes in the past, such as guarantees to secure Belgium's ratification of the EU-Canada trade deal, or Irish ratification of the Lisbon treaty, but these tend to be exercises in fine-tuning rather than rewriting entire deals - let alone substantial concessions to a country *leaving* the club, with all the potential political dangers that poses.

Narrative

With regards to renegotiating the withdrawal agreement, be careful what you wish for. For instance, one recent official EU document referred to Gibraltar as "a colony of the British crown" - meaning what? In the hypothetical event of new talks on the withdrawal deal and the backstop, Spain and other EU countries could demand as a price that the UK hand control of the rock to Spain. In other words, you could end up with *worse* terms and conditions - as Greece found out to its cost, when it reopened talks on the EU's punitive bailout plan: it was subjected to even more austerity measures.

One thing you can say with absolute certainty is that the EU will be no easy pushover. It is faced with an extremely weak minority government that cannot get even its most important pieces of legislation through parliament. If anything, expect further intransigence - even tougher demands. Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council, was probably not joking when he said there was a "special place in hell" for those who pushed Brexit without having a plan on how to deliver it. Does that sound like a man about to make compromises and concessions?

Nigel Farage has already received £1 million to launch a new political party if the EU elections do end up going ahead with British participation. It is easy to imagine the ERG - itself operating very much like a party within a party - striking a non-aggression pact with this new formation. The slogans in such an election would be about the treachery of big business, Whitehall mandarins and Labour remainers, an out-of-touch elite that has no backbone or patriotic spirit - a potentially powerful narrative. Declining imperial powers do tend to dream about the 'good old days' and resent their current lowly position. The EU negotiations have made it absolutely clear that Britain is no longer a global colossus that can command others to do its bidding.

Then there was May's pathetic bribe to various Labour MPs. Bunging some extra money to their constituencies if they vote for her deal - a disgraceful offer, as Jeremy Corbyn correctly pointed out. The problem is austerity itself, not the lack of local arrangements. May's offer is an expression of near panic, as a no-deal Brexit becomes a very real possibility, despite the apparent shifts in her stance on the backstop and customs union. But here we have the central paradox: there is no majority in the Commons for no deal, or wish for it from either business or the state bureaucracy - thus something big has to *give* within weeks, whatever that could be.

Yet the latest opinion poll from Opinium - quite incredibly, given the 230-vote defeat and general Brexit chaos - shows the Tories with their biggest lead since the last general election. They now have a seven-point lead over Labour, whose support fell from 40% to 34%, while Tory support has risen from 37% to 41%. The poll suggests that Labour has lost support from both 'leavers' and 'remainers', the party being pulled in all manner of ways over Brexit. The irony, of course, is that a general election would not solve the problem for Theresa May - it could even make things worse ●

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VENEZUELA

Next on Trump's list

Events in Venezuela amount to an imperialist coup attempt - but the left still draws no lessons from the failures of the 'Bolivarian revolution'. Paul Demarty investigates

The political situation in Venezuela seems, for now, to have reached a rather tense stalemate.

The media in America and Europe has had to retreat from taking seriously Juan Guaidó's claim to *actually* rule as interim president; but they, and their respective governments, have played their hand in supporting him. Nicolás Maduro refuses to budge, bristling intransigently at the endless demands for fresh elections and mass rightwing protests; yet he seems quite as incapable of restoring what passed for order before this latest phase of Venezuela's descent into chaos. The situation has gotten quite so dangerous due to the swaggering machismo of the president - the president of the United States, that is - who refuses to rule out a military intervention in this particular corner of Uncle Sam's backyard.

Yet the deadlock cannot but remind us of an earlier moment in recent Venezuelan history, when a CIA-backed coup against Maduro's illustrious predecessor, Hugo Chávez, failed ignominiously back in 2002. Astroturfed protests led a businessman, backed by reactionary army officers, to declare himself interim president and suspend the constitution; but Chávez was swept back into power within days. It was the decisive moment that propelled him into left superstardom the world over, and fired the starting gun on the wave of similar left-Bonapartist regimes that called itself the 'Bolivarian revolution'. The differences with today are all too obvious - Maduro is not about to defeat his enemies decisively, at any rate, and there is a real danger that the coup-makers will succeed.

However the current situation plays out, it looks like the end of the 'Bolivarian revolution' as we know it. At its core, Chávez's project was quite straightforward. Venezuela is extraordinarily oil-rich. Chávez proceeded to expand the holdings of the state oil company, PDVSA, at the expense of international capital. This provided a substantial revenue base for redistribution to his core electoral supporters among the urban and rural poor. Social programmes were stepped up; doctors were brought in from Cuba, in a highly symbolic deal between the older and newer generations of Latin American leftism.

Chávez was very good at telling people what they wanted to hear, and giving them enough of what they wanted that they continued to support him. As it went for the Venezuelan popular classes, so for an army of international admirers. The bandwagon-jumpers and spear-carriers of the global left - the remnants of the anti-globalisation movement, Stalinists, Mandelites and so forth - were utterly bewitched. And Chávez knew the buttons to press. He was going to found a fifth international; he quoted Trotsky to Trotskyists and Castro to Castroites; he talked big about 21st century socialism. We would say that it was quite remarkable how easily people were taken in, when - upon the most cursory examination - 21st century socialism turned out to be 20th century left nationalism, propped up by PDVSA's petro-dollars; but then it isn't remarkable at all, but merely typical of leftwing credulousness.

Not even Chávez's most obsequious admirers can have expected him to live forever; and,



Hugo Chávez: relied on standing army ... and oil riches

after a long struggle with cancer, he passed away in 2013. There were already signs that the regime was out of ideas - long-standing problems, like a soaring crime rate that left Caracas one of the most violent cities in the region, seemed intractable and, while many had been lifted out of poverty, there had been little improvement in the quality of housing and basic infrastructure. It is all too convenient to blame Maduro for the crisis that followed, but somewhat unfair - Chávez's successor had the misfortune of occupying the top job when the music stopped.

Price

In 2014, the global price of oil collapsed. A slowdown in industrial output led to demand shrinkage, starting the slide; but the oil price is extremely easily manipulable, and it is clear that the US state department leaned on oil-producing allies, especially Saudi Arabia, to keep production levels up, so as to punish its enemies. Foremost among them at the time was Putin's Russia, whose intervention in the Ukrainian 'colour revolution' and defensive annexation of Crimea led to a diplomatic crisis. Venezuela was highly vulnerable too, however, and a deep economic and political crisis followed, which continues today. Matters were made worse by US sanctions that forbid export of oil-extraction equipment to Venezuela.

Since the recent escalation in hostilities, the sanctions have been ratcheted up further, with US companies banned from doing business with PDVSA (any monies paid will go into an escrow account to be handed over to wannabe-president Guaidó, as and when he succeeds in setting himself up as Trump's viceroy in Caracas). This is no small matter - Venezuela is extremely reliant on

oil exports to the US (they generate revenue, as opposed to exports to China and Russia, which principally service debts).

There are ominous signs that things may not stop there. Trump refuses to rule out military action; his secretary of state is apparently considering deploying troops to neighbouring Colombia, whose government is fanatically rightwing and historically connected to counterrevolutionary death squads during that country's long civil war, and will thus be quite happy to abet an American invasion. Trump himself is increasingly hemmed in at home; but the American constitution - as it operates in practice, anyway - offers broad discretion to the commander in chief in matters of war and peace. A spectacular crusade for 'freedom' the far side of the Caribbean would be just the sort of stunt he needs to set up a Hottentot election next year.

Though the 'Bolivarian armed forces' are not likely to put up much resistance to the conventional army of the United States, there remains, of course, the question of winning the peace, and another protracted and bloody conflict after the fashion of Colombia or other places in the USA's backyard in the post-war era cannot be ruled out if the Yankees are too obviously to blame. There remains the question of whether the army will even try to fight back in such a case, and Maduro's *prima facie* bizarre failure to arrest his usurper - combined with frequent frantic visits to military units - suggests a level of worry about their loyalty that bodes ill for the regime's supporters.

In that light, the future is perhaps not a return to the bloodbaths of Colombia and El Salvador, but the present state of Brazil. Guaidó is currently basked in the light of international adulation, but he has been chumming up with

Jair Bolsonaro ever since the latter's election; add a fanatical middle class revolt against a left regime to a foreign-backed coup, and the result is just such a regime of foul reaction.

