



weekly **worker**



Silence in the face of a baseless, utterly cynical witch-hunt is complicity

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Voting for the comedian is an act of sheer desperation

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LETTERS



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

Patronising

Eddie Ford tells the activists of Extinction Rebellion that their “fighting spirit is admirable”, but that they lack “strategy and programme” (‘Fill the jails’, April 25). A bit patronising, perhaps. XR (not ER - Ford clearly hasn’t read enough to know their own chosen acronym) have just achieved a bigger mobilisation than anything produced by the far left since Stop the War. They might well wonder why they need to be lectured on their failings by an organisation whose “strategy” over the last 20 years has not enabled it to raise its membership above the 30 mark.

The first stage of XR’s campaign has forced millions of people to at least think about the threat of climate catastrophe. It has even penetrated the often closed and self-congratulatory world of the far left. Thus Alex Callinicos calls the demonstrations a “watershed” and urges “we should be part of this” (*Socialist Worker* April 24). Callinicos obviously feels the mantle of Tony Cliff on his shoulders, as he bends his stick towards climate change. But the SWP’s turn can only be welcomed, even if it is a little belated. At the SWP’s conference three months ago there were only passing references to climate change.

What the SWP’s turn will mean remains unclear. Shall we see professor Callinicos gluing himself to a tube train? In fact I fancy most of the SWP’s silver-haired cadre would find, if they tried to sit down in the road, that they would be unable to stand up again (this is certainly the case for myself).

XR have mobilised thousands of young and not so young activists; among their supporters there must be an amazing ferment of ideas and debate, a search for strategies and tactics to advance their campaign. It is very unlikely that they are waiting for a self-appointed ‘Leninist’ vanguard to tell them what to do next.

Eddie Ford reminds XR of the fate of the Committee of 100, though his knowledge of it seems to be largely derived from Wikipedia. Thus he tells us it was wound up in 1968 - technically true, but it made no impact whatsoever after 1962. The Committee of 100 confined its demonstrations to small sit-downs, often directed at military targets; the scale of action and use of imaginative tactics by XR has already gone far beyond anything done by the Committee of 100. And to imagine that XR are incapable of learning from history (because only the vanguard party understands history?) is plain stupid.

Ford condemns XR for its “emphasis on non-violence and pacifism”. Now I entirely agree with his argument about the role of violence in political change. But, since (to the best of my knowledge) the CPGB are not currently engaged in armed struggle, this is very much a case of juxtaposing what you do to what we say. Ford admonishes us that “to overcome capitalism requires a serious organisation and a serious programme”. I agree - but such an organisation is rather more likely to emerge from XR than from the ranks of the CPGB (or for that matter the SWP).

Given its rapid growth, I would suspect very few XR activists are committed to non-violence in principle. Rather they recognise that in the present circumstances non-violence is an effective tactic. (See the excellent article on the *Marxists Internet Archive* by Peter Sedgwick about the Committee of 100: ‘Non-violence - dogma or tactic?’, which still makes some relevant points.)

Perhaps the Marxist left needs to show a bit more humility and subtlety, asking - as Lenin used to do - what can be learned from the struggle. How did XR recruit, organise and train so many supporters so quickly? Surely the left should be trying

to learn from this, not counterposing an abstract model of the ‘Leninist party’.

Certainly Marxists have a part to play in the struggle against climate catastrophe. The relationship between climate change and the capitalist drive for profit needs to be central. But we should be a bit cautious. I remember confidently asserting that South African apartheid could not be ended without socialist revolution. Now I’m a bit more careful about prophesying. And if those who rabbit on interminably about the ‘central role of the working class’ could deliver even one or two token strikes it would be a significant start.

In short, let’s welcome XR and try to learn from them, rather than treating them as unruly kids in need of a lecture.

Ian Birchall
London

Not helpful

There are a couple of corrections and additions I want to make to Eddie Ford’s article. Firstly he notes that Extinction Rebellion was initially established in May 2018. This is not exactly correct, as some of the people behind it were also behind Occupy, so it is a continuation and replication of Occupy’s non-violent tactics and consensual democracy.

As for its political strategy, it does have one: to protest; and now representatives of Extinction Rebellion have been mandated to meet political leaders, including in the past couple of days Michael Gove, secretary of state for the environment, mayor of London Sadiq Khan and shadow chancellor John McDonnell.

Ford is correct to say that Extinction Rebellion does not have an anti-capitalist programme. However, he is wrong to say that reducing carbon emissions to net zero by 2025 is implicitly anti-capitalist. Capitalist firms could offset their carbon emissions by investing in renewables or planting tranches of trees, which would not overturn capitalism. However, there seem to be mixed messages, with some activists arguing for a full-frontal anti-capitalist line, while others call for a Green New Deal, similar to that of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of the Democratic Socialists of America.

