



# weekly **worker**



**By their friends shall ye know them: Zionist JLM heaps praise on Jon Lansman's Momentum**

- Letters and debate
- Brexit can-kicking
- Lexit going silent
- ISO's liquidation

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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## South Africa: newly formed SRWP commits to "socialism only"



# LETTERS



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

## Apology

Labour Against the Witchhunt organised a successful public meeting on March 25, which featured Ken Livingstone, along with Jackie Walker and Graham Bash, opening a discussion on the current state of the left-right battle inside the Labour Party. To illustrate the gutter nature of the attacks he had been subject to, Ken reminded us of his confrontation with the noxious John Mann, Labour MP for Bassetlaw. In the course of this, the comrade described - clearly and with *no* room for ambiguity - how he was insulted by this rent-a-mouth rightwing provocateur:

"He [John Mann] starts shouting in my face that I'm a Nazi apologist. He then goes on television and says that I said Hitler was a Zionist. How can a man who loathes Jews be a Zionist? But, because it was all filmed on telly, it went global. And it wasn't just that: soon you could see it all over on the internet that I said, 'Jews are like Nazis' and 'It's not anti-Semitic to hate Jews of Israel. You can't have a proper functioning democracy in a world in which the media can spread lie after lie after lie'" (emphasis added).

Glen Owen - political editor of the *Mail on Sunday* - covered the meeting in the March 31 issue of his rag. As he was not present at the meeting, he must have watched the video of the event, which is on LAW's website. And yet he still managed to totally change the meaning of Livingstone's words - on purpose, of course. This is how the *Mail on Sunday* reports this quote: "The former mayor of London continued: 'It's not anti-Semitic to hate the Jews of Israel and you can't have a proper functioning democracy in a world in which the media, whether it's the press or internet, can just spread lie after lie after lie.'"

In other words, he left out the preceding comments from Ken which made it crystal-clear he was reporting what others had accused him of - absurd charges that he ridiculed and refuted utterly! Yet the article informs its readers, even in the headline, that Livingstone stated: "It's not anti-Semitic to hate Jews of Israel!"

LAW comrades quickly responded and great credit is due to them. After a deluge of complaints and demands for retraction, the paper was eventually forced to issue a long-overdue apology to Livingstone (printed in its April 7 edition), which conceded that it had "incorrectly reported that Mr Livingstone had said it was not anti-Semitic to hate the Jews of Israel. In fact, he told the meeting the claim he had said such a thing was one of the lies being spread about him. We apologise for this error."

Pleasing as this is, Ken's victory statement makes the obvious point that, while the "correction is welcome", it "does not change the fact that thousands of people saw - and other media outlets reprinted - these lies". He writes that we must "continue to challenge how parts of the media act, spreading lie after lie". A point, of course, he made at the March 25 meeting itself that was so maliciously misquoted.

True, but this mendacity is intrinsic to their nature as propagandists for a capitalist system of exploitation and oppression that projects itself as 'democracy'. This requires a constant manufacture of consent from the masses and demonisation of the socialist alternative. The only genuinely effective way to "challenge" the lies of the *Mail*, etc, is for the left of the workers' movement to build its

own, multi-platform media to wage a battle against the deluge of lying shit these outlets pump out every hour of every day.

The occasional grudging apology, tucked away where it can be easily missed, is not enough. This is a war between two world views and the idea that we can appeal to our enemies' propaganda machine for a fair hearing is way beyond naive.

**William Sarsfield**  
email

## Sowing illusions

I have the greatest respect for Dave Douglass and his record of struggle in the National Union of Mineworkers (Letters, April 4). I certainly didn't intend to suggest in my last letter that Dave was a racist or a chauvinist and I'm not suggesting that Dave is in an actual alliance with the Democratic Unionist Party. But it is a fact that it is the DUP and the most reactionary political parties - be it in Ireland, Britain or Europe - that are lined up behind the Brexit project. Of course, I accept that Dave is a supporter of Irish unification, but he should reflect that Sinn Féin and Irish republicans are overwhelmingly hostile to Brexit.

Nor am I saying that Dave has physically or politically made an alliance with racists. However, the motivating force behind Brexit is, without doubt, chauvinistic and racist. It was not for nothing that Jon Snow remarked of the thousands of Brexit demonstrators in Whitehall that "I've never seen so many white people in one place".

Dave refers to the "European Union superstate project" as if this were a bad thing. The original motivation behind what became the EU was a progressive one - the burying of national antagonisms, which had led to European war, and the pooling of economic resources across states. Of course, the EU is not a socialist project. It is precisely because capitalism is based on the nation-state that the EU is unable to progress beyond the harmonisation of laws and standardisation of selling arrangements, etc. It is the capitalist nature of the EU that prevents the very European superstate that Dave fears. It is only on a socialist basis that a true European union can take place.

However, the opposition to even the most basic steps towards European union is reactionary and consists of nostalgia for the times when Britain ruled the waves. It is in essence imperial nostalgia. As Gary Younge of *The Guardian* wrote, "There were lots of reasons why people voted to leave the European Union, some of which were perfectly reasonable. But it would be more accurate to state that racism - particularly expressed in the form of nostalgia and xenophobia - helped to make Brexit possible, rather than the other way around."

Dave denies that those who advocate leaving the EU are arguing for an independent capitalist Britain. Perhaps not consciously, but that is what they will get. Of course, it is not independent in practice - it will be subject to the forces of international capitalism, the banks and multinational corporations, to say nothing of US capitalism - but that is how many of those supporting Brexit see it.

Those who see something progressive in leaving the EU are not suggesting that we join a club of socialist states. What they are advocating is the equivalent of those who saw something progressive in abandoning the factory production line in favour of cottage industries. It was called by Marx and Engels in *The communist manifesto* "feudal socialism": "half lamentation, half lampoon; half an echo of the past, half menace of the future; at times, by its bitter, witty and incisive criticism,

striking the bourgeoisie to the very heart's core; but always ludicrous in its effect, through total incapacity to comprehend the march of modern history".

I cannot agree that free movement of labour is aimed at breaking the labour movement and trade unions and implicitly responsible for low wages. The responsibility for low wages, the decline of trade unions in Britain and the collapse of industrial militancy is not other workers, but a combination of anti-trade union laws, coupled with a permanent high level of unemployment, disguised as self-employment and part-time employment.

The task of British workers is to organise migrant labour and combine with them in a common struggle. It is precisely the defeat of the miners and other workers, reflected in historically low levels of strikes, that has led workers to look to nationalist panaceas and solutions. It is the backward politics of British workers and their illusions in national sovereignty that hold them back and prevent a challenge to the leaderships of their own trade unions. This argument is not a new one.

When Jewish workers came to this country in the late 19th century, the same arguments were made. It was said that, because they were prepared to work in sweatshops for long hours at low pay, this would cause the wages of native labour to decline and unemployment to increase. Reactionary Tory politicians like William Evans-Gordon MP of the British Brothers League campaigned around the 'threat' that Jewish workers posed to British workers.

The TUC repeatedly called for anti-alien legislation in the 1880s and beyond. Because of this hostility Jewish workers were forced to form their own trade unions and unionise the clothing shops. They proved an example to non-Jewish workers in their solidarity and determination. It was through the tailors strike in 1912 and then the support of Jewish workers for striking dockers that unity was forged, which led later to the anti-fascist mobilisation of Jewish and non-Jewish workers at Cable Street.

Support for immigration controls plays into the hands of the capitalists. It instils the illusion that the capitalist state will act on behalf of indigenous labour rather than playing divide and rule. That is why anti-union Tory politicians express their sympathies for workers facing the 'problem' of immigrant workers.

Brexit has caused fear and trepidation amongst European migrants in Britain. They were undemocratically excluded from participation in the referendum - which was anything but democratic, as Dave asserts. Those who support Brexit are sowing illusions that the problems of the British working class are caused by Europe rather than by capitalism - British or European.

**Tony Greenstein**  
Brighton

## The spectacle

Given what is going on in the world, I thought I would look at what Guy Debord had to say. I knew that he was a well-known situationist in the 1960s and that he'd written *The society of the spectacle* (1967), and it struck me that "the spectacle" was quite a good way of looking at Brexit. It has dominated the mainstream news for the last three years - in which time nothing much has changed. How could it be a big story? The MPs and electors of both parties are split and Theresa May doesn't know what to do - and I haven't noticed her critics coming up with anything usable either.

But Brexit is a secondary issue.

There are far more important things going on in the world: for instance, global warming, species extinctions, plastic, particulates, austerity, child poverty and all the sadistic cruelties of this government, such as the "hostile environment" and the relentless cuts in youth facilities and the NHS. They do make the headlines from time to time, but then the next Brexit 'news' comes along ...

And the other big "spectacle" - Donald Trump! He himself seems to be a master of the spectacle, with his 'wall', his war on 'fake news' and so on, but the Democrats are at least as bad (or good?). With elections every two years, the US is in a constant election news hubbub and the elected are in a constant battle for money.

And Trump is a secondary issue too: children snatched from their parents, as they also were under Obama, tax cuts, environmental vandalism and the relentless creep to war - as Yasmine Mather pointed out in last week's paper ("New threats in the offing", April 4).

Two big "spectacles" then, diverting attention from really important things. So I read Debord's 1988 *Comments on 'The society of the spectacle'*. It is a strangely written work that takes a little bit of getting used to and it is, I suppose, an elaboration of the well known Marx-Engels quote from *The German ideology*: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas." Or even the old idea of 'bread and circuses' - though there is a good deal more to Debord than that. He has much to say about democracy, terrorism and surveillance - to mention a few tidbits.

The ruling class try to keep everybody busy with religion, racism, nationalism or just entertainment - anything but class. Or, if it can't be avoided, then just comfy things like elections or rows in our own beloved Labour Party - an anti-Semitism smear campaign works a treat. You anti-Semites aren't going to smuggle socialism into the party!

But Trump and Brexit - they are "the spectacle" and I think Guy Debord had a point. And we are going to have to crush or side-step the spectacles if we are going to defeat the ruling class.

**Jim Cook**  
Reading

## Say no more

I will not go into great detail in response to Arthur Bough's letter (April 4), because Marx has already dealt with this question in his *The poverty of philosophy*!

Arthur Bough's last paragraph demonstrates how he reduces value theory to how long it takes to make a product; this is the same ahistorical and unscientific approach Marx criticised in his polemics against Proudhon and those bourgeois economists who reduced society to Robinson Crusoe on his island. While Marx mocked this approach, Bough wants to make it the cornerstone and the sum total of Marxian value theory. Talk about stripping away from Marx all his brilliant insights and eviscerating Marx's critique of all its richness and profundity.

And this is why Boffy can't see the connection between exchange, private property and value, and the influence of competition, the division of labour, etc, that underpin it. He simply doesn't understand the nature of Marx's critique of capitalism, its alienating aspects, etc. Let me quote from *The poverty of philosophy*:

"Ricardo takes his starting point from present-day society to demonstrate to us how it constitutes value - M Proudhon takes constituted value as his starting point to construct a new social world with the aid of this value ... Thus relative value, measured by labour-

time, is inevitably the formula of the present enslavement of the worker, instead of being, as M Proudhon would have it, the 'revolutionary theory' of the emancipation of the proletariat."

Simply take the above and replace 'M Proudhon' with 'A Bough'.

Furthermore, in *The poverty of philosophy* Marx illustrates the value system of bourgeois society: "Why are cotton, potatoes and spirits the pivots of bourgeois society? Because the least amount of labour is needed to produce them and, consequently, they have the lowest price. Why does the minimum price determine the maximum consumption? Is it by any chance because of the absolute utility of these objects, their intrinsic utility, their utility inasmuch as they correspond, in the most useful manner, in the needs of the worker as a man, and not to the man as a worker? No, it is because in a society founded on poverty the poorest products have the fatal prerogative of being used by the greatest number."

He then indicates how communism will differ: "In a future society, in which class antagonism will have ceased, in which there will no longer be any classes, use will no longer be determined by the minimum time of production; but the time of production devoted to different articles will be determined by the degree of their social utility."

I really don't think any more can be said.

**Maren Clarke**  
email

## Abundance

Stephanie Just writes that socialism "championed rapid economic growth" (Letters, April 4). Yet she does not really explain why this was the case. Sylvia Pankhurst in 1923 explained: "We do not preach a gospel of want and scarcity, but of abundance ... We do not call for limitation of births, for penurious thrift and self-denial. We call for a great production that will supply all, and more than all the people can consume."

Ending poverty is the goal of socialism. Humanity is capable of integrating into a sustainable ecosystem and creating for itself an ecologically benign relationship with nature. Socialists are ultimately striving for a 'steady-state' or 'zero-growth' economy, which corresponds to what Marx called "simple reproduction" - a situation where human needs are in balance with the resources needed to satisfy them. Such a society will decide the allocation of resources to provide for the needs of its communities and it would only have to go on repeating this continuously. Production would not be ever-increasing, but would be stabilised at the level required to satisfy people's needs.

Society's output would be for consumption and whatever is required to replace and repair the raw materials and machinery. However, it may not mean an overall growth in production levels, as the redundancy and consequent redirection of socially wasteful production, such as the armament industries, will lessen the demand made on resources and energy.

But, before that is achieved, emergency action is essential to relieve the problem of shortages, which is inflicted upon billions of people throughout the world, depriving them of a decent life. It means providing for immediate necessities, such as food, healthcare and housing, along with the building infrastructures, such as transport systems and reconstructing crowded cities.

It is when this is accomplished that there can be a reduction in production, and society would achieve a rhythm of daily production in line with daily

needs, with little significant growth. On this basis, the world community could reconcile our material well-being and the stewardship of our planet.

Stephanie is right when she says, "we need to have a good look at ourselves". But we also should take a good look at what is the future we must aspire towards.