'Socialism'

But back to Maduro's supporters: what of international Chávez-fandom? On one level, these events are easily digested by *Chávistas*: their character as an imperialist, corrupt-police action in the US's near abroad are so transparent that even the Alliance for Workers' Liberty has had to denounce it.¹ Too easily digested by half, really, as will become clear from a look at a piece from the International Marxist Tendency - the splinter of Militant that hitched its wagon to the 'Venezuelan Revolution' early on and remains its most vociferous Trotskyist publicist.²

This article, by IMT international secretariat member Jorge Martin, is not at all without interest. The comrade goes into some detail on the specifics of sanctions and provocations against the regime, and we will not recapitulate these points here, except to say that there are far worse introductions to the topic. What, however, are comrade Martin's political conclusions?

The only way to effectively fight off this imperialist coup is by taking revolutionary measures and leaning on the revolutionary masses ... The US has seized Venezuelan property and imposed sanctions. The proportionate response would have been to seize all property of US multinationals in Venezuela ... The Bank of England has stolen 14 tons of gold from Venezuela. Venezuela would be justified in seizing assets for the same amount from UK companies in Venezuela.

From there, we build up to the

Empyrean ecstasies of social revolution:

In order to mobilise the revolutionary energy of workers and peasants, a policy is needed that puts their needs first: repudiate the foreign debt, expropriate the food distribution chain, give the land to the peasants and arm them to defend it; and plan the economy democratically under workers' and peasants' control to fulfil the needs of the people. This is the line that the comrades of the [IMT] are agitating for in Venezuela.

There are many remarkable features of this prescription. The first is the enormous overestimation of the popular support for revolutionary socialism in the Venezuelan population. In many respects, the demands raised here are salutary, but their being raised as a way out of the current crisis for the Venezuelan left is almost comical. Arm the people? Yes - not a moment too soon! Alas, decades too late. In order for any of this to have had any traction, it would be necessary to have undermined trust in military-Bonapartist 'socialism' from the get-go, to have bravely pointed out its limits to the masses - so far as was possible - when the going was good. As Tory idiots like to say, when justifying austerity policies, you need to mend the roof while the sun is shining. The IMT did no such thing, instead setting itself up as an obsequious camp follower for the photogenic colonels.

Today, comrade, we are where we are, and the peasants and workers are not armed, or even conscious of the need for arms. But who would trust the army to arm the masses now? Not comrade Martin, who correctly reminds us that "[Augusto] Pinochet was appointed by president Allende as the head of the armed forces after the failed *tanquetazo* coup of June 1973 as a constitutionalist officer."

Yet this is not the most serious problem, which is truly staring comrade Martin in the face. Given his punishingly detailed analysis of US and European sanctions, one thing is abundantly clear - Venezuela is in no position to face down the power of international capital. Doing so would mean, for a start, giving up its oil industry entirely, since it cannot operate without foreign investment, foreign industrial products and access to the most diplomatically sensitive of global commodities markets. Martin would almost have us believe that Maduro is merely being timid; perhaps we might suggest that he knows something Martin is apparently incapable of learning. Nobody can eat revolutionary energy, or drink defiance.

The surprise is not that Bolivarian 'socialism' is in a state of collapse, but that it held on for so long. An international movement might reverse the fortunes of the coup-makers, and offer a way out of Chávismo that does not lead the western hemisphere further into Trumpian and Bolsonarian barbarism; but such a solution looks desperately unlikely at present ●

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Notes

1. <https://workersliberty.org/story/2019-02-01/soft-coup-venezuela-they-do-so-only-resentfully-of-course>.
2. www.socialist.net/us-tightens-the-noose-on-venezuela-will-the-coup-succeed.htm.

ECONOMY

Chartalism and Marxism

Proponents of 'modern monetary theory' serve to mislead and divert the labour movement, argues
Michael Roberts

Modern monetary theory (MMT) has become flavour of the time among many left economic views in recent years. The new leftwing Democrat, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, is apparently a supporter; and a leading MMT exponent recently discussed the theory and its policy implications with Labour's John McDonnell.¹

MMT has some traction on the left, as it appears to offer theoretical support for policies of fiscal spending funded by central bank money and the running up of budget deficits and public debt without fear of crises - and thus backing policies of government spending on infrastructure projects, job creation and industry in direct contrast to neoliberal mainstream policies of austerity and minimal government intervention.

So in this article I shall offer my view on the worth of MMT and its policy implications for the labour movement. First, I will attempt to bring out the similarities and differences with Marx's monetary theory.

MMT has its base in the ideas of what is called 'Chartalism'. Georg Friedrich Knapp, a German economist, coined the term in his *State theory of money*, which was published in German in 1905 and translated into English in 1924. The name derives from the Latin *charta*, in the sense of a token or ticket. Chartalism argues that money originated with state attempts to direct economic activity rather than as a spontaneous solution to the problems with barter or as a means with which to tokenise debt.

It argues that generalised commodity exchange historically only came into being after the state was able to create the need to use its sovereign currency by imposing taxes on the population. For the Chartalist, the ability of money to act as a unit of account for credit/debt depends fundamentally on trust in the power of the sovereign to impose their will on the population. The use of money as a unit of account for debts/credits predates the emergence of an economy based around the generalised exchange of commodities. So Chartalism argues that money first arose as a unit of account out of debt and not out of exchange. Keynes was very much a fan of Chartalism, but it is clearly opposed to Marx's view that money is analytically inconceivable without understanding commodity exchange.

Can the Chartalist/ MMT and Marxist theory of money be made compatible or complementary, or is one of them wrong? My short answers would be: (1) money predates capitalism, but not because of the state; (2) yes, the state can create money, but it does not control its price; so confidence in its money can disappear; and (3) a strict Chartalist position is not compatible with Marxist money theory, but MMT has complementary features.

Let me now try to expand on those arguments.

Modern monetary theory and the Marxist theory of money are complementary, in that both are endogenous theories of money. They both reject the quantity theory of money: namely that inflation or deflation is dependent on the decisions of central banks to pump in credit money or not. On the contrary, it is the demand for money that drives the supply: ie, banks make loans and as a result deposits and debt are created to fund the loans, not vice versa. In that sense, both MMT and Marxist theory

recognise that money is not a veil over the real economy, but that the modern (capitalist) economy is a monetary one through and through.

Both Marx and the MMT exponents agree that the so-called quantity theory of money - as expounded in the past by Chicago economist Milton Friedman and others, which dominated the policy of governments in the early 1980s - is wrong. Governments and central banks cannot ameliorate the booms and slumps in capitalism by trying to control the money supply. The dismal record of the current quantitative easing (QE) programmes adopted by major central banks to try and boost the economy confirms that. Central bank balance sheets have rocketed since the crisis in 2008, but bank credit growth has not; and neither has real GDP growth.

But the Marxist theory of money makes an important distinction from the MMT. Capitalism is a monetary economy. Capitalists start with money capital to invest in production and commodity capital, which in turn, through the expending of labour-power (and its exploitation), eventually delivers new value that is realised in more money capital. Thus the demand for money capital drives the demand for credit. Banks create money or credit as part of this process of capitalist accumulation, but not as something that makes finance capital separate from capitalist production. MMT/Chartalists argue that the demand for money is driven by the 'animal spirits' of individual agents (Keynesian) or by the state needing credit (Chartalist). In contrast, the Marxist theory of money reckons that the demand for money and thus its price is ultimately set by the pace of accumulation of capital and capitalist consumption.

Theory and history

That raises the underlying issue between MMT and Marxism. Marx's theory of money is specific to capitalism as a mode of production, while MMT and Chartalism is ahistorical. For Marx, under capitalism money is the representation of value and thus of surplus value. In M-C-P-C'-M', M can exchange with C because M represents C and M' represents C'. Money could not make exchange possible if exchangeability were not already inherent in commodity production, if it were not a representation of socially necessary abstract labour and thus of value. In that sense, money does not arise in exchange, but instead is the monetary representation of exchange value (MELT), or socially necessary labour time (SNLT).

Marx's theory analyses the functions of money in a capitalist-commodity economy. It is a historically specific theory, not a general theory of money throughout history, nor a theory of money in pre-capitalist economies. So if it is true that money arose first in history as a unit of account for taxes and debt payments (as the Chartalists and Keynes argue), that would not contradict Marx's theory of money in *capitalism*.

Anyway, I have considerable doubts that, historically, state debt was the reason for the appearance of money. David Graeber, the anarchist anthropologist, appears to argue this in his book, *5000 years of debt*. But it does not wash well with me. Marx argues that money emerges naturally, as commodity production is generalised. The state merely validates the money form - it does not invent it.