However, for Jeremy Corbyn to demand that the UK becomes the first country in the world to declare a climate emergency, and for Ed Miliband and Caroline Lucas to call for it to be put “on a war footing”, with an end to “climate appeasement”, is not helpful. Listening to this and some of the activists, they almost sound millenarian in outlook. What does a climate emergency mean? According to the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, an emergency can include war, attack by a foreign power or terrorists, leading to a serious threat to UK security. I don’t think many activists would like to see even more centralisation of government powers to crush human freedoms.

But Extinction Rebellion activists and the governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, appear to be on the same page. In a 2015 speech, Carney said the challenges currently posed by climate change pale into significance compared with what might come. Whether he would go as far as George Monbiot, who has said that climate change requires facing down capitalism, is another matter. As for Extinction Rebellion, I am not sure what they want.

Mick Hurst
Manchester

Headbangers

The ‘inmates’ at Wisbech town council have finally ‘taken over the asylum’. The Tory-controlled council recently passed a motion that it will campaign for a ‘no-deal’ Brexit.

First, a ‘no-deal’ Brexit would lead to a hard border between north and south Ireland. Second, the M20 in Kent would become one huge lorry park. Third, the car industry in Britain would go out of business. Fourth, the City of London

would become a worldwide tax haven for the super-rich. Fifth, the NHS would be sold to giant American health insurance companies.

A ‘no-deal’ Brexit would complete the ‘Thatcher revolution’, turning Britain into a deregulated, low-wage economy bereft of workers’ rights. Wisbech town council is therefore wrong to campaign for a ‘no-deal’ Brexit. It is a very good example of the kind of Tory headbangers who dominate the one-party state known as Fenland.

John Smithe
Cambridgeshire

Frustration

Anyone in Ulster over the Easter commemorations long weekend will have been hit by the wave of emotion which flowed through the republican communities and across the organisational divides following the fatal shooting of Lyra McKee in Derry.

The backdrop has been the increasing harassment of the non-constitutionalist wings of the republican movement across the board: house raids, stop and search, raids on bookshops and in supporting communities. Meantime Sinn Féin has been working overtime to isolate all non-constitutionalists and delegitimise them, even where they are no longer engaged in armed struggle. It is more or less generally accepted by everyone now that the popular armed struggle is over in this period and the compass has swung to overt political organisation and issues.

Saoradh, the political formation to which the NIRA is associated, had claimed to be ‘breaking the mould’ and making broad ventures into prominent community activity. The Irish Republican Socialist Party - in my view the most mature and realistic of the non-constitutionalist wing of republicanism - is central to discussions on how the opportunity of a border poll will be utilised. Its programme for ‘out of the EU and the UK’ stands in contrast to SF and the social democratic bloc it is trying to forge. Exactly what will the poll decide? Is this a vote for the status quo, with the Six Counties remaining in the UK, but still on the current basis within the EU customs and free movement area? Something which is sellable to the loyalist communities, but maintains UK domination. To the British state, this offers a sort of EU Hong Kong, which economically could well suit. SF seems to lean in this direction.

For the IRSP and others not in SF’s official tent, the prospect of a border poll, which goes to the root of challenging the existence of the Six Counties statelet, is a real prospect, with an end to the border and reunification on terms to be agreed possibly on the cards. These are exciting times in the political arena and far outweigh any attempt to keep the candle of armed rebellion burning. That is not to say that any serious socialist republican group should not maintain at least the capacity to defend itself and the community, should the nature of the situation change.

The republican parades through Belfast showed the strengths and weaknesses of the aspiration to republicanism, with crowds out on the street, watching in succession the various factions and wings march by to their respective rallies. The IRSP, then SF, then Saoradh. While the IRSP extended its sympathy to the partner and family of Lyra and made no criticism of the tactic, SF was far more blunt, calling on the New IRA to give up the posturing and issue an apology.

Tellingly Saoradh itself extended its sympathy and called upon the NIRA to issue an apology - something they later did. I thought this was an attempt to distance the political movement from its military wing and deflect the disgust directed toward them from all quarters.

It was telling when iconic wall murals, depicting various actions, combat and deaths in the cause of republicanism,

were in the aftermath of the killing systematically defaced. The famous “Free Derry” was underscored with “Not in our name” and “RIP Lyra”. While one could see this as outrage at the death, the defacement seemed to be saying much more than that. It seemed to be saying, ‘None of this - the struggle, the resistance, internment, armed struggle - is anything to do with us now’. One would suspect that this is the reaction of Lyra’s personal friends and family, and perhaps sections of the gay community, who have felt outside the whole republican world for some time. Such a reaction would be far more damaging if it were a widespread one.

Despite the united front of churches and political parties across both countries to draw an emphatic line under the radical cause of Ireland this is unlikely to stick. Certainly the men and women who marched behind the tricolours and stary ploughs in their paramilitary uniforms, including Sinn Féin, were predominantly young and their reception in the communities would not indicate any widespread disillusionment in the cause of a 32-county Irish socialist republic.

David Douglass
South Shields

Sowing illusions

Dave Douglass is correct: I don’t classify him as an ally of the Democratic Unionist Party (Letters, April 18). However, that doesn’t excuse his blinkered approach to Brexit and British racism.