**Alan Johnstone**  
Socialist Party of Great Britain

## Not PC

Once again I must apologise to Stephanie Just, this time for being politically incorrect, in my letter of March 28: eg, my use of the word 'man' (which used to be a generic word for the human species).

She also takes me to task for daring to question the idea that climate change is *entirely* man-made (there I go again). Whilst the capitalistic age must be responsible for much of global warming since the beginning of industrial capitalism (a very short period of time indeed in geological terms), natural causes may still be a contributing factor. According to the latest research, scientists have discovered the remains of fossil forests in Antarctica, which suggests that, long before capitalism appeared on the scene, the earth was once an awful lot warmer than it is rapidly becoming today.

Stephanie then goes on to insist that Trotsky was just as guilty as Stalinism, because "he showed little appreciation of ecology and the necessity of treating nature with respect and sensitivity". I beg to differ. She fails to appreciate the fact that, as a rational optimist (like Marx and Engels before him), Trotsky assumed that the world socialist revolution could be renewed, despite the defeats during the period 1919-23), upon which the building of socialism in the Soviet Union depended: ie, socialism is international in character; it is also based on a planned economy under the democratic control of the masses. Of course, Trotsky underestimated the fact that, given the defeat of the world revolution, the party had already degenerated into bureaucratic centralism, which ensured the victory of the Stalinist counterrevolution. Hindsight is a wonderful thing! As a result, his hopes for building socialism in the Soviet Union were dashed, as history would soon show.

Therefore Stephanie ignores the *context* in which Trotsky spoke about the revolutionary masses being able to move mountains, change the course of rivers, etc. As Marx himself says in *Capital* volume 3, Trotsky looked forward to the emergence of a communist society, wherein "the associated producers regulate their interchange with nature rationally [in order] to bring it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by some blind power".

Next Stephanie fails to give due emphasis to the fact that her quote comes from the final chapter in Trotsky's *Literature and revolution* (1924). In other words, it comes from a book about literature - and art - in general. Upon the attainment of a communist society, art will be reintegrated with production (as it once was). In the conclusion to his book, Trotsky goes beyond a discourse about art during the revolution to speculate about what it might be like under socialism, wherein it will cease to be partisan, because now "solidarity will be the basis of society ... Art will become the most perfect method for the progressive building of life in every field."

The nearest equivalent to what Trotsky is talking about here is the emergence of land art in the 1970s. This was a response to the dominance of abstract expressionism, along with conceptual art. As Robert Hughes says in *The shock of the new* (1991), "[James] Turrell's ongoing project involves the partial transformation of

the entire, perfect cone of Roden Crater in Arizona." Whereas the former has no wish to escape commodification, whereby art is bought and sold in order to realise a profit for those who are already rich, at least the latter makes this more difficult. Of course, there is a huge difference here. Trotsky is talking about moving mountains, only because it might be *necessary* - albeit in a way which is both sensitive to the needs of the rest of nature, as well as being aesthetic in character. Turrell, of course, wanted to transform a mountain as a personal vanity project, because he had the money to do so.

How so? If only Stephanie had read Trotsky's final chapter more thoroughly, she would have found the following remarks. Rather than destroy external nature in accordance with their own collective ego, "Through the machine", socialist men and women "will command nature in its entirety, with its grouse and its sturgeons ... Most likely, thickets and forests and grouse and tigers will remain, but only where man commands them to remain. And man [sic] will do it so well that the tiger won't even notice the machine, or feel the change, but will live as he lived in primal times." This is in comparison to the destructive effects of capitalism, which threatens the future existence of the entire ecosystem.

**Rex Dunn**  
email

## Clumsy oaf?

Last month, I approached the Stop the War Coalition, asking them to list on their website our Gaza rally (one of only two in Scotland, and the only one for Glasgow) among the events for the March 30 day of action in solidarity with the Palestinian right to return. They refused to include our protest, organised by the Zionism is Racism coalition.

When I called Stop the War, they said they would not list it because they didn't like who was involved in ZIR. They said they had been looking into our background and "didn't want to be associated with us in any way". When I asked for details they refused any. When I asked for the name of the person I was talking to, they hung up. I tried calling again. The phone rang out.

I then gained the support of the ZIR coalition to explore this. So I wrote to the president, the patrons and the officers of Stop the War on behalf of the coalition. I explained that we are a group of 12 grassroots and campaign bodies who came together to convince Stand Up To Racism not to allow Zionists to march with Israeli flags. For so doing, it would seem we have been blacklisted by Stop the War with no explanation.

I explained that most cities in the UK were listed on the STWC webpage for the day of action - bar Glasgow. Although there was a Glasgow Gaza protest, no-one from Scotland or the media looking at the STWC site would know - and would assume there were few Gaza supporters in Glasgow.

I have been told that Stop the War in Glasgow is run by the Socialist Workers Party and it is the SWP who organise the SUTR marches that are so accommodating to Zionists. The SWP too, it seems, support the 'bogus anti-Semitism' campaign established and funded by Israel to discredit Corbyn and the pro-Palestine movement. Thus, it seems to me that the STWC takes its decisions based on SWP preferences, which are sympathetic to Zionism. So we are blacklisted because we oppose Zionism.

The Scottish Green Party has said it was not appropriate to involve a group which defends the actions of an overtly racist state in a march against racism. This is a position that we in the Zionism is Racism coalition would support. Note we have the support of the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network. But not one of the officers and patrons I wrote to responded. We

had an excellent protest, however - 100 folk turned up. But we might have had more, had Stop the War acknowledged our existence.

It seems these 'celebrity activists' are complicit in having hitched themselves to a parasitical organisation that milks the public for cash, whilst pretending to be anti-war, but doing little more than running a website, employing pro-Zionist staff and fooling an awful lot of people into giving them money. That those august 'celebrity-activists' turn a willing blind eye to the shenanigans of the body they value so much says something about them (as 'busy people' who care so little about the body they represent that they cannot even bring themselves to acknowledge receipt of a complaint). They are sleeping partners of pro-Zionist forces. Of course, I accept that some of them may not have seen my FB message/tweet/email. But all 27? I think not. Sadly, I doubt they care as to how their reputation has become tarnished by association with manipulative pro-Zionist forces, but they should do.

The funny thing is, all these celebs have been taken for a ride and actually think they are involved with a pro-Palestine body. I advise all *Weekly Worker* readers to share this article far and wide, to highlight how effectively our valued institutions have become infected and manipulated by those who promote Israel. It is because of this kind of Zionist infiltration that I propose setting up a new campaign group: Labour Against Zionist Infiltration - or Lazi, for short, which is a working title.

Recently I was suspended by the Labour Party. The *Jewish News* carried the story five days before I was told. Labour HQ is leaky as a sieve and the experiences of Asa Winstanley, Jackie Walker and others suggest the place is riddled with Zionists. I think it is time for action.

I shall seek support from Labour Against the Witchhunt for Lazi, as I know Zionism is a subject close to their hearts. In spite of early rejections from two LAW officers, I aim to take the idea of Lazi to the members meeting on May 4. I hope that the LAWyers may prove more supportive than those on their steering group who have rebuffed me - possibly considering me a clumsy oaf who will make them all hostages to fortune.

A few of us in Edinburgh have drafted a 'working rulebook' and I invite *Weekly Worker* readers to have a look at it at [www.tinyurl.com/laziwork](http://www.tinyurl.com/laziwork) and make their own minds up. Tell me what you think. We are soon heading into a general election, I think, and the Zionist machine will be moving up a gear, as it always does at elections. The Israeli embassy will have a big war chest set aside to ensure Corbyn's destruction, so we must make speed.

I must make clear that this is just a 'working rulebook' (I mean, why should the IHRA, with its 'working definition', get all the fun?). The idea is that the aims and policies are open to comment and correction until after May 4. At which point I hope it might have been finally amended at the LAW members meeting - and, if it fails to get support there, we'll just launch it officially anyway.

It would be good to get feedback from your readers in the meantime. Go to [www.tinyurl.com/laziwork](http://www.tinyurl.com/laziwork).

**Pete Gregson**  
Edinburgh

## Occupation

In my letter last week I reported on the student occupation of a building at Goldsmiths College, University of London. If anyone was wondering about the location of this building, it's Deptford Town Hall, New Cross Road, London SE14. For anyone who wants to follow the occupation online, the Twitter addresses are #GoldOccupay and [gold\\_anti\\_racism@GoldAntiRacism](mailto:gold_anti_racism@GoldAntiRacism).

**Mike Belbin**  
London

# ACTION

## London Communist Forum

**Sunday April 14, 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 (continued): 'Prelude to the "Great War": "Declaration" and split'. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk) and Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk).

## Radical Anthropology Group

**Tuesday April 16, 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: 'The dragon: making sense of a worldwide myth'. Speaker: Chris Knight.

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

## Youth Strike 4 Climate

**Friday April 12, 11am:** UK-wide (and global) student and school student demonstrations. Take direct action on the climate crisis and ecological catastrophe - system change, not climate change! Organised by UK Student Climate Network: <https://ukscn.org/ys4c-where>.

## Jewish National Fund not a charity

**Friday April 12, 7pm:** Public meeting, Mander Hall, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. The JNF UK props up ethnic cleansing in Palestine - it should not benefit from charitable status.

Speaker: Kholoud al Ajarma from a family ethnically cleansed in 1948. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.facebook.com/events/451635232066574](http://www.facebook.com/events/451635232066574).

## Rebellion against climate change

**Sunday April 14, 1pm:** March reception and workshops, Hyde Park, London W2. Welcome the Earth Marchers and prepare for a fortnight of international mass civil disobedience.

Organised by Extinction Rebellion: [www.facebook.com/events/364326324416770](http://www.facebook.com/events/364326324416770).

## Why we need an anti-war government

**Monday April 15, 6.15pm:** Public meeting, NEU conference, room 11C, ACC Liverpool, Kings Dock Street, Liverpool L3.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

## Building the Labour left

**Thursday April 18, 7pm:** Public meeting, Crookes Social Club, Mulehouse Road, Sheffield S10. How to build a grassroots left alternative in the Labour Party. Speakers include Chris Williamson MP and John Dunn (ex-miner, Orgreave Truth and Justice campaigner and surcharged Clay Cross councillor). Organised by Sheffield Labour Left: [www.facebook.com/events/625415124573218](http://www.facebook.com/events/625415124573218).

## Palestine and anti-Semitism

**Wednesday April 24, 6pm:** Workshop, P21 Gallery, 21 Chalton Street, London NW1. Learn about the global anti-Semitism campaign, the politics behind it and become a firm advocate for Palestine. Presented by Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi and Steve Tiller from Jewish Voice for Labour.

Organised by Professionals for Palestine and Europol. Register free: [www.eventbrite.com/e/palestine-antisemitism-tickets-60010687582](http://www.eventbrite.com/e/palestine-antisemitism-tickets-60010687582).

## Keep the guard on Southern trains

**Friday April 26, 12 noon:** Demonstration, Evergreen Building North, 160 Euston Road, London NW1. Mark the third anniversary of opposing the extension of driver-only operation on Southern Railway. Organised by RMT: <http://bit.ly/2OuA8ve>.

## March for unity against racism

**Saturday April 27, 2pm:** Demonstration, Dominion Road, Southall, UB2. 40 years since Blair Peach was fatally attacked by the Metropolitan Police's special patrol group. Organised by Southall Resists 40: [www.facebook.com/Southallresists40](http://www.facebook.com/Southallresists40).

## Britain is broken - end austerity now

**Sunday April 28, 1.30pm:** March and rally, Firstsite, Lewis Gardens, Colchester CO1.

Organised by Colchester People's Assembly: [www.facebook.com/events/331469450810068](http://www.facebook.com/events/331469450810068).

## May Day march

**Wednesday May 1, 12 noon:** Demonstration, Assemble Clerkenwell Green, London EC1 (nearest tube: Farringdon) for march to Trafalgar Square. Solidarity on International Workers Day. Speakers include John McDonnell MP. Organised by London May Day Organising Committee: [www.londonmayday.org](http://www.londonmayday.org).

## Marx Memorial Library

**Wednesday May 1, 11am:** Museum open day, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Free tours, displays and a secondhand bookstall. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.facebook.com/events/353995138663273](http://www.facebook.com/events/353995138663273).

## Labour Against the Witchhunt

**Saturday May 4, 1pm:** Members' meeting, central London (venue details to follow). Moving the campaign forward and electing members to the steering committee.

Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt: [www.facebook.com/events/493682997827672](http://www.facebook.com/events/493682997827672).

## Class struggles, the state and film

Films followed by discussion. Organised by Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Entrance £5 (£3).

**Wednesday May 8, 7pm:** Miners, dockers and builders in a period of militancy: [www.facebook.com/events/247509756132464](http://www.facebook.com/events/247509756132464).

**Wednesday May 15, 7pm:** The 'enemy within' - the Thatcher government attacks: [www.facebook.com/events/268104377453694](http://www.facebook.com/events/268104377453694).

**Wednesday May 22, 7pm:** Women's struggle: [www.facebook.com/events/392972168163097](http://www.facebook.com/events/392972168163097).

## 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.

**BREXIT**

# Reset to Year Zero

With the EU agreeing to a six month 'flexible extension' and talks with Labour getting nowhere, Theresa May is fast running out of options, writes **Eddie Ford**

As expected, the Cooper-Letwin bill passed through the House of Lords late on April 8 by a large majority and the next day the House of Commons voted by 420 to 110 for a motion obligating Theresa May to ask the European Union to delay Brexit.

Of course, the prime minister pleaded for an extension at the April 10 emergency summit of EU leaders. But she wanted a short one - until June 30. Instead the EU 27 agreed a middling extension - to October 31. Not that this, nor what is now the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2019 prevent no deal, obviously, as for that there would need to be a vote to revoke article 50 - which was precisely the aim last week of the Scottish National Party's Joanna Cherry and her (unsuccessful) indicative vote motion. In that sense, neither the Cooper-Letwin vote, nor the new, October 31, date changes much.