Integral to the system

Indeed, I think Graeber's quote from Locke summarises the argument well: "Locke insisted that one can no more make a small piece of silver by relabelling it a 'shilling' than one can make a short man taller by declaring there are now 15 inches in a foot" (p340).

In the classic statement of Chartalism, Knapp argued that states have historically nominated the unit of account and, by demanding that taxes be paid in a particular form, ensured that this form would circulate as means of payment. Every taxpayer would have to get their hands on enough of the arbitrarily defined money and so would be embroiled in monetary exchange. Joseph Schumpeter refuted this approach when he said:

Had Knapp merely asserted that the state may declare an object or warrant or token (bearing a sign) to be lawful money and that a proclamation to this effect that a certain pay-token or ticket will be accepted in discharge of taxes must go a long way toward imparting some value to that pay-token or ticket, he would have asserted a truth, but a platitudinous one. Had he asserted that such action of the state will determine the value of that pay-token or ticket, he would have asserted an interesting, but false proposition.²

In other words, Chartalism is either obvious and right *or* interesting and wrong.

Out of thin air?

Marx argued that money in capitalism has three main functions: as a measure of value, as a means of exchange, and 'money as money', which includes debt payments. The function of measure of value follows from Marx's labour theory of value and this is the main difference with the Chartalists/ MMT, who (so far as I can tell) have no theory of value at all and thus no theory of surplus value.

In effect, for MMT exponents, value is ignored for the primacy of money in social and economic relations. Take this explanation by one supporter of MMT of its relation to Marx's value theory:

Money is not a mere 'expression' or 'representation' of aggregate private value creation. Instead, MMT supposes that money's fiscal backbone and macro-economic cascade together actualise a shared material horizon of production

and distribution ... Like Marxism, MMT grounds value in the construction and maintenance of a collective material reality. It accordingly rejects neoclassical utility theory, which roots value in the play of individual preferences. Only, in contrast to Marxism, MMT argues that the production of value is conditioned by money's abstract fiscal capacity and the hierarchy of mediation it supports. MMT hardly dismisses the pull of physical gravitation on human reality. Rather, it implicitly deprioritises gravity's causality in political and economic processes, showing how the ideal conditions the real via money's distributed pyramidal structure.³

If you can work through this scholastic jargon, I think you can take this to mean that MMT differs from Marx's theory of money by saying that money is not tied to any law of value that drags it into place like "gravity", but has the freedom to expand and indeed change value itself. Money is the primary causal force on value, not vice versa!

In my view, this is nonsense. It echoes the ideas of French socialist Pierre Proudhon in the 1840s, who argued that what was wrong with capitalism was the monetary system itself, not the exploitation of labour and the capitalist mode of production. Here is what Marx had to say about Proudhon's view in his chapter on money in the *Grundrisse*: "... can the existing relations of production and the relations of distribution which correspond to them be revolutionised by a change in the instrument of circulation?" For Marx, "the doctrine that proposes tricks of circulation as a way of, on the one hand, avoiding the violent character of these social changes and, on the other, of making these changes appear not to be a presupposition, but gradual result of these transformations in circulation" would be a fundamental error and misunderstanding of the reality of capitalism.

In other words, separating money from value and indeed making money the primary force for change in capitalism fails to recognise the reality of social relations under capitalism and production for profit. Without a theory of value, the MMTers enter a fictitious economic world, where the state can issue debt and have it converted into credits on the state account by a central bank at will and with no limit or repercussions in the

real world of productive capital.

For Marx, money makes money through the exploitation of labour in the capitalist production process. The new value created is embodied in commodities for sale; the value realised is represented by an amount of money. For Marx money is a commodity like gold or silver, whose value could be exchanged with other commodities. So the price or value of gold anchored the monetary value of all commodities. But, if the value or price of gold changed because of a change in the labour-time for gold production, then so did the value of money, as priced in other commodities. A sharp fall in gold's production time and thus a fall in its value would lead to a sharp rise in the prices of other commodities (eg, Spain's gold from Latin America in the 16th century) - and vice versa.

The next stage in the nature of money was the use of paper or fiat currencies fixed to the price of gold, the gold exchange standard and then finally to the stage of fiat currencies or 'credit money'. But, contrary to the view of MMT or the Chartalists, this does not change the role or nature of money in a capitalist economy. Its value is still tied to the SNLT in capitalist accumulation. In other words, commodity money has/ contains value, while non-commodity money represents/reflects value, and because of this both can measure the value of any other commodities and express it in price form.

Modern states are clearly crucial to the reproduction of money and the system in which it circulates. But their power over money is quite limited - and, as Schumpeter said (and Marx would have said), the limits are clearest in determining the value of money. The mint can print any numbers on its bills and coins, but cannot decide what those numbers refer to. That is determined by countless price-setting decisions by mainly private firms, reacting strategically to the structure of costs and demand they face, in competition with other firms.

This makes the value of state-backed money unstable. Actually, this is acknowledged by the Chartalist theory. According to it, the main mechanism by which the state provides value to fiat money is by imposing tax liabilities on its citizenry and proclaiming that it will accept only a certain thing (whatever that may be) as money to settle those tax liabilities. But Randall Wray, one of most active writers in this tradition, admits that, if the tax system breaks down, "the value of money would quickly fall toward zero".⁴ Indeed, when the creditworthiness of the state is seriously questioned, the value of national currencies collapses and demand shifts to real commodities, such as gold, as a genuine hoard for storing value. The gold price skyrocketed with the start of the current financial crisis in 2007 and another large-scale rise was propelled in early 2010, when the debt crisis of the southern euro countries aggravated the situation.

Policy conclusions

I often hear various MMTers saying that "money can be created out of nothing".⁵ Bank money does not exist as a result of economic activity, they argue. Instead, bank money creates economic activity. 'The money for a bank loan does not exist until we, the customers, apply for credit.'⁶ The short reply to this slogan is: 'Yes, the state can create money, but it cannot

set its price' - or value. The price of money will eventually be decided by the movement of capital as fixed by socially necessary labour time. If a central bank 'prints' money or deposits credits with the state accounts, that gives the state the money it needs to launch programmes for jobs, infrastructure, etc, without taxation or the issuing of bonds. This is the policy conclusion of the MMT. It is the 'way out' of the capitalist crisis caused by a slump in private sector production.

The MMT and Chartalists propose that private-sector investment be replaced or added to by government investment 'paid for' by the 'creation of money out of thin air'. But this money will lose its value if it does not bear any relation to value created by the productive sectors of the capitalist economy, which determine the SNLT and still dominate the economy. Instead, the result will be rising prices and/or falling profitability that will eventually choke off production in the private sector. Unless the MMT proponents are then prepared to move to a Marxist policy conclusion - namely, the appropriation of the finance sector and the 'commanding heights' of the productive sector through public ownership and a plan of production, thus curbing or ending the law of value in the economy - the policy of government spending through unlimited money creation will fail. As far as I can tell, MMT exponents studiously avoid and ignore such a policy conclusion - perhaps because like Proudhon they misunderstand the reality of capitalism, preferring 'tricks of circulation'; or perhaps because they actually oppose the abolition of the capitalist mode of production.

Of course, none of this has been tested in real life, as MMT policy has never been implemented (nor, for that matter, has Marxist policy in a modern economy). So we do not know if inflation would explode from creating money indefinitely to fund investment programmes. MMT people say 'monetising the deficit' would be ended, once full employment is reached. But that begs the question of whether the private sector in an economy can be subjected to the fine manipulation of central bank and state policy. History has shown that it is not and there is no way governments can control the capitalist production process and prices of production in such a 'finely managed' way.

Even leading MMT man Bill Mitchell is aware of this risk. As he put it in his blog,

Think about an economy that is returning from a recession and growing strongly. Budget deficits could still be expanding in this situation, which would make them obviously pro-cyclical, but we would still conclude the fiscal strategy was sound because the growth in net public spending was driving growth and the economy towards full employment. Even when non-government spending growth is positive, budget deficits are appropriate if they are supporting the move towards full employment. *However, once the economy reached full employment, it would be inappropriate for the government to push nominal aggregate demand more by expanding discretionary spending, as it would risk inflation*" (my emphasis).⁷

It seems that MMT eventually just boils down to offering a theory to justify unrestricted government spending to sustain and/or restore full employment. That is its task - no other. This is why it attracts support in the left of the labour movement. But this apparent virtue of MMT hides its much greater vice as an obstacle for real change. MMT says nothing about why there are convulsions in

capitalist accumulation, except that the state can reduce or avoid cycles of boom and slump by a judicious use of government spending within a capitalist-dominated accumulation process.⁸ So it has no policy for radical change in the social structure.