Dave questions my assertion that the majority of the republican movement is opposed to Brexit. Well, assuming that we still consider Sinn Féin part of that movement, the Good Friday agreement notwithstanding, that statement remains true. What is clear is that the overwhelming majority of the nationalist community voted against leaving the European Union and likewise a smaller majority of the unionist community voted in favour of Brexit.

Dave says that the fact that he “favours Britain out of the EU state in no way means that I am in favour of the UK state”. I accept that, but unfortunately he has difficulty accepting that the same is true in reverse for myself. The fact that I am in favour of remaining in the EU does not mean I support it as some form of “equalitarian, progressive, socialist reformism”. I don’t. Clearly the EU is a neoliberal, pan-European entity with certain social safeguards built in order to prevent a race to the bottom. However, the alternative is not a socialist Britain, but an independent capitalist Britain, effectively under the thumb of the United States, where even the most cursory regulatory protections will go in terms of the environment, food standards and so on.

I do not accept that there is an “EU state”, as Dave asserts. The EU is a confederation of states. That is merely rightwing, little Englander propaganda. However, I do think that the EU is more progressive than its alternative, which is an independent capitalist Britain. I am in favour of visa-free travel throughout Europe without border checkpoints. I am in favour of being able to carry a European health card and be treated by the health services of any EU country. Of course, I would prefer that there was one NHS, free at the point of delivery, in the whole of Europe rather than a conglomeration of different systems, in some of which you pay upfront.

However, my main objection to the Brexit project is that it is the forces of rightwing nationalism, the Boris Johnsons and Rees-Moggs, to say nothing of the fascists, who are in the driving seat of this campaign. The main question I ask is whether or not exiting the EU will serve working class interests or not. Will it build bridges with European workers and help combat chauvinism and illusions in the British ruling class? The answer is a clear no.

I listened recently to Suresh Grover of the Southall Monitoring Group, a well-known anti-racist activist who was integrally involved in the Stephen

Lawrence and Blair Peach campaigns. He described the wave of racist attacks triggered off by the referendum vote - it gave every white racist in this country confidence to tell not merely European workers, but black and Asian people, to ‘go home’.

If Dave does not understand this then he is simply blind to racism in this country. He also fails to understand that the support of much of the northern working class for Brexit stems from their defeat in the 1980s under Thatcher and subsequently. Europe has become the scapegoat and Brexit a substitute for class struggle.

I have to say that I find Dave’s talk of “a foot-loose and rootless army of casual, temporary and agency workers with no loyalty to any particular trade or industry or region” both chauvinist and shocking. The working class, as EP Thompson and Hobsbawm have shown, has been made and remade many times. The idea that there was a solid core of a white working class, whose standards were threatened by this mobile army of migrant labour, is a nonsense. When there was unemployment in Wales, workers migrated down to Kent and formed the backbone of the Kent coalfield. This has happened numerous times within the British working class.

Everything Dave is saying about unorganised workers with no loyalties to any trade was said about the Jewish refugees in the 1880s and after. It led to the Aliens Act 1905. British workers who saw their salvation in immigration legislation were essentially relying on support from their own capitalists against others. And incidentally it wasn’t trade union officials who organised Jewish workers into unions: it was self-organisation. Freedom of movement of labour may be of advantage to sections of capital. However, it is also the basis of any socialist society. Asking the state to control the movement of labour is, effectively, to ask the state to help out with improving one’s wages and conditions. It cannot but help sow illusions in the existing state.

The problem today is the political weakness of the working class, as expressed in the support of a large section of it for Brexit. Whether Dave likes it or not for the overwhelming majority this does indeed mean illusions in an independent capitalist Britain.

The suggestion that workers don’t have any nostalgia for the days of the empire is simply absurd. Belief in the myths associated with ‘Great Britain are unfortunately only too strong and they will get stronger with Brexit.

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

Careless

In his review of Paul Kelemen’s important book, *The British left and Zionism - history of a divorce*, comrade Tony Greenstein writes:

“In November 1969 there was the first Palestine Solidarity Conference of 300 people, although the organisation seems to have then disappeared ... This was a time of considerable ferment, with the emergence of an Israeli anti-Zionist organisation, Matzpen, and the idea emerged of a democratic, unitary, secular state in the whole of Palestine ...” (Israel and the “new anti-Semitism,” April 25).

This careless piece of writing seems to imply that Matzpen was somehow associated with the idea of an - inevitably bourgeois - “democratic, unitary, secular state in the whole of Palestine”. Tony surely knows that this is not the case. The idea was in fact raised by Fatah, the leading party in the Palestine Liberation Organisation, before it succumbed to the illusion of the two-state ‘solution’.

Since the mid-1960s, Matzpen advocated inclusion of Israel in a prospective socialist union or federation of the Arab East. Readers can verify this in the Matzpen website (<https://matzpen.org/english>).

I have explained the reasoning behind the Matzpen position in my article, 'Palestine/Israel: Belling the cat' (December 12 2013); and expanded on it in my article, 'Class struggle or national war?' (May 4 2017), which is a direct polemic against Tony, who supports the old PLO position.