Nevertheless it increases the pressure on Theresa May, restricting her room for manoeuvre to one degree or another. Simply running down the clock becomes a bit harder. As readers will doubtlessly recall, the extraordinarily swift passage of the bill - which took just three sitting days to complete - was made possible by the success of an unprecedented amendment (which won by just *one* vote) allowing MPs to seize control of parliamentary business on particular days, meaning the government could not block its progress. Naturally, the government fears that backbenchers will now feel emboldened to take further control of the parliamentary process, passing more bills of their own devising and in general frustrating the will of the executive.

## Tensions

Hardly surprisingly, nearly all of the 110 MPs who voted against the motion to extend article 50 were from the Tories or Democratic Unionist Party - with only three Labour MPs trudging alongside them into the division lobby (Kate Hoey, Ronnie Campbell and Stephen Hepburn), as well as Frank Field, who is sitting as an independent after resigning the Labour whip.

Four cabinet ministers did not vote on the motion and some are interpreting this to mean that May does not have the backing of her party to pursue any soft Brexit deal with the Labour Party involving a customs union and the rest. Marcus Fysh, a prominent Eurosceptic Tory MP, said the vote proved that the government "does not have support for its current direction on the main purpose of its existence, inside the parliamentary party, the party in the country, or the wider country".

Indeed, one cabinet source told *The Guardian* that Theresa May and the government are becoming "increasingly divorced" from the cabinet and the rest of the party. The prime minister has, of course, promised to go *after* her withdrawal agreement (or something akin) has been approved by parliament, but, given that the chances of this happening are slim, it is far from clear when she will actually resign. The Tories could be stuck with her for a while yet, particularly after the chair of the 1922 Committee curtly rebuffed calls from European Research Group MPs for an 'indicative' vote of no confidence in their leader.

Showing the tensions, international trade secretary Liam Fox wrote to the



Arriving in Brussels: decision time for EU 27

1922 Committee on April 9 saying he could not support a customs union with the EU, as this would give other countries access to UK markets without any reciprocal arrangement. In fact, he argued, a negotiated customs union with the EU as a *third party* - as opposed to remaining inside the customs union as a full member-state - would mean being "stuck in the worst of both worlds". That is, he explained, being "not only unable to set our own international trade policy but subject, without representation, to the policy of an entity over which MPs would have no democratic control". In many ways, he is perfectly correct - a customs union of that nature represents a pointless Brexit, or Brino.

Fox's letter followed a slightly odd outburst from Andrea 'Loathsome' Leadsom, the Brexiteer leader of the Commons, who told Sky News that it would be "fantastic" if Angela Merkel would try to "support a proper UK Brexit" by reopening the withdrawal agreement - specifically, if she agreed to put a time limit on the Irish backstop. This is one for the unicorns, as both May and EU leaders have repeatedly ruled out such a possibility. But the fact that Leadsom still clings on to this as "the best possible outcome" shows that some Brexiteers are getting desperate, feeling that the prize is slipping out of their hands. At the beginning of the week, anger bubbled over at a meeting of the Bruges Group think-tank - audience members shouting "Fuck the government" and repeatedly yelling "Traitor!" at every mention of Theresa May.

Having no option, but further enraging Brexiteers, the government has tabled an order enabling the European elections to be held in Britain if the country has not left the EU by the time they are due to take place on May 23 - the cabinet office stated that the elections would be automatically cancelled if Brexit, by some minor miracle, occurs before then. This means that we might see MEPs elected who never take up their seats because a deal has been struck, which according to some would be

the end of the world. Then again, it is certainly the case that, while the prospect of European elections may frighten the Labour Party, it *terrifies* the Tories - for good reason. How on earth can they campaign properly in such an election? Who will actually hit the streets and knock on doors? Will the candidates abide by a common manifesto, and who will draw it up? Whatever the logistics, under such unfavourable conditions you would expect the Tories to get a drubbing. Who emerges as the winner is an entirely different question, of course, but, as the elections are conducted under proportional representation, it is far from inconceivable that a 'leaver' party will come first, whether the UK Independence Party or Nigel Farage's Brexit Party - the suspicion being it is more likely to be the latter than the former. Labour will suffer too, it goes without saying, but not as much as the Tories.

A day before the emergency EU summit, Theresa May dashed around the continent to meet Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron to make the case for a short extension to the end of June. In a damning indictment of Downing Street's strategy, Donald Tusk, the European Council president, declared - not unreasonably it has to be said - that the EU's experience of "the deep divisions" within the Commons "give us little reason to believe that the ratification process can be completed by the end of June". Donald does not believe in unicorns. Jean-Claude Juncker, the European commission president, favoured a longer extension in order to allow the maximum feasible amount of time for Westminster to find a way forward and "kick the can down the road" for a better day. There was a proposal for a break clause if a deal is passed in the meantime - adding a new word to the already expansive Brexit lexicography: a 'flexextension'.

With a considerable delay to Brexit, it seems certain that Britain will be asked to sign up to some sort of legally binding agreement that it has an "enhanced duty of sincere cooperation" with the EU. In other words, the UK government will have

to promise that it will not obstruct the bloc's internal workings or long-term planning mechanisms - as recently recommended by Jacob Rees-Mogg, who wants Britain to be "as difficult as possible", "obstruct the putative EU army" and "block Mr Macron's integrationist schemes". Fellow ERGer Mark Francois, notorious for his obnoxious gobby mouth, fulminated about a long extension that would create "perfidious Albion on speed" and a "Trojan horse within the EU, which will utterly derail all your attempts to pursue a more federal project". Look out, you foreigners - Britain has got your number. EU leaders must have been trembling in their boots.

In the words of a draft communiqué, under this "enhanced duty" the UK must "facilitate the achievement of the union's tasks and refrain from any measure which could jeopardise the attainment of the union's objectives". This effectively means that Britain will be outside the room when it comes to matters such as the appointment of the new president of the European commission and the adoption of the top lines of the budget for the next commission term.

Up to now, the EU has displayed a remarkable degree of unity in the face of continual hissy fits from Britain - which has been outmanoeuvred by Brussels time and again. There is no particular reason to think that this unity of purpose will not continue.

## Boris-lock

Meanwhile, rather predictably, the talks between the Tories and Labour seem to have got nowhere - resuming on April 11, although it has been stressed that they remain at an "exploratory stage". We have had two completely different versions of how the discussions have gone so far - with Labour saying, very plausibly, that May refuses to compromise and will not budge from her red lines: no freedom of movement, no second referendum, no general election ... Philip Hammond, on the other hand, has claimed that there are "no red lines" in the negotiations, where "nothing is ruled out". He was

"optimistic" ministers would soon reach an agreement with Jeremy Corbyn.

It can only be the case that these mutually incompatible accounts reflect divisors within the cabinet itself. The chancellor is determined to get a very soft Brexit, whilst the prime minister is determined - at least rhetorically - to preserve her precious red lines, maybe by giving the customs union another more palatable name ('enhanced trade cooperation and alignment' sounds good). But the Brexiteers have scented treachery - their hatred for the 'remainer' chancellor knows no bounds. They have accused Hammond of "deliberately touting his own view" and attempting to push May into signing up to a customs union - all of which is probably true. The justice secretary, David Gauke, was forced to deny that the prime minister had floated the idea of a free vote in parliament on a second referendum - an anathema to Brexiteers. The Tory civil war rages on.

You do not need to be a genius to know that the central areas of disagreement would be over a customs union, a 'confirmatory' referendum and, crucially, the possibility of Theresa May's successor unpicking any agreement - the so-called 'Boris lock'. Concretely, Labour wants to reopen the political declaration on the future relationship to include a full customs union and "close" relationship to the single market, and *legal assurances* that any deal will survive a change of Tory leader. You can bet your bottom dollar that some future Tory leadership candidates - perhaps most of them - will pledge to rip up Theresa May's withdrawal agreement as part of their election pitch: reset to Year Zero. Labour, of course, also seeks greater protection for workers' rights and the environment - something the Tories have said they would do on a number of occasions, but trying to get a concrete commitment from them is like trying to nail jelly to the ceiling ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

LEFT

# Whatever happened to the Lexit lads?

Life has driven the left advocates of Brexit into ever greater confusion, argues Paul Demarty

**A**mid all the Brexit frenzy - has it ever taken so much fratricidal warfare, humiliation and failure just to kick a can down the road? And some voices are easily missed in the din.

As it always threatened to do, the issue of the European Union has destroyed a Conservative government - so utterly that Theresa May might even envy John Major at this point. Her ministers, having apparently given up on collective cabinet responsibility altogether, do not so much brief against each other as openly make statements contradicting both their colleagues and the threadbare excuse for an official government position. Even that level of decorum is too much for the Brexit true believers, as exemplified by Mark Francois's verbal one-fingered salute to Philip Hammond.

With such bloodletting going on, and the Labour leadership keeping to its pursuit of tactical embarrassment of the government, there is little enough room in the national mind for those rather abashed comrades on the left who urged a 'leave' vote in 2016. In truth, however, their voices are diminished not only by the fireworks in the Commons (nor even by the mainstream media's inherent bias), but also by their own contradictions. The standard-bearers of 'Lexit' are tangled up by their granted wish - either reduced to gabbling without seriously addressing the political questions raised, or farcically playing down the issue.

It is, indeed, quite remarkable to consider that the three largest British left organisations outside Labour's ranks all took a Brexit line back in 2016 - we speak of the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party in England and Wales and the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, without commenting on the rather inscrutable matter of their relative size at present. The SWP hailed the opportunity to get rid of David Cameron (mission accomplished) and the Tories (failed, in spite of everything). The CPB and SPEW both played up the 'bosses' club' aspect of the EU - Viking, Laval, state aid and the rest - and the CPB additionally frothed about national sovereignty, a serious concern for its unabashedly national road to socialism.

Today, in the midst of Britain's biggest constitutional crisis since the 1840s, things are inevitably more confused than ever. We might begin with an editorial in *The Socialist*, SPEW's weekly paper. Certainly, the overall line seems not to have changed - we need a "workers' Brexit".

As a starting point, that means the immediate repeal of all EU laws that limit workers' rights or place obstacles in the way of anti-austerity policies. It should be clear that any big company using Brexit to threaten closures or job losses will, where necessary, face nationalisation under democratic workers' control and management, with compensation paid only on the basis of proven need.

Leave aside the little fact that most laws which hobble trade unions and most obstacles in the way of anti-austerity policies are home grown, and not EU in origin, the emphasis throughout is on fighting for a general election, and particularly on *Jeremy Corbyn* fighting for a general election. The comrades are exultant at recent polling that suggests a 41%-36% Labour lead, so presumably



CPB now keeping quiet about Brexit divisions

they want him to win (although one never can tell, given SPEW's previous suicidal insistence on running candidates through its ever-emptier Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition alliance). Interestingly, this emphasis *seems* to rule out a short-term cliff-edge Brexit:

It looks increasingly likely that either Britain will leave with no deal on April 12 or Theresa May will be forced to call a general election. There is a huge burden of responsibility on Jeremy Corbyn and the workers' movement to fight to ensure it is the latter.<sup>1</sup>

There are a couple of striking things wrong, or even missing, from this. The first is that there is a third option for the bourgeoisie - a national government, before or after a general election. Though it shows up routinely in the bourgeois press, it is weirdly invisible to the left: only we and, occasionally, the *Morning Star* seem to have picked up on the danger. Such is the laser focus on fighting for a general election that not even the most perfunctory wargaming is done of the potential negative outcomes.

## Same boat

'Perfunctory' is just the right word, however, for SPEW's programme for a "workers' Brexit". Frankly, the editors write as if there was not an international division of labour at all, never mind a long-standing trade deficit. Nationalising enterprises threatened with closure is, all things being equal, a very good idea; but take one set of so threatened businesses - the remnants of Britain's car industry. How long will a 'socialist' Britain, taking back (democratic workers') control, be able to feed its factories? This is not a speculative matter. In fact, we may turn to a useful article by Alex Callinicos of the SWP, arguing (perhaps too strongly) that Brexit is not "a key cause" in the decline of the car industry. Alongside long-term decline in demand, he points out:

A new free trade agreement between Japan and the European Union ... came into force last month. By 2027 this will scrap tariffs on Japanese cars imported into the EU. Ironically this was included at the behest of the British government to support

the Japanese car companies based here. But they invested in Britain in the first place to get round the tariff barriers that used to keep their exports out of the EU. Soon they will be able to produce for the European market directly from Japan. Both Honda and Nissan are shifting the production they are scrapping in Britain to Japan.<sup>2</sup>

Callinicos has his own reasons for arguing this line, but it is a neat indicator of how dependent the dreary remnants of British industry are on the good graces of the world market. While the Tory Brexiters have a plan for reintegrating Britain into the world economy, SPEW does not; it has only rhetoric.

The SWP itself is in much the same boat, however. An article in last week's *Socialist Worker* by national secretary Charlie Kimber, which criticised Corbyn for his talks with Theresa May, is typical:

Amid [all] this chaos there needs to be a clear voice calling to link Brexit to other class issues. These include the destruction of the NHS, squeezed living standards, the brutal universal credit regime, the rise of racism, lack of action over climate change and much else.<sup>3</sup>

Linked how, exactly? Another article by Tomáš Tengely-Evans attempts to be that "clear voice" - principally by denying that 'Lexit' has anything to do with small-minded conservatism:

It's true that some rightwing Labour members [like the Fire Brigade Union's Paul] Embury support Brexit. Their project is based on a patronising, pessimistic view of working class people as basically conservative and racist. And they see Brexit as a chance to bolster their nationalist politics of 'family, faith and flag'. But this isn't down to Lexit. It's a set of rightwing ideas already existing within the Labour movement.<sup>4</sup>

The punchline will be familiar to seasoned SWP watchers: "Leaving [the EU] won't usher in a socialist utopia," Tengely-Evans wisely informs us. "Yet it could weaken a racist, neoliberal institution. And when our rulers and their

institutions are weakened, it opens up opportunities for working class people to force through change." The conditional "could" is the only thing unfamiliar from the 'Vote leave to get rid of Cameron' line, which suggests that Tengely-Evans cannot even quite convince himself of it. He concludes with a call for a "leftwing vision of Brexit ... based on an internationalist defence of workers and migrants".