The Marxist explanation is the most comprehensive, as it integrates money and credit into the capitalist mode of production, but also shows that money is not the decisive flaw and that sorting out finance is not enough. Thus it can explain why the Keynesian solutions do not work either to sustain economic prosperity.

Tricks

Let me refer you to an excellent short account of the history of money by Argentine Marxist economist, Rolando Astarita.⁹ Astarita has also analysed MMT in several posts on his blog, and I shall draw on some of his arguments. Suffice it to say that to argue that money only arose because the role of the state in pre-capitalist economies is not borne out by the facts.

Nevertheless, MMT starts with the conviction that it is the state (not capitalist commodity relations) that establishes the value of money. Leading MMTer Randall Wray argues the money takes its value not from merchandise, "but rather from the will of the state to accept it for payment". Chartalist founder Knapp says: "money is a creature of the law"; "The denomination of means of payment according to the new units of value is a free act of the authority of the state"; and "in modern monetary systems the proclamation [by the state] is always supreme". Thus the modern monetary system "is an administrative phenomenon" and nothing more.

Keynes also backed this Chartalist view. In his *Treatise on money*, Keynes says: "... the Chartalist or state money was reached when the state assumed the right to declare which account money is to be considered money at a given moment". So "the money of account, especially that in which debts, prices and general purchasing power are expressed, is the basic concept of the theory of money". I do not think it is correct to say that MMT bastardises Keynes, however - on the contrary, MMT and Keynes are in agreement that money is a product of state creation, as the state decides the *unit of account* for all transactions.

But deciding the unit of account (eg, whether dollars or euros) is not the same as deciding its *value* for transactions: ie, as a measure or store of value. MMT supposedly supports the 'endogenous' money approach: namely, that money is created by the decisions of entrepreneurs to invest or households to spend, and from the loans that the banks grant them for that purpose. So banks make loans and so create money (as issued by the state). Money is deposited by the receivers of loans and then they pay taxes back to the state. According to MMT, loans are created by banks and then deposits are destroyed by taxation, in that order. At a simple level, MMT merely describes the way things work with banking and money - and this is what many MMTers argue: 'All we are doing is saying like it is'.

But MMT goes further. It argues that the state creates money in order to receive it for the payment of taxes. The state can force taxes out of citizens and can decide the nature of the legal tender that serves for money. So money is a product of the state. Thus MMT has a circuit of money that goes: state money - others (non-state entities) - taxes - state money. The state injects money into the private sector, and that money is then reabsorbed with the collection of taxes. According to MMT, contrary to what most of us simpletons think, issuing money and collecting taxes are not alternatives, but actions that merely occur at different times in

the same circuit. So if a government runs a fiscal deficit and spends more than it receives in taxes, the non-state sector has a surplus, which it can use to invest, spend and employ more. The state deficit can thus be financed by creating more money. Taxes are not needed to finance state spending, but to generate demand for money (to pay taxes!).

But the MMT circuit fails to show what happens with the money that capitalists and households have. In MMT, M (in value) can be increased to M' purely by state diktat. For Marx, M can only be increased to M' if capitalist production takes place to increase value in commodities that are sold for more money. This stage is ignored by MMT. The MTT circuit starts from the state to the non-state sectors and back to the state. But this is the wrong way round, causally. The capitalist circuit starts with the money capitalist and through accumulation and exploitation of labour back to the money capitalist, who then pays the state in taxes, etc. MMT ignores this. But it shows that money is not exogenous to capitalist economic activity. Its value is not controlled by the state.

MMT creates the illusion that this whole process starts and ends with the government, when it really starts within the capitalist sector, including the banking system. Taxes cannot destroy money, because taxes logically occur after some level of spending on private output occurs. Taxes are incurred when the private sector spends and governments decide to use those taxes to mobilise some resources for the state. Private incomes and spending on resources precede taxes.

Another Chartalist, Pavlina Tcherneva, writes:

Chartalists argue that, since money is a public monopoly, the government has at its disposal a direct way to determine its value. Remember that for Knapp the payments with currency measure a certain number of units of value. For example, if the state required that in order to obtain a high-powered money unit a person must provide one hour of work, then the money would be worth exactly one hour of work. As a monopoly issuer of the currency, the state can determine what the currency will be worth by establishing the terms in which the high-powered money is obtained.¹⁰

Tcherneva's policy of state 'exogenous pricing' is pretty similar to the views of 19th century utopian socialist John Gray, who reckoned that, by issuing bonds that were exogenously priced to represent working time, so economies could deliver growth and full employment¹¹ - a view that Marx criticised.

Where MMT differs from Keynesian-type fiscal deficit spending is that its proponents see government deficits as *permanent* in order to drive the economy up and achieve full employment of resources. In this way, the state becomes the 'employer of last resort'. Indeed, the MMT exponents claim that unemployment can indeed be solved within capitalism. So there is no need to change the social formations based on private capital. All that is needed is for politicians and economists to recognise that state spending, 'financed' by money creation, can sustain full employment. MMT proponent Tcherneva writes:

Chartalists propose a policy of full employment, in which the state exogenously establishes an important price for the economy, which in turn serves as an anchor for all other prices This proposal is based on the recognition that the state does not face operational financial constraints, that unemployment is a result of

restricting the issuance of currency, and that the state can exercise an exogenous pricing.

Ironic

This policy conclusion is rather ironic. It leads to a view that full employment can be achieved by the "exogenous" issuance of currency at a fixed price. And yet MMT is prominent in its rejection of the monetarist argument that an exogenous increase in the quantity of money will lead to a boost in economic activity. It seems that MMT also has an exogenous theory of money!

As Cullen Roche, an orthodox Keynesian, put it,

MMT tries to reinvent the wheel and argue that it is the government's fault (and implicitly, the rest of society's fault) that you can't find a job ... MMT gets the causality backwards here by starting with the state and working out.

Roche goes on:

The proper causality is that private resources necessarily precede taxes. Without a highly productive revenue-generating private sector, there is nothing special about the assets created by a government and it is literally impossible for these assets to remain valuable. We create equity when we produce real goods and services or increase the market value of our assets relative to their liabilities via productive output. It is completely illogical and beyond silly to argue that one can just 'print' equity from thin air. Government debt is, logically, a liability of the society that creates it. In the aggregate government debt is a liability that must be financed by the productive output of that society.¹²

Some deny that MMT exponents reckon that money can be created out of thin air - this is a distortion of MMT, they say. Apparently the real argument of MMT is that government spending can finance itself by raising economic activity and thus more taxes. Well, British tax expert/economist Richard Murphy is definitely a supporter of MMT. He expounded that MMT first says:

... governments can make money out of thin air, at will ... MMT then says all government spending is in fact funded by money created in this way, created by central banks on the government's behalf ... MMT logically argues as a consequence that there is no such thing as 'tax and spend' when considering the activity of the government in the economy; there can only be 'spend and tax'.¹³

Similarly, Stephanie Kelton is currently the most followed MMT economist. She argues that governments can expand spending to whatever level necessary to achieve full use of productive resources in an economy by state money because such spending is 'self-financing'.

Money only has value if there is value in production to back it. Government spending cannot create that value - indeed some government spending can destroy value (armaments, etc). Productive value is what gives money credibility. A productive private sector generates the domestic product and income that gives government liabilities credibility in the first place. When that credibility is not there, then trust in the state's currency can disappear fast, as we see in Venezuela or Zimbabwe, and even Turkey right now.

To quote Cullen Roche again:

... productive output *must*, by

necessity, precede taxes. In this sense it is proper to say that productive output drives money. And if productive output collapses then there is no quantity of men with guns that can force people to pay taxes ... So the important point here is that a government is indeed constrained in its spending. It is constrained by the quantity and quality of its private sector's productive output. And the quantity and quality of income that the private sector can create is the amount of income that constrains the government's ability to spend.¹⁴

This is Keynesian terminology: but if we alter the words 'income' or 'output' to 'value', we can get the point in Marxist terms.