Moshé Machover
London

Don't expel me

The steering committee of Labour Against the Witchhunt are proposing to carry out my expulsion at their May 4 all-member meeting. The committee have put my two motions last, but set their motion about me third on the agenda, so I guess they hope to shorten the meeting considerably by expelling me early doors and avoiding having to support my two initiatives.

So what is the crime I am to stand trial on? Here is the motion:

"Labour Against the Witchhunt was set up explicitly to fight the witch-hunt against Corbyn supporters in the Labour Party. As the witch-hunt has centred on the campaign to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, LAW needs to confront any hint or trace of genuine anti-Semitism in our own ranks. That is why supporters of Socialist Fight were expelled.

"Members of LAW - and in particular Tony Greenstein - have spent considerable time and effort trying to patiently discuss and explain to Peter Gregson why some of his formulations are in our view problematic - for example, in his petition on the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism (which LAW never supported). The last straw for us was Peter Gregson's refusal to distance himself from the holocaust denier, Nick Kollerstrom. We do not wish to be associated and tainted with holocaust denial and therefore believe that Peter Gregson can no longer remain a member of Labour Against the Witchhunt.

"We do not believe that Peter Gregson should be expelled from either the GMB union or the Labour Party. These are broad organisations of the working class that contain many different viewpoints."

The encounter that this is based on took place by email. It arose because I sent out a link to an article by Ian Fantom on Theodor Herzl, where Ian outlines his group's interest in the IHRA definition and makes a passing reference to a Nick Kollerstrom piece about Auschwitz. Kollerstrom is a self-declared holocaust-sceptic, who does not deny that the Nazis murdered many, many Jews, but disputes evidence around the use of Zyklon B.

The LAW motion is inaccurate in many respects. It is also wrong where it claims I refused to distance myself from Kollerstrom (who is not a "denier" anyway). If anybody reads the online account, they will see clearly that I refute Kollerstrom's claims. I also pointed out that Fantom had no opinion either way on Kollerstrom.

When Tony first read my update, he immediately issued the threat of LAW expulsion to force me to remove the Fantom article from the update I sent out on March 22. I refused, because I don't like being threatened and because I thought what Fantom said about Herzl - the father of Zionism and Israel's greatest hero - was important to hear. Many consider Herzl an extremely anti-Semitic individual; he certainly would have been on the Jewish Labour Movement's hit-list for his utterances.

In summary, the LAW steering committee are utterly wrong in their statements. Their support for Tony's anger and arrogance is part of the problem. For what Tony says is, they appear to think, always correct. Nobody could deny the devotion Greenstein has made to the cause. But his style is hectoring and this is not the first time he has sought to cause grief. He repeatedly claims I do not know the difference between Jews and Zionists. He calls me a loose cannon.

He has misquoted me in the past. I did not say, "Jews use the holocaust", as he claimed. I said that all Jews had leverage because of our holocaust guilt. I said "all Jews", because all suffered

equally on account of the way we treated them for the first half of last century, most particularly from 1933 to 1945; thus all have the leverage of guilt. But I have always made clear that only Zionists use that leverage. I had made the comments in the context of an article reflecting upon why most of the UK has raced to adopt the fraudulent and politicised definition of anti-Semitism that the IHRA presents. I pointed out that not just Jews have "guilt leverage"; Scots have leverage over the English because of the racism we suffered for centuries, which is why Westminster gives Scotland an extra billion pounds a year through the Barnett formula. In fact, I have a public-sector job because of this largesse, so the guilt leverage works for me too.

Around four weeks later, Tony changed his tune so much, he was presenting support statements for my GMB hearing against expulsion from the union. And then on March 5 he attended my appeal and spoke in defence of my freedom of speech. He says he now regrets this.

So what is going on with LAW? It feels to me that LAW, being essentially a defensive body, is unable to cope with mass disobedience. They consider we all put ourselves at risk by openly defying the Labour NEC. Their banner reads, "Defend free speech", but do they? What kind of free speech do they defend? Is there some speech that is free and some that can never be free? Just as one should be free to criticise Israel, should one not be free to call someone "a fucking anti-Semite" if one feels like it? However, if by so doing, you, as an elected representative widely associated with Labour, falsely attack the leader of the party, then clearly the matter of 'bringing the party into disrepute' must be addressed. But I am not closely associated with LAW and I have never levelled false accusations against any LAW officer.

Thus, I don't see why my ongoing membership of LAW is now under question. I am not heavily identified with LAW (unlike Stan, Jackie, Tony, etc), so why should an update to my petition (which none of them like anyway) cause them so much grief that they must disavow me?

Jackie herself, freshly expelled from Labour, after charges against her free speech were levelled, would, of all people, be expected to be sensitive to bogus charges. But she prefers to go along with Tony (and presumably her partner,

Graham Bash of *Labour Briefing*, who has also declared against publishing anything I say and do) and condemn me.