In both these cases, it is as if - with apologies to the prime minister - there is a magic socialism tree, that the intrepid leftwing journalist can shake when he or she needs to impose some progressive sparkle on something that, on the face of it, is not terrifically progressive at all. The Brexiters who matter are uniformly quite unpleasant people, from a socialist point of view. But both SPEW and the SWP feel it is enough to proclaim, via vapid counterfactuals, the need for a perfect Brexit which is all sunshine and rainbows. Not a socialist utopia, perhaps, but certainly clean of the anti-migrant sentiment that, in reality, motivated a large part of Brexit voters. To put it bluntly, a Brexit to the SWP's specifications - "Yes to freedom of movement ... no to the single market" - would be considered quite as much a betrayal of the 2016 vote as a straight remainder coup by a great many 'leave' voters. The idea that the political situation can be wrenched left by these empty formulations is utterly fatuous.

## Divisive

For the *Morning Star*, alas, things seem even grimmer. The extraordinary *absence* of Brexit from the paper's front pages in recent weeks, when one half expects to find it on the cover of angling magazines, must be a conscious editorial decision. It pops up every now and again on the editorial pages, at least, where the paper's Brexit bona fides are implicitly omnipresent, but the emphasis is invariably elsewhere. Take a broadside from the end of last month:

In the 2017 election, over 85% of voters backed candidates who pledged to respect the referendum result. Labour, by accepting that the people had spoken, but pushing an agenda of wealth redistribution and social regeneration, successfully moved

beyond the divisive polarisation of the 2016 campaigns.<sup>5</sup>

It is *polarisation* that seems to concern the *Star*, which goes on to argue that any socialist Labour government "has to bring leavers and remainers together". Kumbaya, my Lord!

We are reminded - unfortunately - of the Commons vote on gay marriage. Opponents seemed shy of openly declaring that they considered homosexuality shameful or contrary to their religion or whatever, and instead huffed about how the debate was a 'diversion' from the real issues facing the country. Brexit is a deeply divisive issue, on which the *Star* is radically out of step with its 'broad' labour movement target readership; thus this issue, which is absolutely core to its politics, is now toxic and embarrassing for the CPB. So the *Star* tucks the news away on page 7 and writes Delphic editorials about how awful it is that people are so 'polarised', as if it were some smug liberal imbecile delivering a TED talk.

The problem is perhaps more acute for the *Star*/CPB because it is an avowed defender of 'our' national sovereignty, and thus will find it harder to detach itself from the common run of Brexitism than its Trotskyist contemporaries. Yet all are in the same bind, which is the product of long decades of political error.

For the CPB, anti-Europeanism dates back at least half a century, to the days when the 'official' Communist Party's loyalty to the Soviet leadership demanded opposition to the pro-American alliances that included what was then the Common Market; Militant, as it was then, ingested this tankie nostrum at one remove, through accommodation to the wider Labour left; and the International Socialists, as the SWP was then, abandoned their plague-on-both-houses attitude to the EU and UK 'bosses clubs' in deference to shop-floor feeling in the unions. Both those paths to left Euroscepticism are markers of the indirect *influence* of the old CPGB.

In 2016, of course, the geopolitical landscape had changed immeasurably from its layout in the days that gave left Euroscepticism its birth. The line, however, had not. In 2019, things are immeasurably worse for the Lexit perspective, seeing as how it has been put to the test of practice. Left remainers, while equally politically hamstrung, are in a better position in some ways. They may be reduced to the role of spear carriers for the liberal bourgeoisie and its paid persuaders (in some cases, they *are* paid persuaders); but at least the script of this drama actually has a role for spear carriers. The Lexiteers are reduced to stammering idiocy or shamefaced silence because they are surplus to requirements ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

1. www.socialistparty.org.uk/issue/1036/28921/03-04-2019/corbyn-and-workers-movement-must-lead-fight-for-general-election-and-socialist-alternative-to-eu-bosses-club.
2. https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/48046/Brexit+is+not+a+key+cause+of+the+crisis+in+the+car+industry.
3. https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/48152/Corbyn+should+say+no+to+Tory+Bretxit+talks.
4. https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/48125/Dont+back+bigots+in+the+battle+for+Bretxit.
5. https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/e/growing-gulf-between-leavers-and-remainers-dangerous.

**BREXIT**

# Politics in the round

Rex Dunn offers his view of what is now a full-blown crisis. Is Britain about to descend into civil war?



will start by making two general points.

Firstly, given the extremely fluid situation, no-one can predict the outcome with any certainty. In a way, the events of a single day can provide a sort of snapshot of history - and what might happen next! Take April 1, for example. It was also the second day set aside by parliament in order to come up with its own consensus on the way forward for Brexit. But it failed to do so once again.

Secondly, we need to place Brexit in the context of the worst refugee crisis since World War II. It is symptomatic of the breakdown of the idea of a civilised international order, within which both the European Union and Britain are complicit. This is a huge problem for the whole of Europe, which shows no sign of ending. At the same time we have a similar crisis in Latin America, as refugees from poverty and gang violence flee towards the Mexican-US border. Therefore we have a world refugee crisis, which is just as important as capitalism's failure to take decisive action over climate change.

Indeed, apart from the millions

forced to flee as a result of imperialist-inspired wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, we have a 'perfect storm' in the case of Africa. Millions of people have been forced to flee from poverty and conflict, as a result of corrupt regimes (which are conduits for profits made by the city of London, etc), civil wars, the rise of jihadi movements - not forgetting desertification due to global warming, which means that people can no longer farm the land.

The refugee crisis, in turn, is a major contributing factor to the rise of anti-immigration sentiment within the EU, which is putting great strain on the latter. Britain, of course, is no exception. In March of this year, an article in the *London Review of Books* had this to say:

More than a million migrants crossed the Mediterranean during the refugee crisis of 2015, with about 850,000 landing in Greece and the remainder in Italy. By March 2016 the EU signed an agreement with Turkey: Ankara

**All classes are split over Brexit, but the socialist alternative remains a marginal force**

**Boris Johnson: driven by naked ambition, not the interests of big capital**



would do its best to ensure that the refugees (mostly Syrian) pushing up into Turkey would remain there. [As a result] in 2016, the number of migrants [coming to Europe via Turkey] dropped by two thirds. [But] the number arriving in Italy increased ...

Rome and Brussels reacted by seeking to negotiate a replica of the Turkish agreement with those countries south of the Mediterranean from which the refugees set out: Libya, Sudan and Niger were described as Europe's 'southern border'. But Sudan is much less safe for asylum-seekers, and Libya is extremely dangerous. Since the [overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi by British and French intervention] in 2011, there has been no functioning state with full control of the country. The [newly created] government of national accord (GNA) ...

has no proper army and depends on [Islamist] militias to ensure its survival.

Sudan,

meanwhile, is a failed state whose long civil wars have displaced nearly four million of its own citizens - increasingly they too are seeking asylum in Europe ... In mid-2017 the number of migrants [from Libya] began to drop significantly ... around two thirds of the migrants who left from Libya were intercepted by the new coastguard; their boats were towed back.

But the success of these policies comes at a human cost. In Libya and Sudan, militias were already involved in human smuggling - and highly abusive forms of human trafficking ... As well as perilous sea and desert routes, they face violence from armed groups, some of them in the pay of Brussels and Rome.<sup>1</sup>

## Crisis

For Britain, all this is a reflection of its further decline as a world power within a neoliberal, globalised world - here too immigration plays a key role. The problem for Marxists is that anti-immigration sentiment is also a reflection of a dearth of working class

consciousness.

Working backwards, the immediate trigger for this anti-immigration sentiment goes back to early 2016. As a result of pressure from British prime minister David Cameron (along with the leaders of other EU countries), the EU introduced the emergency brake law. This allowed any member country to “limit access to in-work benefits for new EU immigrants”, providing they had the agreement of other governments. Obviously it was intended to stem - if not stop - the flow of ‘economic migrants’ from the poor countries within the EU (as well as the refugees from outside). Clearly, at this time, Brussels was prepared to yield to Britain’s demand, in order to keep its most important trading partner within the EU. But this policy was not helped by the fact that Cameron had to wait for another 18 months before his government could hit the emergency brake.

The background to the referendum itself goes back to a private member’s bill on Britain’s continued membership of the EU. This was introduced in 2015 and came into law at the beginning of 2016. Previously the Conservative Party had included a referendum in its manifesto, which enabled Cameron to win a slim majority in the general election of May 2015 (unlike Theresa May in 2017). In order to staunch the haemorrhage of party members, as well as silence its rightwing Tory backbenchers, a referendum on withdrawal from the EU was inserted into the party’s election manifesto. But when the referendum was held in June 2016, to Cameron’s great surprise, the public voted to leave. As a supporter of British business, he had made a monumental blunder, because now the Brexit genie was out of the bottle.

But I need to say more about the material basis for this outburst of anti-immigration sentiment across the developed areas of the capitalist world. Apart from the external problem - ie, the world refugee crisis - this is also a domestic one. As Yanis Varoufakis said on a recent TV programme, Britain’s “business model” has come to rely on “low wages, zero-hours contracts and little regulation”. Hence we see the rise of the working poor and record levels of child poverty (over four million). Therefore Britain’s economy is based on an “ideology of cheapness”.<sup>2</sup> In reality, human life is cheap, even in Britain. At the same time, the Eurosceptics within the Tory Party - ie, the European Research Group - have morphed into old-fashioned *English* chauvinists. They are prone to emotive outbursts, such as the claim that Britain has become the “slave state” of Europe. Hence Britain needs to “take back control” over our borders, as well as make our own laws. Churchill’s Dunkirk spirit is also being raised.

As for the fantasy that Britain can make its own way in the world, even if it has to trade under World Trade Organisation rules, the ERG group believes that ‘we can do it on our own’, even if it means a lot of belt-tightening for a few years, or however long it takes (bugger the working class!). Yet a hard Brexit would lead to the further decline of British capitalism: ie, it would no longer have a manufacturing base to speak of - whether this is British-owned or multinational in character - which would mean the loss of thousands of jobs. It would mean that British-based companies would no longer be able to enjoy frictionless trade within the world’s largest trading bloc. No wonder the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress have formed an alliance in favour of a soft Brexit (or even ‘remain’), because both understand that a hard Brexit would be a disaster

for the British economy.

On the other hand, the ERG is prepared to block May’s deeply flawed deal, even if this means no deal. Clearly the ERG has forsaken economic reality for atavistic, ideological reasons. In reality, rightwing Tories, such as Jacob Rees-Mogg and Boris Johnson, want post-industrial Britain to take a further step and become a “European version of the Cayman islands” (as Labour MP Steven Kinnock says): ie, a low-tax economy, wherein the rich get richer, because they are also able to rely on their overseas tax havens. Meanwhile Britain would impose strict controls over immigration, favouring rich investors, either in the City of London (which is happy to launder their ill-gotten gains) or in London real estate (eg, Russian and Saudi oligarchs).

Today, of course, after nearly three years of negotiations, the British political system is unable to agree on Brexit. As a result, we are now faced with a constitutional as well as a deepening political crisis. On the one hand, parliament is trying to wrest back control from a divided and impotent executive, but it is unable to reach a consensus in order to take Brexit forward. On the other, we have a deepening disconnect between the public and the ‘political class’ (which is reflected across the capitalist world). In other countries, we are seeing the emergence of rightwing populist parties, some of which have achieved electoral success and are even in government (eg, Italy and Austria). But this is creating problems for the leadership of the EU. It is undermining the latter’s claim to be the upholders of liberal values, such as ‘freedom of expression’, ‘respect for others’, etc.

However, a rightwing populist government is not likely to be elected in Britain. This is because we have a ‘majoritarian’ political system, which favours the two main parties. Whenever there is a general election, at least up to now, the two mainstream parties are able to ‘mop up’ any populist movement, both of the left and the right (Ukip), leaving the far right as a small fringe minority. (I shall leave the far left out of this, which is pitifully small and has no strategy to build a Marxist party fit to lead the working class in the struggle for socialism.) As for the far-right groups, they are still dangerous, because they are the breeding ground for anti-immigration sentiment, linked to Islamophobia and white-supremacist ideas, as well as *genuine* anti-Semitism.

## Bonapartist

But I am getting ahead of myself. To return to reality, the 2016 referendum and its outcome has to be seen somewhat differently. After all, it was supposed to be an example of ‘direct democracy’. But the public were asked to vote for ‘remain’ or ‘leave’ in a vacuum: ie, before any negotiations had taken place. However, the 2016 referendum gave the masses the opportunity to kick back at the establishment, which they rightly see as out of touch with ordinary people. They were also left to rely on their own gut instincts: eg, there are ‘too many immigrants, who don’t speak English’; they have come here to ‘take our jobs’, etc. Millions of people voted to leave on the basis of such crude reasoning.

But for the majority, including those who are not racist, of course, the question of whether Britain should remain in the EU or leave, was far too complex to be answered by means of a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ vote. Therefore people voted without knowing what the real consequences would be if Britain decided to leave. Such is the nature of Bonapartist referenda: ie, direct democracy does not work in a modern societies (which are not like

the *demoi* in ancient Athens!). Rather referenda are undemocratic - more suited to the needs of an authoritarian ruler.