Marx's theory of money concurs with the endogenous approach, in so far that it is the capitalist sector that creates the demand for money; to act as a means of exchange and a store of value. Banks make loans and create deposits, not vice versa. Indeed, Marx's theory of money is more *consistently* endogenous than MMT, because it recognises the primacy of the capitalist accumulation process (with banks and markets) in deciding the value of money, not any 'exogenous' role of the state. As Astarita puts it,

the fundamental difference between the Marxist approach to money and the Chartalist approach revolves around this single point. In Marx's conception, money can only be understood as a social relation. In the Chartalist approach, it is an artifice in which essential social determinations are missing ... it 'sweeps under the carpet' the centrality of productive work, and the exploitation of work - the true basis on which capitalist society is based.¹⁵

The state cannot establish at will the value of the money that is issued for the very simple reason that, in a capitalist economy, it is not dominant and all-powerful. Capitalist companies, banks and institutions rule and they make decisions on the basis of profit and profitability. As a result, they *endogenously* drive the value of commodities and money. Marx's law of value says value is anchored around the socially necessary labour-time involved in the overall production of commodities (goods and services): ie, by the average productivity of labour, the technologies and intensity of work. The state cannot overcome or ignore this reality ●

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

Notes

1. See <http://bilbo.economicoutlook.net/blog/?p=40562>.
2. J Schumpeter History of economic analysis London 1954.
3. <https://urpe.wordpress.com/2017/07/04/some-remarks-on-mmt-marxism-in-light-of-david-harveys-marx-capital-and-the-madness-of-economic-reason>.
4. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=137409.
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REVIEW

Zionism's inherent contradictions

Amos Oz *Judas* Vintage, 2017, pp274, £8.99

Unlike some of his fictional characters, Israeli writer Amos Oz, who died a few weeks ago, was a Zionist with a conscience - but he remained a Zionist.

His original name was Amos Klausner, but he changed it to Oz, which means 'courage' in Hebrew. His parents were rightwing Zionists, who were émigrés from eastern Europe. Aged 14, a rebellious young Oz decided to become a labour Zionist. He joined a kibbutz and served in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), before going to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where he studied philosophy and Hebrew literature. He fought as a reservist in the Six-Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur war in 1973. Between 1987 and 2014, he was professor of Hebrew literature at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

He wrote more than 40 books, including many novels. His basic argument is that the "Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not a war of religion or cultures or traditions, but rather a real-estate dispute - one which will be resolved not by greater understanding, but by painful compromise" (this sounds like a two-state solution to me). "Even unavoidable occupation is a corrupting occupation," says Oz.

He was a founder of the Israeli 'Peace Now' campaign in 1991, but did not oppose the building of Israel's West Bank barrier - except that it should have followed the green line of the 1949 armistice between Israel and Jordan. As for Jerusalem, this should be divided into zones, not just for Jews, Arabs and Christians, but also for the Eastern Orthodox church and Hasidic Jews.

He has opposed Israel's settlement policy, but always from a left Zionist position. So he was critical of the non-Zionist left. He became a member of the Israeli Labor Party, and was close to Shimon Peres. But in the 1990s, he joined the "more leftwing" Meretz party. Yet he supported the second Lebanon war of 2006, saying: "This time the battle is not over Israeli expansion and colonisation. This is a war of self-defence." The Israeli peace movement should support it, as long as the IDF targets Hezbollah bases and tries to protect the lives of Lebanese civilians (!) He changed his mind after the Israeli cabinet decided to expand its operations in Lebanon. A day before the 2008-09 Israeli invasion of the Gaza strip, Oz supported military action against Hamas. Two weeks later he called for a ceasefire and referred to the harsh conditions in Gaza. If civilians have been killed, this should be treated as a war crime, he argued - although he doubted that the bombing of UN buildings was intentional.

In 2010, he wrote in the *New York Times*:

Hamas is not just a terrorist organisation ... [it is] an idea, a desperate and fanatical idea that grew out of the desolation and frustration of many Palestinians. No idea has ever been defeated by force ... To defeat an idea you have to have a better idea, which is a more attractive and acceptable one. Therefore Israel has to sign a peace agreement with ... Fatah and [the] government of the West Bank.¹

But there is no mention here of the fact that Israel encouraged the rise of Hamas, as an Islamic movement, as a foil to Fatah, which has always been secular. There is no mention either

of the fate of the Gaza Strip, which is controlled by Israel and Egypt. It is like the Warsaw Ghetto, although it is somewhat bigger; only not big enough to sustain a viable state.

Oz also supported the Israeli invasion of Gaza in 2014 (the third since 2000). He criticised Hamas's alleged use of 'human shields', despite the fact that many civilians were killed in their homes - even children playing on the beach.²

Judas (2014 publication) was described by the *Financial Times* as "one of the boldest of all his works".³ As a Zionist with a conscience, Oz closely resembles Gershom Wald, the old man in *Judas*, who is a scholar like himself. On the other hand, young Schmuel Ash resembles a youthful, unformed Oz. Thus the author frees himself to speculate about Zionism, past and present, through his fiction, whilst he defends Zionism in the real world, despite its oppressive and expansionist nature.

The story takes us back to the foundation of Israel as an independent state in 1948, and all the violence and suffering which followed, especially for the Palestinians. I expected him to look at both sides of the argument before coming down firmly on the side of Zionism; but, as the *Times Literary Supplement* says, *Judas* is a "heartbreaking meditation on roads not taken, and collisions yet to come".⁴

There was another road other than the Zionist one, which was the struggle for a unitary Palestinian state - albeit as part of a socialist revolution against colonialism and imperialism - which would also aim to unite Jewish settlers along with the Arab workers and peasants throughout the Middle East.

Literary worth

Judas was long-listed for the Mann Booker prize in 2017. Set in a cold wintry Jerusalem in the late 1950s, this reinforces the melancholic and elegiac tone of the novel. Human suffering is always to the fore, be it personal or as a matter of historical record. At the same time, this is a very sensuous and sensual story, wherein the reader can clearly see the places Oz describes, be they bright colours and textures or darkness; not just what someone looks like, but also the touch of another's skin; how they smell, along with the smells of the kitchen. Then we have myriad sounds of the household and the city outside, including sirens and sniper fire.

Apart from the story line, which is absolutely fascinating, wherein the personal and the political are seamlessly interwoven, Oz is able to create flesh-and-blood characters. They are believable because they are specific types - dissident even, but not willing to break the mould. (For example, it is all right to rebel against one's parent's generation, given their mistakes, but there is no need to become a revolutionary Marxist!)

Young Schmuel Ash is a bumbling bear of a man - an asthmatic, who takes his bushy beard and always smells sweet. He is easily moved to tears, even by a stray, hungry cat; whereas Atalia Abravanel, the female object of his desire, is aloof, as well as strong and dominant; hardened by grief, she has become completely self-contained. She only needs intimacy on rare occasions, which is sad not just for her, but for others too - in particular, several hapless young men!

The style of *Judas* is deliberately repetitious, in order

to establish Schmuel's growing attachment to the house and its occupants. Now Gershom is the only male occupant. He is old and crippled, but fully alert - a man who brims with knowledge and ideas (when he is not taking a nap). The house used to belong to his friend, Schealtiel Abravanel, who died a couple of years after the foundation of the Jewish state. The only female occupant is Atalia. She is an attractive woman of about 40. Micha, her husband (who was also Gershom's son), was killed by Palestinians in the 1948 war; which is even more tragic, since he was a reluctant volunteer.

Who is the 'Judas' of the title? It takes a while before the reader realises that this is a term which applies to Jews as well as Christians. This idea is cleverly developed via the character of Schmuel, who starts out studying religion at university. He has a long discussion with Gershom about the events leading up to the crucifixion of the historical Jesus: Judas Iscariot is seen from both a Christian and Jewish perspective. At the same time, Schmuel challenges conventional wisdom. Judas Iscariot was not the betrayer of Jesus: rather he was the first Christian, because he really believed that his master was the son of God, whilst Jesus himself was doubtful right up to the end! Jesus really was the messiah - not just for the Jews, but for all mankind. Therefore, in order for the prophecy to be fulfilled, Judas had to persuade the Pharisees that Jesus was a blasphemer, a false messiah, who must be put to death. But, when Jesus died on the cross, Judas was horrified and suffered a sudden loss of faith. That is why he hanged himself. But what about the 30 pieces of silver? That is a lie told by Christians, because they hate the Jews, whom they called 'Christ killers'. As for today's Jews, Zionists in particular, anyone who betrays the cause of Israel is a Judas (a variation on the self-hating Jew).

The fact that Gershom is living in Atalia's house is amazing, considering the back story. His friend, Schealtiel, had been a member of the Council of the Jewish Agency and the Zionist Executive Committee. But then he came to the conclusion that the decision to fight for an independent Jewish state in Palestine was the wrong road to take. After the holocaust, he concluded: "... the Jews might be right to aspire to establish a homeland here, but he [now believed] that the home should

be shared between Jews and Arabs ... In 1947 ... he suddenly [opposed] the UN partition plan against an independent Israel" (p258).