The steering group say in their invitation to the May 4 meeting: "We want to discuss how we can move the campaign forward. What can we do to stop the witch-hunt? How can we engage with the emerging efforts to unite the Labour left?" The irony of doing this by carrying out a witch-burning should not be lost on any of us. A few lines further down they propose my expulsion, presumably believing the campaign can be progressed by expelling and condemning an activist who has brought over 2,000 Labour activists together to challenge bogus anti-Semitism. They don't want to unite the left - they want to split it even more.

My boss recently told me I was a "trouble-maker". The dictionary definition of this is one who "takes action against people in power". Though I have never taken action against LAW steering group, I certainly seemed to have annoyed them so much they want me expelled from their club. I reckon I have been expelled, almost expelled or sacked from 10 bodies since I was 17, starting with my school (not wearing a uniform), and including Unison (for arguing with the NHS Lothian branch chair) and Edinburgh council, where I was fired after criticising the council. Recently I was expelled from the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign by the organiser after I disagreed with him about Christian Zionism. And then last month the Revolutionary Communist Group in Glasgow expelled me from the Zionist Is Racism coalition.

The LAW constitution states of those likely to be expelled from the Labour Party: "An accused member should be given all the evidence submitted against them and be regarded as innocent until proven guilty. Legal representation costs to be paid by the party." I asked the committee if LAW will do the same for me? My request was ignored.

Indeed, there is nothing in the LAW constitution permitting expulsion on matters of free speech; there is no rule that they can say I have broken. I actually think what the committee are proposing is unconstitutional. If you value LAW at all, please come along to the meeting on May 4 and help defend me. Join if you are not a member - it only costs £10.

Pete Gregson
Edinburgh

Fighting fund

Ease my worries

As I've been saying, the decision to increase our monthly fighting fund target has met with a fantastic response. A week ago I reported that we needed just £7 to reach the new £2,000 mark, and over the last six days of the month a further £235 came our way, taking the final tally for April to a brilliant £2,228.

Most of that came via standing orders and bank transfers - thanks in particular to DG (£60), JT (£50) and BL (£25), with a mention also for JS, SS, GT, JM, VP, RL and AR, who all donated either £10 or £15. Speaking of AR, he likes to contribute using two methods - as well as his £10 standing order, he has also organised a monthly PayPal payment of £5! Thanks also to JK, who made a another PayPal donation for £10.

And May has got off to an excellent start after just one day - we've already received no less than £231! Admittedly most of that came in the shape of three cheques, all of which were sent in April, but, since they were only received on May 1, they'll count towards this month's total. Thank you, OG and RG, who added £60 and £40 respectively to their subscription payments, and to CG, who sent us the other cheque for £30

(not to mention some stamps to help us with our weekly mailout!).

The remaining £101 received on May Day was made up entirely of standing orders - a large proportion of which are scheduled for the beginning of each month. Thanks go to the 10 comrades who contributed between £5 and £20 each. We also received a new standing order authority from PL, who answered the editor's appeal with a commitment to pay £6 a month.

However, a word of warning. Although the response has been fantastic, it has mostly been in the form of one-off payments. So how will we fare from now on? The increase in standing orders so far works out at less than £100 a month, while the target has gone up by £250. Of course, the £228 received in April over and above that new target is cash in the bank right now, but it would really ease my worries if more comrades could help us out with an SO ●

Robbie Rix

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

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday May 5, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimitz's *Lenin's electoral strategy from 1907 to the October Revolution of 1917*. This meeting: chapter 2 (continued): '1905 redux?' Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday May 7, 6.30pm: Series of talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryl Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. This meeting: 'Lunarchy in the kingdom of England', Speaker: Camilla Power. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

Labour Against the Witchhunt

Saturday May 4, 1pm: Members' meeting, central London (venue details will be sent to members). Moving the campaign forward and electing members to the steering committee. Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt: www.facebook.com/events/493682997827672.

Class struggles, the state and film

Film screening, 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.

Wednesday May 15, 7pm: The 'enemy within' - the Thatcher government attacks: www.facebook.com/events/268104377453694.

Wednesday May 22, 7pm: Women's struggle: www.facebook.com/events/392972168163097.

Exist! Resist! Return!

Saturday May 11, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble Portland Place, London W1, for march to Whitehall. No new nakba! End the siege! Defend the right of return! Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.facebook.com/events/260404684903442.

With banners held high

Saturday May 18, 11.30am to 5pm: March and labour movement festival. Assemble Smyth Street, Wakefield WF1. Live speakers, music, poetry and drama. Organised by With Banners Held High: www.facebook.com/events/1159025200917201.

Youth Strike 4 Climate

Friday May 24, 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: www.facebook.com/UKSCN.

Labour, value and exploitation

Tuesdays from May 28 to June 18, 7pm: Series of four classes, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Beginners course in Marxist economics presented by Sorcha Foster. Entrance £5 (£3). Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.facebook.com/events/2087601738196914.

Stop the far right across Europe

Saturday June 1, 1pm: International forum, NEU, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Speakers from anti-fascist organisations across Europe debate why the far right are on the rise and how to stop them. Organised by Stand Up To Racism: www.facebook.com/events/1448957158579543.