Nevertheless, prime minister Theresa May responded to the narrow ‘leave’ vote of June 23 2016 by switching her own position to the winning side: instead of trying to be inclusive, since such a large minority had voted to remain, she lurched to the right, along the lines of ‘Brexit means Brexit’. She was more interested in preserving the unity of the Tory Party: ie, appeasing the right wing, especially the ERG - aka an ‘English national party within the Conservative Party’. As if that was not bad enough, following her disastrous decision to hold another election in 2017, May found herself at the head of a minority government. Therefore she has to rely on the support of the Democratic Unionist Party in parliament. The DUP is just as reactionary as the ERG, if not more so (it still believes in the defence the union - historically, the basis of the Protestant ascendancy, which it still hankers after: ie, ‘Croppy, lie down’; opposition to abortion rights, etc).

Like May, Jeremy Corbyn is also caught between the left and right of his own party. Yet he is perhaps the most leftwing leader in the history of the Labour Party (eg, he comes from an anti-Trident, pro-Palestine position, etc.). He had the opportunity to do so much more in order to ‘transform’ Labour. After all, he started out with a huge following on the left at the grassroots level, if not within the parliamentary party, in the shape of the Corbynistas, most of whom joined the party online, whereby they boosted Labour’s membership to over half a million (making it the largest political party in Europe). But unlike May, Corbyn tried to appease both the Brexiteers and the remainers within Labour - although, as a Eurosceptic himself, he errs towards the former. (As the ERG say, Corbyn is a ‘remainer’ in the south and a ‘leaver’ in the north!)

As for its own two wings, although a minority in the parliamentary party, Labour’s Brexit MPs represent a huge swathe of working class/lower-middle class voters in the north of England (including former mining areas): ie, Labour’s traditional core vote; but they now see themselves as ‘the left-behinds’. Unfortunately, given the atomisation of the working class and the inability of reformism to offer meaningful improvements (as in the past, such as in 1945), in this part of the country, ‘the many’ see immigrants as the root of the problem (instead of neoliberalism and austerity, which kicked in following the 2008 crash). By contrast the party’s ‘remain’ MPs - mainly neoliberal Blairites - represent the better-offs (eg, liberal, metropolitan elites, as well as idealistic, Europhile young people). Along with their counterparts in the Tory Party, the Blairites want to preserve the status quo ante: they represent the interests of British and foreign capital, based on frictionless trade within the EU trading bloc, along with the free movement of capital and labour.

Therefore for Corbyn - for all the above reasons - Labour’s manifesto, *For the many, not the few*, makes a concession towards British chauvinism: ie, the demand to “take back control” over the economy and trade (as if that were possible), which also includes immigration, whilst it seeks to retain the closest possible links with the EU (despite the fact that the latter is committed to free movement, etc). In other words the manifesto calls for a ‘bespoke’ relationship between Britain and the EU. Therefore Corbyn is trying to drive a square peg into a round hole, which cannot be done.

(Rather like May’s hard-won deal

with the EU: it is unable to reconcile British withdrawal from the single market and the customs union with the need for a frictionless Irish border; hence the inclusion of the ‘Irish backstop’ - a last resort in order to preserve an open border between the north and south. That would mean, of course, that the border between the EU and Britain would then become the Irish Sea. No wonder the DUP is so vehemently opposed to the May deal!)

Corbyn is also a weak leader. Ever since he came to power, despite his strong position, he has relied on the strategy of appeasing his enemies; in particular those responsible for the bogus argument that anti-Semitism is rife within the party, which is being organised by the Zionist lobby (such as the Jewish Labour Movement, Labour Friends of Israel, etc.) Therefore Corbyn has to fight a war on two fronts.

On the one hand, the left is being accused of anti-Semitism, leading to a large number of suspensions (including that of Chris Williamson, who is one of his closest colleagues). Of course, the real aim of the ‘stainless’ Blairites is to overthrow Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party - preferably long before he has the chance to become Britain’s most leftwing prime minister. On the other hand, he is supposed to be leading Labour to victory in the face of May’s monumental Brexit cock-up. No wonder he is unable to seize the initiative.

## Chaos

Back to the present. To paraphrase the famous expression, ‘Nero fiddled, while Rome burned’, the British political class is playing some kind of grotesque game, while the country is about to drive off the cliff by means of a no deal (if not burst into flames!).

Parliament is still unable to pass a meaningful vote on Brexit; therefore the country is now in a deeper constitutional and political crisis. As a result, technically Britain’s default position is that it will leave the EU without a deal, unless May gets a modified deal ‘over the line’. On the other hand, May shows no sign of stepping down; she is also unlikely to call a general election. Therefore Britain is in a ‘state of paralysis’.

Hence there has been a record stockpiling of products by British companies, compared to that of any other G7 country. But this is not because of demand: they are doing it out of fear that there will be no deal, which would mean that Britain’s trade with the rest of Europe could grind to a halt. The British economy is already suffering from a hit, to the tune of £600 million a week, compared to pre-referendum figures. The public is also fearful. Summer holiday bookings for Easyjet are only a third of what they were this time last year.

At the same time, it seems clear that May’s government is unable to deliver Brexit (although a sudden *volte face* is still a possibility!) Many people on the right of the political spectrum see this as a ‘betrayal’. Hatred and intolerance is on the rise. This is the ‘ugly face of Brexit’, as the pro-Brexit demonstration on March 29 clearly showed. There were plenty of anti-Islamic and white-supremacist placards on display at the Ukip meeting, which was addressed by Tommy Robinson - just yards away from Nigel Farage, who was attempting to gather support for his Brexit Party.

If there is to be a general election - or another referendum - there could well be fighting in the streets. If that happens, of course, this would not be the first time that there would be civil violence in Britain. Previously, however, this took the form of a class struggle against the state, even if this was somewhat refracted: eg, both

the anti-Vietnam protestors and the miners fought the police during the 1970s. But today, if fighting does break out in the coming period, it will be between pro-‘remain’ and pro-Brexit supporters: ie, a civil war without the class struggle, because it crosses class lines. The police would be caught in the middle. Then what happens? What do those who want to defend the bourgeois state do? Establish a more authoritarian one?

In another *Guardian* article, Rachel Shabi noted that Labour’s abandonment of

freedom of movement [will inevitably lead to] hostile border policies. In January the party sparked a backlash when it tried to abstain on the horrendous Tory immigration bill [severe restrictions on immigration, which are weighted against unskilled workers, whilst being weighted towards higher paid, skilled workers] Then there is the Lexit caucus, a component which is currently echoing an anti-Semitic conspiracy beloved by the far right, while claiming that liberals are in cahoots with ethnic minorities to thwart the wishes of the (always implicitly white) working class.<sup>3</sup>

Although the Lexit caucus within Labour may be small in number, it is a safe bet that they will not be suspended for bringing the party into disrepute, let alone expelled for being racist.

If Labour really were “an internationalist and European party” (as Labour MP Jess Phillips says), which claims to represent the working class, given the fact that Corbyn is the most leftwing Labour leader in the history of the party, he should have come up with a real socialist alternative to the EU of ‘the bosses’. Of course, the problem is that he is a reformist, rather than a socialist. He is presiding a Labour manifesto which does not even call for a full Keynesian programme. Therefore if Corbyn were to come to power, on the basis of his own manifesto, Labour would not be in a position, for example, to introduce a ‘Green New Deal’. *For the many, not the few* is the antithesis of the necessary campaign for a United Socialist States of Europe, which would make clear to the masses that capitalism is the problem, not immigration. At the same time, the socialist left is unable to force Corbyn towards such a position, given that it is too small, as well as weak and divided by sectarian squabbles.

Hence as the *Financial Times* says, if May carries on as prime minister (despite her offer to step down), and then is forced to call an early election, she might even win it, despite the fact that the Tories are divided; moreover, they do not care about the lives of ‘ordinary, hard-working people’: ie, the working poor, who are forced to rely on food banks, whilst their children fall below the official poverty line. On the other hand, it is also possible that Boris Johnson could become the new leader of the Conservatives (accompanied by more defections from the centre-right of the party). Thus we could end up with a hard-line, anti-immigration Brexit after all.

Once again, the problem is that working class consciousness is at an all-time low and it does not have a socialist party to lead it ●

rexgdunn@gmail.com

## Notes

1. J Tubiana and C Warin, ‘Diary’ *London Review of Books* March 21.
2. *Question time* BBC 1, March 28.
3. ‘Jeremy Corbyn needs to get behind the people’s vote to fight the far right’ *The Guardian* April 1.

# LABOUR



Why is this outfit still affiliated?

## In praise of Momentum

The Jewish Labour Movement has recognised Jon Lansman's 'valuable work' in support of Zionism, reports **Carla Roberts** of Labour Party Marxists

Readers of the *Weekly Worker* will have noted that the Jewish Labour Movement has just held its annual general meeting - a story which has been splashed all over the bourgeois media. The AGM voted "almost unanimously" for a motion stating that "the leadership of the Labour Party have demonstrated that they are anti-Semitic and have presided over a culture of anti-Semitism"; that "Jeremy Corbyn is unfit to be prime minister and that a Labour government led by him would not be in the interest of British Jews"; and that therefore the JLM has "no confidence" in Corbyn.<sup>1</sup>

So far, so predictable. Gathered in the JLM are, after all, some of the most vile rightwingers who have been plotting against Jeremy Corbyn from day one - ie, long before the smear campaign to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism really took off. You would have thought that this campaign - which has proven so incredibly successful since then and has led to the suspensions and expulsions of thousands of Corbyn supporters - would have led to a massive influx into the JLM.

But we read that in "the closest vote of the day" a mere 148 people took part.<sup>2</sup> And apparently that is not down to huge numbers of abstentions, as elsewhere an attendance of 160 has been reported. Now remember, you do not have to be Jewish or a Labour Party member to join the JLM - for example, Gordon Brown recently signed up. He thought it would be a good idea to join his former nemesis, Tony Blair, and engage in a bit of anti-Corbyn propaganda just before the local elections. He 'stars' in a video produced by Hope Not Hate - or 'No Hope, Hate Corbyn' as it should henceforth be known. In the video, Brown claims that "the Labour Party has let the Jewish community and itself down. They should never have allowed legitimate criticism, that I share, of the current Israeli government to act as a cover for the demonisation of the entire Jewish people." Who exactly is 'demonising' the entire Jewish population, Gordon?

Anyway, on this basis, 160 members coming to an AGM is, to put

it mildly, pathetic. This organisation claims to be "the" voice of Jewish members in the Labour Party. Clearly it is not. Jewish Voice for Labour should reconsider its policy of not publishing its membership figures, because it would quite clearly and easily trump this hands down.

This "closest vote of the day" does affect the JVL, as it happens. And it makes for interesting reading. The main motion (besides expressing no confidence in Corbyn) concerned itself, naturally, with anti-Semitism. After all, that is the main reason why the JLM, which was pretty inactive for a number of years, relaunched in 2015 with the expressed aim of harming Jeremy Corbyn, as the award-winning *Electronic Intifada* has uncovered.<sup>3</sup>

This main motion contained a sentence that charged Momentum, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and the Labour Representation Committee as having "acted ... to protect and support those engaging in anti-Semitism". This displays a considerable lack of *actual knowledge* when it comes to the left of the party. The CLPD has been shamefully quiet on the witch-hunt against Corbyn supporters.

As for Momentum - or, more precisely, its owner, Jon Lansman - it has been playing a very active role ... on the side of the witch-hunters: as soon as Jackie Walker was first suspended from the party (over charges that were later dropped because they were so flimsy), Lansman immediately moved to have her removed as vice-chair of Momentum - with the help of the pro-Zionist Alliance for Workers' Liberty, who were in turn booted out during his coup of January 10 2017.<sup>4</sup>

He then turned on his long-term comrade in the CLPD, Pete Willsman, when he was accused of being soft on anti-Zionism, removing him from the Momentum-endorsed list of candidates for Labour's national executive committee (Willsman was re-elected nevertheless).

When Chris Williamson MP was suspended for stating that the party had "apologised too much" over the charge of anti-Semitism,

Lansman did not say a word in his defence - but a day later publicised and spread a letter, in which Labour Party members "sincerely apologise to the Jewish community over our collective failure on the issue", using similar vocabulary to that of Chris Williamson, but, of course, stating the opposite. In other words, it is a vile, scabbing letter.<sup>5</sup> And that is the role that Jon Lansman has been playing for some time: he is a scab who is not just happy to throw Corbyn supporters to the wolves, but is actively undermining Jeremy Corbyn himself.

The majority at the JLM AGM, however, seems to have recognised that, in fact, Momentum is not the enemy any longer and that Jon Lansman has been acting like a witch-finder general. An amendment was moved to delete Momentum from the list of organisations said to be 'protecting' and 'supporting' anti-Semites - and replace it with Jewish Voice for Labour. That does indeed make a lot more sense.

The amendment also added a sentence, praising Lansman's good work: "... Momentum has, for the last year, committed itself to tackling anti-Semitism within the Labour Party and wider society, through educational videos directed at Labour Party members, calling out and reporting anti-Semitic posts online, and joining JLM and other groups in protest against the likes of David Icke and Gilad Atzmon."

Indeed it has. The mover could have added plenty of other examples of Momentum - just like the JLM - propagating and fostering the lie that Labour is overrun with anti-Semites. Not everybody in the room was convinced - too deep-seated is their hatred of what they *conceive* to be the left, no doubt. But 81 voted in favour of the amendment, while 67 were against.

Did the latter figure include Ruth Smeeth MP, who replaces Luciana Berger as national parliamentary chair of the JLM? After all, just after the AGM she claimed on *Sky News* that Jeremy Corbyn was, in fact, "responsible for anti-Semitism inside and outside of the party" (my emphasis).

Last but not least, the AGM also saw the return of Ella Rose, who quietly

disappeared after the *Al Jazeera* documentary *The lobby* exposed how closely she was working with Shai Masot - "the senior political officer at the centre of the Israeli embassy's covert efforts to influence British politics in an even more pro-Israel direction", as the *Electronic Intifada* reported.<sup>6</sup> In the documentary, she is heard angrily talking about how her previous employment at the Israeli embassy had been publicised: "Anti-Semites, the lot of them", she fumes. Masot, incidentally, talks about Jackie Walker, whom he calls "problematic", indicating she was on the Israeli government's radar. Asked by the *Al Jazeera* undercover reporter what can be done about Jackie Walker, Masot responds: "Do not let it go."