At the start of 1948, Abravanel "requested permission to give evidence before the UN Special Commission ... examining the question of the future of Palestine" - he hoped to give his own "individual" view concerning the "conflict between the Jews and the Arabs" (p118). He argued that the David Ben-Gurion line would lead to "a bloody war between the two peoples ... endangering the lives of 600,000 Jews in Palestine. This conflict is based on a misunderstanding, which can be resolved through dialogue" (p122). But after he had opposed the plan for an independent Israel, "some people began to call him a traitor" (p258). From a Zionist perspective, he was a modern-day Judas. Gershom was also inclined to this view. As a result Abravanel was forced to resign all his positions: "After his resignation, he shut up completely. He decided not to say a single word in public" (pp258-59).

For Oz, Abravanel stands for the road not taken. Whilst this is a good idea, it is still a flawed one, because he sees this in terms of the Zionist movement and its direction of travel. Whereas the next step for Abravanel would have to involve a complete break with Zionism, because the latter ultimately bases itself on a religious idea: that Palestine is the 'promised land', part of the (broken) covenant between God and the Jews. But this would have to come via the expulsion of Arab inhabitants who happened to be in the way, despite the fact that they have lived in this land continuously for at least 1,000 years. So, if Abravanel were to achieve his dream that "the land should be shared between the Jews and the Arabs", he would have to move towards a classical Marxist solution: ie, he and his supporters (people like Schmuel and his "Socialist Renewal Group") would have to appeal to the workers and peasants throughout the region to fight for a united socialist states of the Middle East; because there is no other way for people to live in peace and harmony, with equal rights for all. There is no national solution. But

the only alternative was Stalinism: in 1948 the USSR voted for the UN partition of Palestine.

Schmuel

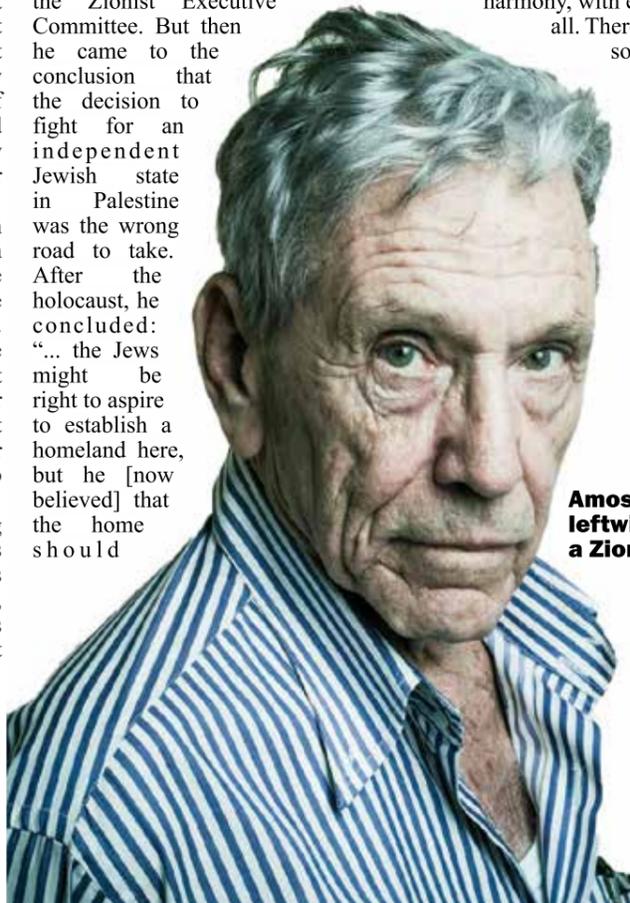
In his character, the personal and the political come together: Schmuel arrives at the house of Abravanel in answer to Atalia's advertisement for a young man who is well-read, but also willing to look after the invalid, Gershom. Schmuel is instantly smitten by her: "It had been a long time since a woman had touched him ... or any human being had touched him." It did not matter if she was old enough to be his mother, who rarely touched him (p75). In between the ritual of warming the old man's porridge and feeding him, as well as his own face, old Gershom warns Schmuel not to fall in love with Atalia, because she will cast him aside as soon as she is satisfied - such was the fate of his two previous helpmates: "Be careful she doesn't singe your beard" (p104). But he knows that Schmuel cannot help himself. His soul is "like a watch with the glass removed" (p83).

But what about Schmuel's background? It roughly follows that of the real-life Amos Oz: Schmuel was a member of the Socialist Renewal Group, but it was so small, it could fit around one table in a cafe. It had split over Khrushchev's revelations of Stalin's crimes at the 20th Party Congress in 1956. But Schmuel asks: "Should we put an end to a grand idea ... because the party in the Soviet Union became corrupted and lost its way?" (p61). So he is a dyed-in-the-wool Stalinist, warts and all.

But there was also a gulf between Schmuel's socialist group and the working class, symbolised by their meetings in the cafe. The group never spoke to the workers and vice versa. On the other hand, Schmuel was a student of religious studies at the university. He was particularly interested in the story of the crucifixion and the role which Judas Iscariot played in it: "What nonsense is this!" exclaims his professor. "What has come over us suddenly? Jewish views of Jesus indeed. Obviously a fruitless field without parallel opens up before us" (p9 - surely there is more scope for a dramatic breakthrough in the *Talmud*):

Once he met Stalin in a dream ... he showed Stalin, from the roof of the Formation Abbey on Mount Zion, a distant view of the wailing wall. [But] He failed to explain to Stalin, who was smiling under his moustache, why the Jews rejected Jesus and why they still stubbornly continued to turn their backs on him. Stalin called Schmuel Judas (p7).

Gershom is also prone to the occasional idealist lapse. In one conversation with Schmuel, he refers to the crusades: A group of crusaders were on their way to the Holy Land, where they are going to liberate Jerusalem from the infidel. But en route, some of them gave up their dream and founded a new Jerusalem for themselves; since they were willing to share the abundant land of Slovenia with the locals. This became a new "promised land ... without shedding any more blood and without fighting endlessly against hostile infidels" (p67). Perhaps the Zionist movement should have done the same? But later he tells the love-sick Schmuel that Schealtiel was a hopeless dreamer: "If two men love the same woman, or two peoples love the same land, they can drink rivers of coffee



Amos Oz: a leftwinger, but a Zionist too

What we fight for

together, and these rivers will not quench their hatred; neither can the floods drown it" (p122). Irrational Zionist nationalism, inflamed by the horrors of the holocaust, must override rational socialist ideas.

Atalia also has political views, which are more in line with her father's: she is an anti-Zionist: "You wanted a [Jewish] state ... [The side you support] shed rivers of blood ... you drove hundreds of thousands of Arabs out of their homes ..." Schmucl disagrees strongly, so Atalia adds, "You call yourself a socialist, but you're really a Zionist like all the others." Schmucl tries to convince her that "we had our backs to the wall and the whole of the progressive world supported a Jewish state, including the communist bloc". Atalia comes back at him: "That was a lie, based on a false dream, which led to the unnecessary slaughter and violent expulsion of the Palestinians" (p166).

Gershom believed that David Ben-Gurion was a new King David for the Jewish people. He does not understand that nationalism is a dead end, especially in Palestine. He asks why the Jewish people should be singled out to be denied a nation of their own. The fact that they did not have one led to the holocaust. All the more reason why they should have their own historic land now. There is enough land for the Jews and the Arabs. Maybe one day the two could be united as one nation.

But how can this come about if it involves the violent expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Arabs from their land from the moment a Jewish state is declared? Since he is writing in the present, Oz also ignores the true nature of Israel as a colonial-settler state, which seeks to expand its occupation, forcing hundreds of thousands more Arabs to become a landless, exploited under class or go into exile: ie, join two million of their brothers and sisters who had been driven out generations ago.

But, back in 1948, Abravanel said that Arabs feared exactly that: a Jewish conquest - like a second crusade - which would establish "a Jewish empire from the Nile to the Euphrates". The Deir Yassim massacre - and other Jewish acts of terrorism - was intended to spread panic among the Arab masses: they feared that the Jews would massacre them all, so they fled into exile. Instead, the Jews "should have opened up the Histadrut, their schools and universities, as well as their settlements to them" (pp200-01). In a rare moment of reflection, Gershom asks why the Jews and Arabs could not cooperate together, since they had both been victims of Christian colonialism. He knew in his heart of hearts that 'Judaising' the land would lead to endless bloody conflict; that Abravanel was right.