Protest against the Trump state visit

Tuesday June 4, 12 noon: March in central London, details to follow. Organised by Together Against Trump: www.facebook.com/events/447620012676970.

Stop the London arms fair

Events organised by Campaign Against Arms Trade. **Saturday June 15, 12.30pm:** Network organising meeting, St Hilda's East Community Centre, 8 Club Row, London E2. Planning the mobilisation against the global arms trade in London in September. www.facebook.com/events/432514417493720. **Saturday June 22, 11am:** Training session, Bridge 5 Mill, 22a Beswick Street, Manchester M4. Skill up to stop the DSEI arms fair. www.facebook.com/events/591596081307911.

Miners' strike 35th anniversary

Saturday June 15, 1pm: Rally, Orgreave Lane, Sheffield S13. Demand truth and justice for miners brutalised by police at Orgreave in 1984. Speakers include Matt Wrack (FBU) and Steve Hedley (RMT). Organised by Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign: www.facebook.com/events/2016964828402260.

Derby Silk Mill Rally

Saturday June 22, 10am to 5pm: March, rally and festival. Assemble Market Place, Derby DE1 and march to Cathedral Green. Celebrate Derby's historic general strike of 1833-34. Organised by Derby Silk Mill Rally: www.facebook.com/DerbySilkMillRally.

Durham Miners' Gala

Saturday July 13, 8am to 6pm: Rally and labour movement festival, The Racecourse, Durham DH7. Organised by Durham Miners' Association: www.facebook.com/events/1993862707314329.

CPGB wills

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

LAW

Rothschild and irrationality

Carla Roberts looks forward to the May 4 members meeting of Labour Against the Witchhunt

Any event that Labour Against the Witchhunt is putting on these days is likely to be described as timely. The witch-hunt against Jeremy Corbyn and his leftwing supporters has now become daily and normalised. In the run-up to the local and European Union elections rightwingers in and outside the Labour Party have been busy scrolling through the Facebook and Twitter accounts of Labour candidates in particular. Naturally, they have been hugely successful in discovering 'problematic', often historic, posts (that were not considered problematic at all a few short years back).

Liverpool council candidate Sam Gorst, for example, is now under investigation for alleged "anti-Semitism", because it appears he tweeted something "in defence of former London mayor Ken Livingstone".¹ His accounts have been deleted, so we cannot tell you more about it - but if that is all, then clearly the compliance unit is going berserk. Remember, Livingstone *resigned* from Labour after the national executive committee decided to readmit him after a one-year-suspension. The right wing cried 'foul' and the Corbyn leadership was in agony over what to do with Ken. He resigned to spare Corbyn any more blushes - to no avail, of course. Because Corbyn and his allies have continuously given in to the witch-hunters rather than standing up to them, Livingstone is now 'known' to be an anti-Semite (as is Corbyn himself, of course).

Corbyn has also - again - been put on the defensive after somebody found that in 2011 he wrote a forward to a new edition of John A Hobson's hugely influential 1902 book *Imperialism - a study*. Corbyn praised it as "a great tome", which is "brilliant, and very controversial at the time". Hobson was a liberal anti-war journalist who later joined the Independent Labour Party and developed a theory of underconsumption to explain capitalism's vicious repeating cycles of bust and boom. He was also (probably) the first person to explain that the development of imperialism was the direct result of capital's need for constant expansion. His book had an influence on Lenin, Trotsky² and many socialists to this day. In 2014, *The Guardian* described it as the "definitive book on imperialism".³

For the *Daily Mail*, however, this 400-page seminal work is nothing but a "century-old book, which argued that banks and newspapers were controlled by Jews"; and Daniel Finkelstein in *The Times* describes it as a "deeply anti-Semitic book".

In fact, it is a *single paragraph* that riled up Finkelstein (who kicked off the whole business) and it does not come "a few pages in", as he claims - but at the end of chapter 4, where he states that, "while the new imperialism has been bad business for the nation, it has been good business for certain classes and certain trades within the nation" and goes on to describe those who "benefit from aggressive imperialism and militarism".

He starts by listing the most obvious companies - those who produce weapons. Then there is "the shipping trade" and those from the ruling class who take up "the numerous official and semi-official posts in our colonies and protectorates". Not to mention "the investor, who cannot find at home the profitable use he seeks for his capital, and insists that his government should help him to profitable and secure investments abroad".