At the AGM, Ella Rose was

elected unopposed as "JLM network officer" - no prizes for guessing who she might be networking with. But the main question that springs to mind is: why on earth is this rightwing outfit allowed to remain a Labour Party affiliate? ●

### Notes

- <https://twitter.com/JewishLabour/status/1114892296758149120>.
- <https://labourlist.org/2019/04/jewish-labour-movement-opts-to-stay-and-fight-with-new-leaders>.
- <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/asa-winstanley/jewish-labour-movement-was-refounded-fight-corbyn>.
- <http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/momentum-reduced-to-a-corpse>.
- [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1cuDi0sm-xORNirB8wwj6KITI-yxd1NY8-QImc14zDIY/viewform?edit\\_requested=true](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1cuDi0sm-xORNirB8wwj6KITI-yxd1NY8-QImc14zDIY/viewform?edit_requested=true).
- <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/al-abunimah/die-hole-israel-lobbyist-tells-critics>.

## Fighting fund

### Good news

We've already had a positive response to our appeal - sent out last week to *Weekly Worker* subscribers - to set up or increase their standing order payments. Three comrades replied promptly, each sending us a new SO authority, meaning that from now on we'll receive an extra £40 per month - thanks to GH, LK and RG, who have pledged £20, £10 and £10 respectively.

For his part, JC has upped his quarterly payment by a tenner, but for now has donated £20 by bank transfer. Comrade JB also donated that amount by the same method. Then there were the existing monthly standing orders that came in over the last seven days - thanks to CG (£30), FK, DV and GD (£25 each) and SM (£10). Finally a big thank you to our comrades from Union of Turkish Progressives (UTWB), who made a bank transfer for a fantastic £300! That's what I call solidarity!

All this is in response to our decision to increase our monthly fighting fund target from £1,750 to £2,000, which would take care of the recent extra costs we've incurred. This week we received an excellent £565, taking our running total to £825 after just 10 days. So we still need another £1,175 in just less than three weeks.

For readers who want to set up a standing order, but didn't receive a form, not to worry - you can either use the one on the back page of every issue of the printed *Weekly Worker* or download it from our website (click on 'Donate'). Or, of course, you can set up an SO yourself via your bank, either in person or online.

Watch this space for more good news ●

**Robbie Rix**

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

# Learn the lessons

Peter Moody comments on the collapse of the most prominent revolutionary group on the US left



Road to nowhere: like the SWP in Britain the ISO fetishised street protests

As readers will know, on March 29 the International Socialist Organization - likely the largest US grouping that could be reasonably described as on the revolutionary left - voted to dissolve itself.

In a statement put out on the website of its newspaper outlining the decision, the immediate reason is said to be due to the discovery of a cover-up regarding sexual assault in one of the organisation's branches in 2013.<sup>1</sup> As the dissolution statement notes, while a disciplinary committee drawn up to investigate the incident recommended expulsion for the perpetrator of the assault, the national steering committee of the ISO at the time "interfered with the committee's work, overturned its decision and effectively silenced anyone who dissented from the course it chose". And, when a new steering committee came into power earlier this year as a result of a - frankly momentous - change of leadership, the full extent of this interference and cover-up was made public, profoundly shaking the ISO as a whole and setting it on the course which led to the collapse.

This is *not* the first time this incident has been made public. Over the later part of 2013 and into the beginning of 2014, a group within the ISO calling itself the Renewal Faction waged an internal struggle against what it saw as inaction from the national leadership on the question.<sup>2</sup> Its comrades were expelled for their efforts. This raises the question about what is different now: perhaps the fact that the Renewal Faction was engaging in an open factional struggle (something which is considered *verboten* outside of strictly prescribed periods by the political tradition from which the ISO descends) or that Renewal published documents regarding potential financial malfeasance within the

organisation and its non-profit partner (again something which would likely not endear loyalists) meant that the charges levied by the faction were merely seen as the jibs of malcontents. No doubt a sufficiently thorough cover-up by the old leadership would help perpetuate this conception.

The dissolution statement, however, does not go into detail about what changed between 2014 and now; while the ISO does have a perceived reputation for a high rate of membership turnover, it is difficult to believe that no-one apart from the old leaders who are (now ex-) members of the ISO was not around five or six years ago, though an account of one individual's grappling with the allegations has been published on the *Socialist Worker* website, and other statements on the website suggest that the sentiment expressed there are shared by others.<sup>3</sup>

Despite this sordid history, it would be wrong to assume that protecting abusive members and lack of transparency around accusations of sexual assault are the sole provenance of the ISO's now former leadership. Over the past year, the Workers World Party underwent two splits, both of which claim to be related to sexual assault within that organisation's Baltimore branch.<sup>4</sup> The Democratic Socialists of America have also recently mishandled sexual assault cases, both on the national and local level.<sup>5</sup> So, while it might be tempting for people aiming to score sectarian points against the ISO - or against self-described 'democratic centralist' groups more generally - to depict these problems as somehow inherent to such organisations, reality suggests otherwise. What does seem clear, however, is that the left is usually no more capable of delivering justice in situations such as these than the bourgeois legal system, where people in positions of authority are able to use their connections and authority to cover up abuse - and they have access

to useful financial and institutional channels if accusations of abuse come to trial.

In a certain sense, this is not surprising. Despite whatever growth has occurred in the past decade, the US left in general is still only just emerging from a period of historical defeat, and our internal capacity is as such in the early stages of redevelopment. Moreover, we are still saddled with organisational frameworks that downplay abuse and prevent open and just proceedings from occurring. On the one hand, there is the 'activist sect' model, which treats the perpetuation of the organisation as paramount, which can lead to its members being unwilling to ask hard questions (whether on transparency of leadership or of political differences); this likely did play a role in ISO activists rallying around five or six years ago. On the other hand, there is the habituation towards bourgeois legalism brought in by the pro-state politics of social democracy (and adapted to by sections of 'official communism' and other tendencies), which replicate the problems of the bourgeois legal system in the workers' movement. The specific solutions are yet to be determined, but these frameworks directly oppose the transparency and political democracy that the workers' movement needs to both adequately conduct its own affairs and provide the basis for its establishment as the ruling class in society.

## DSA

The political elephant in the room, however, is the relationship that the ISO has had to the growing (if still vague) positive sentiment towards socialism in the United States - in particular its expressions in the closely intertwined phenomena of the Sanders campaign and the DSA - and how that relationship will affect the

trajectories of both now-former ISO members and whatever new grouping that may emerge. Indeed, the change in leadership that precipitated the recent chain of events seems to be related to whether the ISO was able to 'go on in the old way' in terms of its organisational norms and how it related to the movement (or movements) that it considered itself a part of.

A piece written by a former ISO member notes that, in addition to the main fight between "reformers" on the steering committee and the old leadership, a smaller third faction existed, which advocated a positive orientation towards the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign and "democratic socialist" congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. If adopted, this would have marked a significant step away from the ISO's historical opposition to the Democratic Party.<sup>6</sup> This tendency represents a significant phenomenon on the left to integrate with broader forces in order to more effectively 'do the work' of rebuilding the movement - an ostensibly laudable goal, but one which often has the consequence of either shutting up about political differences, so as not to jeopardise that work, or explicitly abandoning long-term political strategy for the sake of more immediate and 'achievable' goals. This has already started to happen, with former ISO members who have left in the past few years entering the DSA and to a greater or lesser degree integrating with its social democratic and pro-Democratic Party strategy. The collapse of confidence in the ISO's organisational model will likely accelerate this process, since the DSA alternative appears to remain credible.

This would be a tragic coda to the ISO's dissolution. First, as mentioned above, the DSA itself has had problems

handling sexual assault, particularly when the perpetrators are well-positioned within the organisation. Second, self-described revolutionaries working in DSA as individuals, without presenting a clear political alternative to the social democratic orientation of the leadership, will most likely end up burning out from stifled factional struggle, from replicating the problems of the 'activist sect' model on a lower political level, or from simply adapting to the dominant politics within the DSA. This would be a loss for the left as a whole, especially as 'socialism' becomes a more popular label, as it is now more critical to fight for a conception of socialism that is based around the working class taking political power and remaking society as a whole.

Fortunately this is hardly a guaranteed outcome of the ISO's dissolution, and all communists should offer both a frank and friendly hand to now-former ISO members, who are no doubt still struggling with what they have gone through over the past few months, so that the left in general may rebuild itself on a higher level ●

## Notes

- [1. https://socialistworker.org/2019/04/02/the-iso-vote-to-dissolve-and-what-comes-next](https://socialistworker.org/2019/04/02/the-iso-vote-to-dissolve-and-what-comes-next).
- [2. https://externalbulletin.org/2014/02/15/assessing-the-year-long-inaction-regarding-charges-of-sexual-violence-in-the-iso](https://externalbulletin.org/2014/02/15/assessing-the-year-long-inaction-regarding-charges-of-sexual-violence-in-the-iso).
- [3. https://socialistworker.org/2019/03/20/what-socialists-can-learn-from-metoo](https://socialistworker.org/2019/03/20/what-socialists-can-learn-from-metoo).
- The two groups - the Communist Workers League and Struggle for Socialism - do not go into much detail about what they thought was the problem with the handling of the incident, so their specific views on the case are unclear.
- The national-level case involved a member of the organisation's national political committee, who did eventually leave his position. An ongoing local case in the DSA's Los Angeles branch involved sexual assault and harassment, with an accessory to the harassment himself being a former member of the ISO.
- [6. https://newmilitant.com/the-crisis-and-collapse-of-the-international-socialist-organization/?fbclid=IwAR3-7vedp0668xhXHwRjzPSXzuTB0xktF6eLSY4\\_QK4EZ-U4Ie0IUhfda2s](https://newmilitant.com/the-crisis-and-collapse-of-the-international-socialist-organization/?fbclid=IwAR3-7vedp0668xhXHwRjzPSXzuTB0xktF6eLSY4_QK4EZ-U4Ie0IUhfda2s).

## REVIEW

# Three centuries of oppression

Tom Devine *The Scottish clearances: a history of the dispossessed 1600-1900* Allen Lane, 2018, pp463, £25

This is a wonderful book. It follows on from earlier writing and research on the Scottish Highlands (north of the Central Belt and west of the north-eastern coastline, stretching roughly from the river Tay to the county of Nairn, which borders the Moray Firth).

The best known book on the more familiar Highland Clearances is probably that of John Prebble with that title, which appeared in 1963, but - not to put too fine a point on it - the title begs the questions, 'What, precisely, should we understand by "clearance"?' and 'Are there comparable historical instances of such a process in other parts of Scotland?' We are told that a book with the title *The lowland clearances*, authored by two former BBC Scotland journalists, came out in the 2000s (see page 9 of professor Devine's book), based on a radio series using significant input from historians. Devine makes a convincing case that 'clearance' is the right word for comparable events since 1746 on both sides of the Highland line.

His book gives a balanced comparison between the two regions (pp352-54). The chief difference between the two would then lie in the speed and convulsion north and west of the line, as opposed to more gradual, evolutionary change to the east and south - related, naturally, to the degree of urban, industrial, capitalist development in Scotland from, arguably, 1760 onwards.<sup>1</sup> Hence *The Scottish clearances* features not only Gaelic-speaking Highland tenants, displaced from inland straths to the coast, inland cities or further afield, but also prominent peasant or rural artisan-cum-labourer groupings. The focus, then, is on cottars<sup>2</sup> (folk whose holdings were recognised by custom, but not by any contemporary law); on crofters (tenants of a legally recognised smallholding); and, over against these, on agents of oppression and eviction, comprising landlords, their 'factors' (land agents), military recruiters, cattle traders, sheep ranchers, agricultural improvers, the courts, and so on.

A wealth of detail leaps from the book's pages, with the inclusion of passages dealing with similar processes in England and Ireland, plus coverage of Scots emigrants in Canada, the US and Australia, the mid-19th century potato blight and famine that struck Scotland as well as Ireland, together with illuminating examples of poetry and song in both Scots Gaelic and English.

Devine lists possible specific causes of clearance by human design, as opposed to acts of nature:

... influences and pressures ... included: the impact of increases in rental division of larger holdings to impose living space for soldier veterans among existing tenantry; landlord unwillingness to accept accumulation of rent arrears; refusal to provide relief when crops failed; prohibition of working on kelp<sup>3</sup> shores; confiscation of cattle to meet accumulated arrears; refusal to assign leases to sitting tenants; relocation of cottars and small tenants to crofting townships and new villages; punitive prohibition of illicit whisky-making, so undermining local peasant economies; rigorous prevention of subdivision of land among kinsfolk; long-run attrition of multi-tenancies until single occupiers became the sole tenants

on compact large farms ...

... all of these factors to a greater or lesser extent were common across the length and breadth of Scotland and not confined to any one region. This, therefore, was indeed the Scottish clearances. If so, a fundamental question then comes into focus. If the dispossession was Scotland-wide, why has loss of land come to be exclusively associated in the popular mind with the Highlands? (pp353-54).

I cannot pursue this last topic here.<sup>4</sup> The remainder of this review will focus on sheep-ranching - in particular the notorious clearances on the Sutherland estates, highlighted, as readers will know, by (among others) Karl Marx in *Capital* volume 1; emigration from both sides of the Highland line in the 18th and 19th centuries; more on Highland-lowland differences regarding the fate of the Scots subordinate classes; the parallel processes in Ireland; a consideration of the impact of developments from, roughly, 1750 to World War II, as recorded in prose literature, poetry and folksong (much illumination from Devine here); and, finally, the Scottish lowlands, as compared with rural England from 1815 onwards.