Gershom recalls: "... the slim chance which opened up in the mid-30s of setting up a state of Jews here, albeit in a tiny section of the country, dazzled most of us. Including myself." That is as close as we get to any acknowledgement on Gershom's - or Oz's - part that some of the Zionist leaders made a Faustian pact with the Nazis: ie, in those countries which were now under Nazi occupation, the latter would allow a limited number of Jews to migrate to Palestine, in exchange for bipartisan trade and investment, despite the fact that there was a worldwide trade boycott against Nazi Germany at the time. Before long hundreds of thousands of Jews were being rounded up and sent to the death camps. Abravanel, for his part, did not believe in any state. Not even a binational one ... (p201).

To sum up the argument: Abravanel condemned his fellow

Zionists in the council of the Jewish Agency, because they had become a "Frankenstein monster", who "deliberately exploited the age-old religious and messianic energies of the Jewish masses and enlisted these in the service of a political movement which was ... secular, pragmatic and modern" (p183). Ultimately for Abravanel, he could not remain friends with Gershom, because the latter was "firm in his view that Zionism could [only] be achieved through confrontation with the Arabs, whereas I had understood by the end of the 40s that it could not be achieved without confrontation". For Gershom, confrontation was inevitable, especially in the wake of the Jewish exodus from Europe in the aftermath of the Holocaust. By contrast, Abravanel called for a negotiated settlement, Atalia's views were even more extreme than her father's: "The presence of the Jews in the land of Israel is based on injustice" (p185).

Armageddon

Gershom is a cynic, as well as a conscience-stricken Zionist. He tells Schmucl: "All great revolutions end in blood, slaughter, ... crusades or jihad or Gulag, or the wars of Gog and Demagogue" (p62). It is a pity Oz does not come back to this last reference, because of the way in which events have unfolded - not just in Palestine, but in the world at large:

- Gershom was referring to the story of Armageddon or the end of the world, which is supposed to take place in the holy land: ie, modern-day Israel-Palestine. Armageddon also features in Judaeo-Christian texts, as well as Islamic ones (see below). By coincidence, this religious myth is now entwined with geopolitics and the holocaust: the Middle East, including Israel-Palestine, would not be nearly as important today if it had not turned out to be an oil-rich region, which the USA, as the post-war world hegemon, must have control over.

- But before that came the holocaust, which encouraged the rise of modern Zionism. Previously the Jews had allowed themselves to be 'assimilated' within the nations of Europe. But the rise of the Nazi regime led to the genocide of six million of them. Arguably, given the planned and industrialised nature of the slaughter, this was the worst genocide in history. So, for post-war Zionism, nationalism was the only solution. In future, the Jews can only defend themselves by having a homeland of their own; but now this had to be in Palestine, the original 'promised land' - despite the fact that it was also the homeland for millions of Arabs. When the British won the mandate for Palestine after World War I, they also promised the land to both the Arabs and the Jews. This merely compounded the problem.

- Modern Israel is now the most powerful state in the Middle East and a principal ally of the United States: ie, a bastion for US imperialism in this strategically important region.

- The US also happens to be a 'hotbed' for evangelical Christianity - also known as Christian Zionism - whose adherents take the Armageddon story literally: for Christian Zionists, US foreign policy must be aligned with the Armageddon story, as a prelude to the Rapture. The Rapture cult is particularly popular among US evangelical groups. White evangelicals were Donald Trump's most vocal and active voting bloc during the 2016 election campaign. At the heart of it all is a particular interpretation of biblical prophecy - an amalgam of passages from the *New Testament*, but also Daniel and Isaiah in the *Old Testament*. In Revelation 20,

we are told that Jesus will rule for 1,000 years "with his bride" (?). Then Satan will "go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth, Gog and [Dema]gogue, and to gather them for [the final] battle".⁵ In essence, Armageddon points to an apocalyptic Middle Eastern war - and the second coming of Jesus Christ. When this happens, 144,000 Christian souls will be granted access to heaven. The rest will remain on Earth to be punished.

Christian Zionists also happen to be hard-line supporters of the Republican Party. Today they constitute Trump's core supporters; despite the fact that he is a crass materialist and a womaniser. To shore up his position, Trump has surrounded himself with such people. His vice-president, Mike Pence, is a "stoic evangelical". According to him, "God wants Israel returned to the Jews. That Armageddon is part of God's plan." Then in 2018 Mike Pompeo became Trump's second secretary of state. He is also an evangelical Christian! ("Politics is a never ending struggle ... until the Rapture".⁶) Trump has proclaimed First Baptist Dallas megachurch pastor Robert Jeffress to be his spiritual advisor! Jeffress preaches the Rapture to all who will listen: 'Islam is wrong. It is a heresy from the pit of hell.' he says. "Mormonism is wrong. It is a heresy from the pit of hell. The Catholic Church is led by Satan. All Jews are doomed to Hell. All homosexuals are outcasts."⁷

The decision to move the American embassy to Jerusalem in 2017 fulfilled a key Trump election campaign promise. It also represented a victory for hard-line pro-Israeli interest groups - the conservative evangelicals. At last their great nation has an embassy in god's own capital city: ie, Jerusalem. It also means that cataclysmic events proclaimed by prophecy can now take place, with Trump himself at the heart of this prophecy. It is hard to believe that prayers along these lines were uttered by Trump's religious advisors during the inauguration of the American embassy last year. But they were - I guess Netanyahu and co must have been laughing up their sleeves when they heard this.

- In 2018 Netanyahu's government declared that Israel had become "an ethno-nationalist state, which calls itself 'Jewish', and declares that it is the state of only part of its population ... [Today Israel constitutes] the world's only apartheid entity ... [able] to discriminate against its Palestinian citizens in the name of a 'Jewish state'."⁸ By so doing, it falls back on religious arguments. Therefore, apropos the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the situation is now much worse than it was during the time in which Oz's novel is set - ie, the late 1950s - when, as a young man, the real Oz volunteered to work on a 'socialist' kibbutz. But by 2014 they had all been privatised; so now the work is done by exploited immigrant workers. Perhaps this is another reason why he wrote *Judas*?

- Finally there is also an echo between the Armageddon story within Islamic texts as well (the Shi'ite tradition). On this basis, a few years ago, when he was president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made a speech about the rise of an evangelical ruler of Iran, which would be the prelude to the coming of the Mahdi or a Muslim messiah.⁹ (Perhaps he was modestly excusing himself as a mere forerunner?)

So today there are dark and irrational forces at work, not just in the Middle East, but also within the global hegemon, which holds the fate of the world in its hands: it could start World War III tomorrow

if it so desired. Arguably this bizarre state of affairs is a symptom of capitalist decline: when the system is in terminal crisis, as it now is, pathological signs of disorder begin to manifest themselves. Surely Armageddon is top of the list!

Conclusion

Gershom Wald is the pivotal character in *Judas*. He plays an instrumental role in young Schmucl Ash's political - along with his personal - "rights of passage". He learns that Gershom is plagued by the memory of his dead friend, the Arabist, Shealtiel Abravanel. His daughter, Atalia, is also a strong opponent of Zionism. Schmucl learns that just before the 1948 war Avavanel was forced to resign from his Zionist posts, because he had come to the conclusion that to fight for an independent Israel was wrong. Six million Jews, who had tried to assimilate themselves into European society, were murdered by the Nazi regime. Despite this he rejected nationalism as a solution. For this, Abravanel was condemned as a Judas by his fellow Jews. In the end Schmucl has to decide whether to remain a Zionist or not. Could his love for Atalia make a difference? Read the book and find out.

Abravanel made his stand for humanist, not Marxist, reasons. Amos Oz also tries to reconcile his own Zionist views with humanism too. But it cannot be done. That is his limitation. In a recent interview with Alan Yentob for the BBC's *Imagine* programme, Oz took him to one of the new towns in the Negev. He points out that the people in the street are "working class Israelis", with whom he has an affinity. He must have been aware that most of them support the Zionist state, because it offers them privileges at the Palestinians' expense. Oz tries to salve his conscience by pointing to the empty desert, saying that "there is plenty of room for everyone".

But an unequal two-state solution is clearly not enough to end the decades-long cycle of violent oppression, expulsion and occupation, followed by violent resistance. Hence the only viable solution is revolutionary socialist struggle, which seeks to unite both Jews and Arabs within Palestine. But a united socialist Palestine can only come about as part of a wider revolution for a socialist Middle East. Therefore one has to go beyond the humanist/reformist ideas and embrace the ideas of classical Marxism.

On the other hand, to paraphrase the actor in Klaus Mann's *Mephisto*, Oz had every right to say, "But I'm only a writer!" Yet Abravanel - Gershom's conscience in the story - was Oz's conscience as well. Abravanel pointed to the road not taken - the right one, whereas Oz is unable to act upon this in the real world.