This is the context in which Hobson



If you want a real anti-Semite ... and lauded by the establishment

writes: "... still more dangerous is the special interest of the financier, the general dealer in investments", who "use stocks and shares not so much as investments to yield them interest, but as material for speculation". These "great businesses" were "controlled, so far as Europe is concerned, chiefly by men of a single and peculiar race, who have behind them many centuries of financial experience". He asks: "Does anyone seriously suppose that a great war could be undertaken by any European state, or a great state loan subscribed, if the house of Rothschild and its connections set their face against it?" (my emphasis)

Of course, 120 years ago, Hobson would have used the word "peculiar" in its *original* meaning of "distinctive" or "characteristic of a particular group"⁴ - not in its modern sense of "odd" or "eccentric". But no doubt he did mean the 'Jewish race'. The point is, however, he was writing at a time when anti-Semitism was prevalent and acceptable within the ruling class. As a Labour press officer is quoted as saying, "Similarly to other books of its era, Hobson's work contains outdated and offensive references and observations."⁵

But do these phrases mean that the book as a whole has no value? It is quite likely that Corbyn did not even read the whole book, but, like many others, knew of its historical importance - and, of course, as Labour's press officer said, "Jeremy completely rejects the anti-Semitic elements of his analysis." But there is a real danger that the current hysteria sparked by the witch-hunt is robbing people of any sense of proportion, history and rationality. Will the likes of the *Daily Mail* and Finkelstein start demanding the suppression of the writings of William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Winston Churchill and John Buchan - all redolent with anti-Semitism?

Clearly, there is tons of work to do for a campaign like Labour Against the Witchhunt.

Controversies

The members' report produced by LAW's steering committee for the May 4 meeting in central London makes for impressive reading. Since January 1, the campaign has produced dozens of model motions, petitions and campaigns in defence of Labour members who have been investigated, suspended, expelled and/or falsely accused of anti-Semitism - among them Chris Williamson MP, Jackie Walker, Asa Winstanley, Liverpool councillor Jo Bird and Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, who the NEC refused to endorse as

parliamentary candidate in South Thanet.

No doubt, most prominent and effective has been LAW's campaign for the reinstatement of Chris Williamson, who is unfortunately the only MP who has dared to stand up to the witch-hunters (and the only one who has campaigned for the democratisation of the party). LAW has managed to debunk as "fake news" the so-called 'ban' on Labour Party branches and CLPs discussing and passing motions in solidarity with Chris and has produced detailed advice on the issue on its website. At least 27 CLPs, eight Momentum branches and "dozens of left Labour and trade union organisations" have since come out in public support with Chris and are listed on LAW's website, alongside supportive statements that the group has collected from Ken Loach, Alexei Sayle, Lowkey, Mike Leigh and many others.⁶

The campaign, which has "close to 400 members", has also managed to extract a rare apology from the *Mail on Sunday* over its malicious reporting of the March 25 'Defend the left' meeting, where it reported Livingstone as saying: "It is not anti-Semitic to hate the Jews of Israel" - even though he was merely quoting one of the ridiculously false charges made against him! After hundreds of people complained, the paper had to print an apology.⁷ Ken Livingstone has since become honorary president of LAW, alongside founding member Moshé Machover.

LAW has also campaigned against the Labour Party's adoption of the 'definition' of anti-Semitism published by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, publishing a detailed position paper outlining its opposition and a number of model motions on the issue, while also highlighting a number of cases where the IHRA definition has been misused to discipline and expel union members and even sack people from work. So far, it has not been used in disciplinary cases in the Labour Party, but that is probably only a matter of time.

Slightly more controversial has been LAW's petition fighting for the overdue implementation of the reformed trigger ballots, about which we previously reported. Not all LAW supporters seem happy with what they see as the campaign going beyond its original remit of fighting the witch-hunt.

We disagree. The Parliamentary Labour Party is stuffed with careerists, Blairites and witch-hunters, who are openly hostile to Jeremy Corbyn and have been busy sabotaging his leadership from day one. Given the

chance, members in most localities would have chucked out rightwing MPs years ago. But now the NEC - in an attempt to stop more rightwingers from defecting to Change UK - is dragging its heels when it comes to implementing a timetable for trigger ballots (which is the only way a sitting MP can be deselected). Should there be another snap election without re-selections, the PLP's political composition will probably remain unchanged. Almost 1,500 people have signed the petition, so there is clearly some appetite for this important issue.⁸

Similarly, some LAW supporters have criticised the fact that the May 4 meeting will discuss a motion on 'George Galloway and EU elections'. The motion objects to Galloway's call for a vote for "Nigel Farage's Brexit party", because it is "a vote for rightwing chauvinism and an anti-migrant stance". It also emphasises that LAW - of course, given the name and its campaigning priorities - calls for a vote for the Labour Party.

Judging by the number of those, including some LAW supporters, who have expressed sympathy for Galloway's call, I think it will be useful to discuss the issue. There are plenty of illusions on the left that Corbyn can introduce 'socialism', once Britain has finally been able to free itself from the 'shackles of the EU'. This is not just mistaken about the way global capitalism works, but also a serious misunderstanding of Corbyn's rather reformist and tame politics.

The meeting will also discuss if Peter Gregson should be expelled from LAW. In the past, the campaign has published a number of statements in Gregson's defence - for example, protesting against his expulsion from the GMB union - while also criticising his often slapdash use of language. In March, Gregson posted an update to one of his petitions, which he also sent to a number of LAW members and supporters, in which he urged people to read the article, 'UK's Labour anti-Semitism split', by Ian Fantom (founder of the Keep Talking campaign).