## Escape strategy

Competition for status between Highland aristocratic chiefs and their lowland and English counterparts appears to have led many of the former into what commentators have called a "luxury trap" (p131). Many traditional Gaelic leaders fell into debt, and by the mid-19th century some two thirds of Highland estates had changed hands (p132). Pressure was on for a viable economic escape strategy, and here sheep ranching offered an attractive way out: sheep walks were a way of cutting labour costs, but required the eviction of customary tenants from their holdings in low-lying areas.

An anonymous Gaelic speaker saw what was coming: "*Mo thruaighe ort a thir, tha'n aorach mhor a' teachd!*" ('Woe to thee, oh land, the great sheep is coming!')<sup>5</sup>

The sheep in question was the Cheviot breed, developed in the south-eastern Border region:

The specialist region for sheep was Roxburgh and Peebles in the central and eastern Borders, while cattle rearing and fattening was more dominant further west in Galloway and the surrounding districts. What happened in these areas eventually generated the model for the later and more familiar clearances in the Highlands. Indeed, it was Border-reared and improved Cheviot breeds which from the last quarter of the 18th century began to stock numerous farms across the north-west and the islands in a seemingly inexorable white tide, which led to the uprooting of many peasant communities (p83).

The most extreme example of the process in the Highlands is undoubtedly that of the Sutherland estates, where the traditional clan chieftain also enjoyed feudal title as the Countess (later Duchess) of Sutherland:

Between 1807 and 1821 the factors of the Countess of Sutherland and her husband, Lord Stafford, removed several thousand people from the internal parishes to tiny



Dispossessed by clan chiefs and aristocrats

crofters of no more than three acres established on the inhospitable eastern coast. There they were to labour to bring barren land into cultivation by spade husbandry and at the same time take up fishing in a harbourless maritime environment ... Meanwhile the fertile inland straths, where their ancestors had lived since time immemorial, were converted into large holdings for sheep. In its scale and ambition the Sutherland strategy was the most extraordinary example of social engineering in 19th-century Britain (p226).<sup>6</sup>

Devine has also some interesting details on the Sutherland's agent, Patrick Sellar - a native of the lowland part of Morayshire, who was a lawyer by profession (p301). Devine's assessment is that:

The Countess ... [and especially her estate managers] had apparently little understanding of the values and culture of the people and their attachment to a time-honoured way of life [in which it was held that the chief's duty to protect his clan - literally 'children' - was paramount]. To these non-Gaels, their attitudes were not only archaic, but wholly irrational. Sellar, for example, had nothing but racialised contempt for the people, dismissing them scathingly on more than one occasion as primitives or 'aborigines' (p228).<sup>7</sup>

Sellar was determined that the original cleared settlements of the Gael were to be rendered uninhabitable from clearance onward (p227). Such was his zeal that he was eventually tried in 1815 at Inverness High Court in connection with his handling of the clearance of Strathnaver, on a charge of "culpable homicide, oppression and real injury". Devine publishes a contemporary *aoir* (satire) in Scots Gaelic composed against Patrick Sellar, both in the original and in English translation (pp296-99).

## Emigration

Devine draws attention to the amount of Scottish emigration to Ulster at the close of the 17th century, as a result of poor harvests and famine, with a total of some 40,000 Scots crossing to Ireland in the period 1695-1700 (pp66-67). Emigration due to clearance seems to have commenced from Campbell territories in the 1730s - Argyll estates, Mull, Tiree, Breadalbane estates, with small parties leaving also from Sutherland, bound for Georgia and the Carolinas across the Atlantic (p45). Roughly contemporaneously there was a scheme devised by Macleod

and MacDonald of Sleat to deport clansmen and their families from the isle of Skye.

Major transoceanic emigration seems to have started with the end of the largely Anglo-French Seven Years War in 1763 (Peace of Paris), which opened the prospect of British colonisation of large stretches of territory previously controlled by the French. This was aided by the desire of Glasgow merchants to finance the outward half of the Atlantic crossing, as well as profiting from tobacco, timber and rice imports from the New World. Devine asserts that between 1700 and 1815 some 90,000-100,000 Scots left for North America, mostly in the period 1763-1775. They came not only from the Highlands, but from the western lowlands also (pp157-58).<sup>8</sup>

However, such uprooting was not as traumatic as compulsory emigration, which occurred again from the Highlands in the mid-19th century - such as, for example, the ejection by command of some 3,000 destitute tenant and cottar families from Barra, Benbecula and South Uist to Quebec in 1848-51, whose members arrived in a weakened state (see p323).

The islanders of Lewis went through a comparable experience between 1851 and 1855:

The wealthy owner, Sir James Matheson, the China opium magnate of Jardine, Matheson & Co, decided to 'emigrate' many of his destitute tenants and cottars through a huge programme of evictions and 'assisted' transportation to Canada. No fewer than 2,327 men, women and children were eventually given the bleak choice of being cleared and left destitute or of boarding the emigrant ships for supported passage across the Atlantic. In 1851, just before the emigration, the population of Lewis outside the town of Stornoway stood at 17,320 men, women and children. The population 'emigrated' accounted for just over 13% of that total (p235).

Mention should also be made here of the Emigration Advances Act (1851), introduced in response to the potato blight and famine under Sir Charles Trevelyan, assistant secretary to the treasury, who played a major role in the British government's response to the parallel, but even more devastating, events in Ireland.

Trevelyan was assisted by Sir John MacNeil in the Highland and Island Emigration Society, which arranged finance for the exodus of some 5,000 people to Australia between 1851 and 1856 (see p319). We get a glimpse

of Trevelyan's thoughts on page 320, where he is recorded as being of the opinion that people of Teutonic stock might possibly take the place of the Scots and Irish natives, as they are "an orderly, moral, industrious and frugal people, less foreign to us than the Irish or Scotch Celt; a congenial element which will readily assimilate with our body politic".

A theme running through the book is that, compared with the at times cataclysmic disruption caused by some of the Highland clearances, as far as the lowlands were concerned, the process was more gradual and less intense in its effects. For example, Devine writes:

By comparison with the north-west and the islands, ... dispossession seems to have caused much less dislocation in most parts away from the upland districts of the Borders and other zones of hill country, where pastoralism offered the most profitable option by the late 18th century ...

In addition, the consolidation of farms under single husbandmen in arable districts was a gradual and protracted process, mainly carried out by the normal method of letting and reletting of holdings at the end of term. Cottars were forced to surrender their plots of land, but there was the possibility of finding work in rural villages and small towns, which, unlike those of the same type in the Highlands, often had a sustainable economic future because of the successful expansion of country textile industries.

But the vexatious nature of the process should not be underestimated. Cottar families left the traditional townships for an uncertain future, in which new opportunities existed, but could not necessarily be guaranteed. The experience was one of dispersal and not always carefully planned transfer to a new environment. The silence of the people should not be interpreted as the happy acceptance of a life-changing process (pp356-57).

Furthermore, Devine suggests, the level of landlords' investment, leading in certain cases to a dramatic rise in their rental income,<sup>9</sup> was appreciated by those lowland farmers who welcomed their escape from the thickets of traditional communally organised agriculture (the so-called run-rig, separate strip farming subject to periodic redistribution of holdings), since, once such 'strong farmer' tenants were in place, investment from landowners was needed by way of enclosure, funds for erecting farm buildings and outlay on roads, in order to market the product (p154). This investment and oversight was necessarily a long-drawn-out one, and also conducive, to dampening social unrest (p155) - inasmuch as it was successful, which it was on the whole, despite a number of poor harvests in the later 18th century.<sup>10</sup>

A third salient point is that the lowland and Highlands clearances were not, in fact, one synchronised process. The clearances from the Highlands began later than those from the south, and, moreover,

still had only limited impact by the last quarter of the 18th century. They also lasted for nearly a hundred years - a much longer time frame than dispossession in the

# What we fight for

lowlands. Not until the later 1850s did mass removals come to an end in the north-west Highlands and islands. Indeed [as we have seen], some of the most controversial and highly publicised evictions took place earlier in that decade (p358).

## Modes

Devine's remarks on the parallel Irish experience of famine and eviction of tenants are illuminating, but surely need a broader anthropological and historical context as well. Here the Marxian notions of 'mode of production' and 'social formation' are also illuminating, since all social development is both uneven and 'combined' in terms of existing features - any particular combination being one with a chance of becoming the future norm or else one in which the past dominates.

A starting point in modes of production is what I would call the basic or initial 'tribute mode', which would directly follow original communism (usually referred to as 'primitive communism', which is a misleading description). This 'basic tribute mode' is to be distinguished from the so-called 'Asiatic mode', which would include the ancient Incas of America, as well as ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, etc. The basic tribute mode, I would argue, appears as control by male patriarchs or elders, out of which a tribal aristocracy can develop. Pre-Roman Celtic Gaul and pre-Norman Celtic Ireland are examples of the latter (the ancient Romans never conquered Ireland).<sup>11</sup>

In the Irish case, a full, native-based feudalism did not develop, and moves in that direction were overtaken by the Norman conquest in the 12th century. Anglo-Saxon England, and Scotland, did go further along this road (witness King Edward the Confessor and, in Scotland, David I, who reigned from 1124-53 and was a conduit of Norman influences<sup>12</sup>). What seems to have occurred subsequently in both Ireland and Scotland was a movement by the mediaeval English and Scottish kings to impose 'high feudalism' over the Gaelic inhabitants of each realm, as seen in Ireland by the policy of 'surrender and regnant', revived by Henry VIII,<sup>13</sup> and in Scotland by King James III (1460-88), who forced John MacDonald, Fourth Lord of the Isles, to surrender Kintyre and the earldom of Ross and hold his whole lordship feudally. Gaelic rulers in this position still had to reckon with the expectations of their clan folk that their chief was responsible to them in a conflict with the demands of the state power, as constituted by the English and Scots monarchies.

The route to the establishment of capitalism was not entirely the same also: the Plantation of Ulster under James VI created the basis for the emergence of that province as an industrial stronghold as well as a bastion of the 'British-Irish'; despite some analogous colonisation schemes in Scotland (eg, on the Isle of Lewis), the industrial development of Scotland occurred in the lowlands (principally in the central belt).

The point I wish to make is that a 'national superiority complex' to the detriment of Gaelic culture in both Ireland and Scotland was in many ways an expression of differences, leading back ultimately to a fundamental difference in the historic mode of production between the Gaelic areas, on the one hand, and the English-speaking and lowland areas - the former closer to tribalism,<sup>14</sup> the latter based on high (Norman-style) feudalism and, subsequently, capitalism.

Just as predominantly Catholic Ireland generated a huge peasant problem up until the beginning of the 20th century, so the consolidation of rule by the English and Scots ruling classes was impeded in the Scottish

Highlands by geography, by the remnants of a distinct proto-nationality (the Scottish Gael) and a lack of viable industrial centres in that region. As we have noted, emigration was being canvassed as a remedy in Scotland, and it was also seized upon in Ireland both in 1847 by destitute Irish small farmers and in 1848 by strong farmers eager to escape the tragedy.<sup>15</sup> A passage in Cecil Woodham Smith's classic work on the Irish potato famine can be read as an indictment of capitalism pure and simple:

The influence of *laissez faire* on the treatment of Ireland during the famine is impossible to exaggerate. Almost without exception the high officials and politicians responsible for Ireland were fervent believers in non-interference by government, and the behaviour of the British authorities only becomes explicable when their fanatical belief in private enterprise and their suspicions of any action which might be considered government intervention are borne in mind.

... [Hence] there was to be 'no disturbance of the ordinary course of trade' and 'no complaints from private traders' on account of government competition.

The flaw in the plan was the undeveloped state of the food and provision trade in a great part of Ireland. Large numbers of people, especially in the west and south-west, hardly purchased food at all; they grew potatoes and lived on them. Shops and organisations for importing foodstuffs and distributing them on the English model were generally found only in more prosperous districts in north-east Ulster, Dublin, some places in eastern Ireland and the larger towns, like Cork. Where relief would be most needed, the means by which it was to be supplied seldom existed.<sup>16</sup>

Did this not apply to some extent also in the Scottish Highlands? Perhaps, but, as Devine points out, there were differences - not only in the sheer scale of the problem in Ireland by comparison, but in actual state intervention, which in the Scottish case did actually station one vessel at Tobermory on Mull and another at Portree on Skye, where landowners could purchase grain at set prices to provide relief. "This initiative ran from 1846 to 1847, and after that the burden was borne by Church charities," writes Devine (p308).<sup>17</sup> Back in 1836 and 1837 the Highland crofters lost a quarter to a half of the usual potato crop, plus a half to a third of the oats crop (p251).

## Post-clearance

One of the most informative features of the book is the observations on the lowlands - post-clearances, from around 1750 to World War II, which are full of interest concerning the popular literature and folk culture of Scotland. Consider the following passage on ploughmen, whose prowess was celebrated in song:

The horsemen might have seen themselves as princes of the farm, but they could not function without the support of many other hands. Of crucial importance were women workers. By 1871 over a quarter of all permanent farm servants in Scotland were women, and they also formed the majority of the seasonal labour force at the busy times. The reliance on female labour was distinctively Scottish, as nothing like the same dependency existed in the southern and Midland counties of England.

By custom females were paid half the male wage. They carried out all the work on the farm except those which directly involved the

management of horses: sowing, reaping, weeding, hoeing, singling and pulling turnips, gathering in the potato crop and spreading manure. Women also had a monopoly of milking and cheese-making. Small, family-run farms in the south-west region especially depended on the labour of wives and daughters.

The lives of these women were likened by some observers to those of black slaves, so all-consuming were the hours of work and so tiny the pittance paid by fathers to unmarried daughters under the 'tyranny of family labour'. It was said that women were such a significant part of the workforce because the heavy industries in Scotland of iron, steel, engineering and shipbuilding drew off so many men from the countryside to better-paid jobs in the towns and cities (p195).