Apart from its literary qualities, this is another reason why *Judas* is a remarkable novel. Given the rise of Trump and Christian Zionism, not forgetting the Netanyahu government itself, this book assumes even greater significance. It deserves to be widely read ●

Rex Dunn

Notes

1. www.nytimes.com/2010/06/02/opinion/02oz.html.
2. Amos Oz, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amos_Oz.
3. Financial Times September 30 2016.
4. www.the-fts.co.uk/articles/public/books-of-the-year-2016.
5. Revelation 20:8.
6. Mike Pompeo, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike_Pompeo.
7. Robert Jeffress, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Jeffress.
8. T Greenstein, 'Siding with Labour right' Weekly Worker January 24 2019.
9. Ha'aretz October 22 2010.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly worker

**Trigger ballots
will see many
MPs given
their marching
orders**

Split - and split now!

Perhaps some of the most obnoxious Blairites in the PLP will actually jump before they get pushed, hopes **Carla Roberts** of Labour Party Marxists

One is reminded of the boy who cried wolf when evaluating the latest reports about a group of Labour MPs planning to split from the party - perhaps to join with the Liberal Democrats or form a new Blairite, centrist party. We have heard it all before, of course. This is, after all, not the first time such 'rumours' have made their way into the national press as a way of putting pressure on Jeremy Corbyn since his election as leader in 2015.

However, there are a few reasons why we should not simply dismiss the possibility that, this time round, there might actually be something to it. And no, not because the reasons to split from Labour have become so overwhelming - in addition to 'anti-Semitism' and Brexit, some MPs apparently "despair" of the fact that Corbyn refuses to get behind a CIA-led coup in Venezuela - because these interventions tend to end so well, don't they?

We only know the names of three of the six MPs behind this latest rumour (though Vince Cable has let it be known that six "is very much at the lower end of the figures" that he is aware of), but those three are very interesting: Luciana Berger, Angela Smith and Chris Leslie have been plotting against Corbyn from day one.

It is perhaps no coincidence that two of them have just had local no-confidence votes cast against them: Leslie's Constituency Labour Party in Nottingham came out against him in September 2018,¹ while Smith lost the vote in her Sheffield constituency of Penistone and Stocksbridge in November.² Luciana Berger's CLP, Liverpool Wavertree, has not yet moved such a motion, but there is no question that she is unpopular among members. The local CLP executive, which since 2017 has been clearly dominated by Corbyn supporters, has publicly 'censored' her on numerous occasions - for example, for not backing Corbyn over the Salisbury poison incident,³ and, more recently, over her public support for a second Brexit referendum.⁴ No doubt she will have also been instrumental in moving the motion in the Parliamentary Labour Party, accusing Corbyn once again of not acting on 'anti-Semitism' (see page 3).

Trigger ballots

A vote of no confidence does not start a deselection process, of course. Such votes have no official standing in Labour Party rules. Yes, they are a slap in the face for the MP and make for bad press, but, until recently at least, a sitting MP could just shrug off such votes.

That all changed at last year's Labour conference, however. In the face of a very successful campaign led by International Labour for the mandatory reselection of all MPs (under the name of 'open selection'), Corbyn and his allies agreed instead to reform the existing trigger ballot process - a way, perhaps, of softening

the blow and not spook rightwing MPs too much. But it was a huge political own goal, in our view. It is, after all, the right in the PLP that has been driving the slow coup against Corbyn. The membership, given half a chance, would have long replaced the most ardent rightwing MPs.

But until last year it was virtually impossible to get rid of a sitting MP. A majority of all local union and Labour branches affiliated to a CLP had to challenge the MP by voting 'no' in the so-called trigger ballot. Each branch and affiliate was counted equally, irrespective of the number of members. A CLP usually has far more union affiliates than Labour branches and, unfortunately, those union reps tend to vote with the right (just like they do on the national executive committee).

But last September conference voted to replace the current trigger ballot with two separate ones: one for local affiliated bodies like unions; and one for local party branches. The threshold in both has been reduced from 50% to 33% and it is enough for one of the two sections to vote 'no' to start a full selection process - ie, a democratic contest between the different candidates. It is a small step forward from the status quo (though totally insufficient, when one considers that in the 1980s the party allowed the full, democratic and mandatory reselection of all candidates).

There is very little question who would win the support of local members if there was a democratic contest between a campaigning Corbyn supporter and a Blairite like Angela Smith or a back-stabbing career whinger like Luciana Berger. And they know it.

While there is not often good news coming from the Labour NEC, we understand that the January 22 meeting of its organising committee commissioned general secretary Jennie Formby to "prepare a plan to ensure that CLPs have the opportunity to call a selection process if they so wish, even if Theresa May calls a new 'snap', short-campaign general election".⁵

As an aside, it is questionable whether May really is preparing for a snap election on June 6 (or whenever). Yes, somewhat surprisingly, the Tories are ahead in the polls, but surely she has



More than six MPs ready to quit ... good riddance

to consider not just how wrong the polls were last time (and one would have thought that the government's inability to actually deliver Brexit will add to that uncertainty), but also the political make-up of new MPs. Many, if not most, local Conservative Associations are dominated by a very active pro-Brexit wing, guaranteeing that the next crop of Tory MPs will probably be even more opposed to any 'deals' that Theresa May can pull out of her hat.

No matter: the Labour NEC decision is of huge importance politically. When Theresa May called the last snap election in 2017, the NEC was still dominated by the right and the party bureaucracy still led by general secretary Iain McNicol. Together they agreed that every sitting MP would automatically become the candidate once more, without even allowing local members or union branches the possibility of a trigger ballot. And, in many CLPs without an incumbent MP, unsuccessful candidates from the 2015 general election were simply reimposed. That was a crucial trick to keep the PLP stuffed with Blairites,

who would use their privileged position to sabotage and plot against Jeremy Corbyn.

We know that many CLPs have long been eagerly waiting for the NEC's timetable to pop into their inboxes. Without the executive's go-ahead, no trigger ballot can take place. That is why Berger, Smith, Leslie (and many others) will now be in serious discussions about how to salvage their political career - if it is indeed salvageable. All three are outspoken 'remainers' and supporters of a second referendum. They *might* consider standing for the Liberal Democrats, but, as that party is currently languishing at around 8% in the polls, it is hardly a safe bet.

Standing as an independent is perhaps even more risky - unless you are really popular locally, which Angela Smith and Chris Leslie are certainly not. Berger has a certain message that the media like - ie, Jeremy Corbyn is a dangerous anti-Semite. She might just get enough push from the establishment and the media to get elected. The virulently

anti-Corbyn MP, John Mann, also seems to be seriously entertaining that option. He is one of the few Labour MPs who have responded positively to Theresa May's pretty outrageous offer to 'convince' Labour MPs to vote for her deal in exchange for financial bribes: he has indicated that he would go for it, if she "shows us the money".⁶ The man seems pretty aware of the fact that his Labour career is coming to an end. About time too.

If enough of those rightwingers get together and jump ship before they get pushed, there might even be a possibility of them forming some kind of new 'centrist' party. It is conceivable that such a party could come to an electoral deal with the Liberal Democrats in a few select constituencies, which could perhaps see the return of a few former Labour MPs.

Their problem here, however, is not just the short-lived history of the Social Democratic Party, which still serves as a serious warning. There are also divisions over Brexit: the Labour right also has its fair share of Brexiteers - 14 of them defied Corbyn's three-line whip and voted against Yvette Cooper's amendment that would have required May to delay Brexit if she could not get a parliamentary majority for her deal.⁷ Those two wings could not coexist for long in the same small party, at least in this political period.

We would guess that quite a few current MPs will soon simply throw in the political towel and look for pastures new - perhaps some cushy job in a think tank or on a company board. Naturally, we would have preferred it if Jeremy Corbyn and the NEC had had the guts to expel these traitors ●

Notes

1. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-45691851.
2. https://labourlist.org/2018/11/angela-smith-loses-no-confidence-vote-by-local-party.
3. www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/luciana-berger-slammed-corbyn-supporting-14666017.
4. https://twitter.com/wavertreeclp/status/1072823079477350400?lang=en.
5. https://skwawkbbox.org/2019/01/25/excl-labour-nec-authorises-formby-to-make-general-election-reselection-plan.
6. www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1080798/brexit-news-latest-labour-mps-theresa-may-deal-john-mann-withdrawal-agreement-eu-news.
7. https://i/news.co.uk/news/brexit/brexit-amendment-cooper-boles-full-results-brexit-delay.

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