Not that mechanically expert male workers were absent from these farms: "The 'orra man' or 'other man' was also a master of all trades. He could plough, manage cattle, and put his hand to the repair of the farm tools" (p195).

Seasonal workers for the grain and potato harvests - day labourers from nearby villages, plus Highlanders and Irish for the same works, and shepherds - complete the picture (pp195-96).

Devine mentions Lewis Grassie Gibbon's trilogy of novels with the title *A Scots quair* ('A Scottish book'), consisting of *Sunset song* (published in 1932), *Cloud Howe* (1933) and *Grey granite* (1934), that evokes this world. The quotations from Robert Burns are also used pointedly, and set some of Burns's poems in context.

Finally, on differences between the Scottish lowlands and rural England in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, Devine stresses to start with that the situations of farm labourers were at opposite poles here: in England there was a labour surplus on the land, resulting from the southern areas exhibiting increased grain production, market prices rising in wartime, and the introduction of the threshing machine, which led to less labour being required by the farmer in winter, when threshing had traditionally been carried out by hand (p199). The result was a growth in casual labour at harvest time, but such labourers lived in nearby villages separate from their workplace, and were paid by day or by the week. 'Long hiring' (by comparison) survived in Scotland, with workers hired for six months or for a year. Moreover,

Payments in kind, though they varied in detail, still formed a very substantial part of the wage reward for most workers. In the south-eastern lowlands and parts of the east central district ... most permanent farm workers were married ploughmen, or *hinds*. As far as life's necessities were concerned, they were insulated from the market when fee'd [hired]. The allowances for the *hind* included stipulated measures of oats, barley and pease, the keep of a cow and ground for planting potatoes. The rental of the cottage was paid for by the labour of his wife and daughters during harvest. Fuel was carted from town at the master's expense and, by law, he was also obliged to provide for the *hind* for six weeks when he was unable to work because of ill-health (pp198-99).<sup>18</sup>

All this contrasts markedly with the parallel English experience. Further, in lowland Scotland there was competition close by for available labour: that is to say, in the form of urban industry, while spinning and weaving continued to operate rurally (pp199-200). Yet again, the upkeep of horses was paramount and expensive,

and it was necessary to keep them working throughout the year. Climate was also a factor, leading to mixed farming in Scotland rather than cereal monoculture.

As a result it was easier for the lowland Scots farmer to control his workers than it was for his English counterpart.<sup>19</sup> And there is this telling comparison:

As in the crofting districts of the Highlands, the root cause of the social crisis in southern England was the emergence of a gross imbalance between a rising population and limited employment opportunities. Indeed, fewer labourers were leaving the agricultural districts of East Anglia, Suffolk, Surrey, Sussex, Middlesex, Kent and Hampshire precisely at the time when grain farming was itself in acute difficulty after the Napoleonic wars. There was thus increasing pressure on the regional Poor Law at a time when farmers and landlords were less able or less willing to raise their rate subsidies to provide support. Indeed, the attempts to cut the Poor Law dole was a major factor in the discontent which triggered the 'Captain Swing' riots all over the south and east of England in 1830 (p206).

Do read this book if you are not too busy. It is a timely reminder that Scotland, as a whole, is a very different country from England ●

## Notes

- 1760 is convenient as a marker, being the year when the Carron Iron works began production ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carron\\_Company](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carron_Company)).
- As in Burns' poem, 'The Cottar's Saturday night', excerpted on pages 78-79. See also glossary, pp20-xxi. There is also a revealing passage reproduced from 'Tam o' Shanter', where the wives curse husbands drinking at a hostelry in the evening (pp188-89).
- This brown seaweed yields soda and iodine.
- Devine discusses it in his introduction, conclusion (pp352-63) and also annex A - 'Excerpts from popular histories 1974-2000', p365.
- Quoted in J Prebble *The Highland clearances* London 1969, p24.
- Cf K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, chapter 27, Moscow, pp729-30. See also J Prebble *The Highland clearances* London 1969, chronology/timeline.
- For the racist element in early 19th-century medical and scientific thought in the UK, and its reflexion in prominent organs of the contemporary Scottish press, see pp316-17: *The Scotsman*, *The Glasgow Herald* and the *Inverness Courier* (a pro-landlord Highland paper) are mentioned.
- See the references to the United Company of Farmers, and the Scots-American Company Farmers - tenants clubbing together to raise the passage money (p158).
- Eg, the average increase on the Douglas estate in Lanarkshire between 1737 and 1815 was an eightfold one, while the Earl of Eglinton in Ayrshire enjoyed an annual rental of £11,054 in 1797 - more than doubling to £25,992 in 1815.
- Compare the policy tsar Nicholas II's advisor, Pyotr Stolypin, which the latter called "banking on the strong" (*O Figs A people's tragedy* London 1997, p99).
- A passage in Devine illustrates this, relating to before 1746: "... rentals in kind of cattle, sheep, meal, cheese, hens and geese, which were paid the chief by clansmen in their role as tenants, were sometimes converted back into the provision subsistence support in seasons of shortage. In this way, the clan elites were able to provide a form of social insurance in a volatile environment. It was an expected obligation which endured as expectation among the people after the ethic of clanship had passed into history" (p34). The continuation of this passage highlights another activity that chiefs were expected to organise: "Feasting at the behest of the leading families also had a vital social purpose. As well generating the chief's capacities for generosity and hospitality, collective eating and drinking also generated a sense of communal harmony for all clan families, no matter their rank."
- See C Bamberg *A people's history of Scotland* London 2014, p14.
- See GR Elton *England under the Tudors* London 1962, p384.
- 'Tribalism' will do as a descriptive term, if understood as referring to the basic tribute mode, and not merely pejorative.
- See C Woodham Smith *The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845-1849* London 1991, pp325, 371.
- Ibid* pp54-55.
- Four-fifths of Hebridean islanders' nourishment in 1811 possibly consisted of potatoes and oats (see p239).
- Single men and women servants were also given accommodation on the farm (p199).
- Exceptionally, those men given accommodation on the farm in bothies (separate buildings for unmarried males) did tend to embrace radical politics: that is to say, Chartism (p201).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# weekly worker

**SRWP will  
challenge ANC-  
SACP in May 8  
elections**

## A promising start

Peter Manson welcomes the formation of the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party in South Africa

More than a thousand comrades attended the three-day launch congress of the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party last week. The SRWP has announced that it will contest the May 8 general election and its leader, Irvin Jim, has stated that the aim will be to do better than the left-populist Economic Freedom Fighters, which in 2014 was the third largest party with 25 seats (6.35%).

The driving force behind the SRWP is the country's largest trade union, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), with its 340,000 members. Back in 2013 Numsa announced that it had broken with the ruling African National Congress and its alliance partner, the South African Communist Party, in protest at the blatantly neoliberal policies of the ANC government. Up until then Numsa had been a prominent force within the SACP-led Congress of South African Trade Unions, but, as a result of its schism with the ANC, it was expelled from Cosatu soon afterwards and felt obliged to set up a rival confederation, the South African Federation of Trade Unions (Saftu).

However, while Saftu has been up and running for some time, the new party - which the Numsa leadership claimed would soon be launched six years ago (there was even talk of it contesting in 2014!) - has finally seen the light of day exactly one month before the 2019 general election. Although its launch has received reasonable publicity in the South African media, it is very unlikely that it will be able to build up a huge amount of steam by May 8. It should, however, see several candidates elected, as the voting system is completely proportional, with no minimum threshold: just 0.25% of the total vote is enough to win any party standing one of the 400 seats in parliament.

It is true that there were strong disagreements between the two main personalities involved in the breakaway - Irvin Jim himself and Zwelinzima Vavi, who was dismissed as Cosatu general secretary in 2015. Vavi was then appointed to the same post in Saftu, but the new confederation announced in November 2018 it would not be backing the SRWP after all: Saftu had decided to "resist being stampeded into becoming a labour desk for, or forming an alliance with, any political party". It seems that Vavi had wanted a rather 'broader' formation than Jim had in mind.

While that, of course, dealt a bitter blow to Jim's plans, it does not explain why things have been so slow-moving. For example, there is still no SRWP website and its Facebook page is not exactly regularly updated.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it is certainly positive that a workers' party that calls itself socialist and revolutionary will stand in opposition to the ANC next month.

For a while it had seemed that

the SACP, despite itself driving the expulsion of Numsa from Cosatu for rejecting the ANC, would commit the same 'crime' itself by contesting the 2019 elections in its own name. After its July 2017 congress it announced that "the SACP will certainly contest elections" - although "the exact modality in which we do so needs to be determined by way of a concrete analysis of the concrete reality and through the process of active engagement with worker and progressive formations".<sup>2</sup>

Later that year the SACP did indeed contest a municipal by-election, but soon afterwards all mention of going it alone was quietly dropped. This was, of course, not unconnected to the departure of Jacob Zuma and his replacement as president by Cyril Ramaphosa. The party was so opposed to Zuma and his blatant corruption that it had been prepared, as a last resort, to ditch the ANC and look for a replacement "popular front" to further advance the "national democratic revolution" - which it laughably contends has been making substantial progress under the ANC and is "the most direct route to socialism in South Africa".

But, thanks to Ramaphosa, it seems that the SACP is now fully back on board - despite the fact that the current president was directly implicated in the Marikana massacre of August 2012. As a senior board member of Lonmin, the company employing the 34 striking miners who were shot dead by police, Ramaphosa had, on the very eve of the slaughter, urged the police to take "concomitant action" against them.

### Marxist-Leninist

But Marikana was the last straw for many in the workers' movement, who up till then had been prepared to go along with the SACP's nonsense about the "national democratic revolution". It was Marikana that sparked the rebellion within Cosatu, led by Numsa, whose leadership had once been SACP loyalists - it seems that the overwhelming majority of those attending the SRWP founding congress were in fact Numsa members.

Clearly demonstrating that the likes of Irvin Jim have not forgotten the language they learnt as SACP members, the SRWP issued a statement on April 8, two days after



Irvin Jim: "socialism only"

its congress ended:

The SRWP is a Marxist-Leninist party fighting for the establishment of a classless society. Our primary objective is to organise and unite the working class by raising the levels of consciousness, around the class divisions in society. We are in a struggle to overthrow the capitalist system and replace it with a democratic socialist state.<sup>3</sup>

At the congress Numsa president Andrew Chirwa stated: "This is not a party for reform. This is a party for communists. We are serious about the revolution. We are a party for socialism and nothing else." Later SRWP spokesperson Phakamile Hlubi-Majola commented: "We are the only ones fighting for the total destruction of capitalism." It is hardly accidental that the SRWP seems to have adopted the slogan, 'Equality, work and land' - rather reminiscent of the Bolsheviks' 'Peace, land and bread'.

While the party's election manifesto is expected very soon, Jim - who was elected national chair and effective leader - has already stated that it will include the aim of "eradicating poverty and unemployment within five years". Among the policy motions agreed was the establishment of a single education system and the elimination of private schools.

As for elections, Jim says: "As communists we have an old view that elections are not necessarily a solution. However, they are a tactic that can be explored to test if we have the support of the working class."

This was echoed by Shaheen Khan, a member of the SRWP national working committee:

Rather than pursuing votes, Khan says, the SRWP is "focused on using every opportunity to raise the consciousness of the working class on the nature of the capitalist system and our need to organise independently outside of parliament and against it". The party's aim is "merely to secure a presence in parliament, from which we can raise the working class voice and expose the capitalist nature of parliament itself".<sup>4</sup>

Positive and correct decisions were taken on the question of party organisation. For example, Khan pledged that SRWP candidates elected on May 8 would be subject to "instant recall" by the party. They would be paid the wage of an "average skilled worker", with the rest of their official salary redirected to the party, in order to "advance working class struggle". Furthermore, it was decided that members of the national leadership would not stand for parliament.

It was agreed that - unlike the SACP, which accepts as a member anyone who fills in an application form - the SRWP would enforce strict criteria. There will be a "60-day induction programme" and members will be expected to "undergo rigorous political training" and sign a code of conduct. Membership will be open from the age of 14 and there will be "socialist programmes" of education during school holidays.

A word of warning, however. Despite the revolutionary rhetoric

and the adoption of many radical and progressive positions, the basic politics of the SRWP's overwhelming majority is derived from what they learned from the SACP. Socialism is considered mainly as an objective for South Africa alone rather than a global process, and the SRWP's 'internationalism' will probably be based on solidarity with the likes of Cuba and Venezuela.

And the bourgeoisie is not exactly shaking with fear. For example, while Imraan Buccus of the Auwal Socio-Economic Research Institute points out that "the road is open" for the SRWP to "capture a currently vacant political space on the left", its emergence should be considered as "an important step towards the normalisation of our politics, and towards offering real choices to the electorate".<sup>5</sup>

And an article in the online *Daily Maverick* contends that the SRWP could be a blessing in disguise for the ANC. Perhaps the new party could play a similar role to that of the SACP in helping to keep the working class in its place:

It may be possible for, say, the ANC to reach an agreement with Irvin Jim's SRWP, because of his support from organised labour. If the ANC can get the SRWP to cast its ballot for the ruling party, Jim may be offered a place in the sixth administration.<sup>6</sup>

That seems very unlikely right now, of course, given the clear positions the SRWP has just adopted. But such statements should act as a warning against complacency. The SRWP should be regarded as a site for struggle in the battle for genuine Marxism and proletarian internationalism ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.co.uk

### Notes

- www.facebook.com/OfficialSRWP.
- 'Declaration of the 14th Party Congress', July 15 2017.
- www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/fighting-for-a-classless-society--srwp.
- www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2019/03/CCPA%20Monitor%20Mar%20Apr%202019%20WEB%5B1%5D.pdf
- Ibid.
- www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-04-08-writing-the-2019-election-personalities-time-and-money-prevent-the-beating-of-the-anc.

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