As LAW's Tony Greenstein then pointed out in a long email exchange with Gregson, in this article Fantom makes reference to "my colleague, Nick Kollerstrom", who "had been targeted in a witch-hunt" for a positive review he wrote of a book about Auschwitz and the "gas chamber illusion". Tony advised Gregson to take down the reference to Fantom's article, arguing:

The title of Kollerstrom's article - 'The Auschwitz "gas chamber" illusion' - speaks for itself. But anyone with any doubts needs simply read the first sentence: "This essay will argue that well-designed cyanide gas chambers were indeed present at Auschwitz, and did work efficiently, but that they were operated for purposes of hygiene and disinfection, in order to save lives and not take them."

Tony goes on to explain why this is not a question merely of 'freedom of speech': "It is incredibly damaging for LAW or anyone else to have the slightest contact with you if you maintain these links and I would ask for an immediate assurance that you will cut these links."

To cut a long email exchange short, Gregson refused Tony's request and as a result Tony deleted him from the 'Unofficial LAW Facebook group', where he is the main administrator. Gregson then stupidly published the whole exchange on his website

(including bad-tempered comments by LAW members who wanted to be deleted from the exchange), where it was picked up by the *Jewish Chronicle*, which gleefully reported the whole disagreement.⁹

As the steering committee's motion proposing Gregson's expulsion points out, "We do not believe that Peter Gregson should be expelled from either the GMB union or the Labour Party. These are broad organisations of the working class that contain many different viewpoints." But LAW, however, is a campaign with a rather narrower political focus and therefore needs to "confront any hint or trace of genuine anti-Semitism in our ranks. We do not wish to be associated and tainted with holocaust denial".

Left

In its lead motion, LAW quite rightly calls out the Corbyn leadership's "short-sighted and futile attempt to appease the right", which "can only undermine the Corbyn leadership and often plays into the false 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' narrative". Momentum is described as "unfit for purpose".

Therefore, LAW will support efforts to

build an alternative Labour left that organises democratically and transparently; both supports Corbyn against attacks by the right, and is independent and able to criticise the leadership when necessary; and is consistently anti-racist and internationalist - a stance which by definition includes anti-Zionism and supporting the Palestinians.

The steering committee proposes a campaign for the "disaffiliation of the Jewish Labour Movement from the Labour Party and for Labour CLPs and trade union branches to affiliate to LAW and Jewish Voice for Labour". I understand that there will be at least one amendment opposing the first part of the sentence.

We welcome the fact that LAW proposes to campaign for "the scrapping of all bans and proscriptions" within Labour, because "if the mass of socialists in Britain joined the party, it would put us in a much stronger position in the ongoing civil war within the party".

We are looking forward to what is shaping up to be an interesting meeting, though it could well get rather heated at various times. But that is not a problem. Meetings within the labour movement should feature open discussion around controversial issues. Instead of burying our disagreements thanks to compromise formulations, we need to debate them out honestly ●

Notes

1. www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/liverpool-labour-council-candidate-being-16181573.
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imperialism_(Hobson)#Antisemitism.
3. www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/02/sp-first-world-war-manchester-guardian-uk-neutrality.
4. www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/peculiar.
5. www.theguardian.com/news/2019/may/01/jeremy-corbyn-rejects-antisemitism-claim-over-book-foreword.
6. www.labouragainstthewitchhunt.org/model-motions/resolutions-passed-in-support-of-chris-williamson-mp.
7. www.labouragainstthewitchhunt.org/campaigns/exposedoutrageous-attempt-by-mail-on-sunday-to-smear-ken-livingstone.
8. www.change.org/p/labour-party-no-to-a-national-government-implement-the-trigger-ballot-now.
9. www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/emails-reveal-row-within-labour-against-the-witchhunt-over-member-s-support-for-holocaust-denier-1.483088.

SWP

Anti-racism and ‘useful idiots’

The SWP remains trapped in its old bad habits - and never have they been more obviously counterproductive, reckons **Paul Demarty**

As we shudder into what must be the most bizarre election in Britain for some time - the objective being to select members to sit in the European parliament for some period of time lasting not less than zero days and not more than five years - our thoughts turn to comrades on the left, and how they might pick their way through this one.

In some cases, the particular layout of burning political issues has effectively reduced people to paralysis - there is nothing wrong *in principle*, as the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain has decided to do, with boycotting an election, but we are rather taken aback by it in this instance. It seems to reflect the uncomfortable reality that the actual political options available to ‘red’ Brexiters like the CPB are effectively zilch. They have always wanted to give Brexit a different political content than the one it was destined to have; surely it would be tactically more astute to try to *provide* such an option themselves, rather than nihilistically condemning the whole affair.

But we will have to leave that one to them, and take a closer look at the Socialist Workers Party's response. There is, on the face of it, little new about it - old wine in new skins, you might say. Yet we are in more interesting times, so far as British high politics goes, than we have been for a good while; and it is from this vantage point, rather than that of five, 10 or 15 years ago, that the comrades seem so impoverished.

A look at last week's *Socialist Worker*, to be sure, would leave the proverbial Martian who had landed at an SWP paper sale outside a local tube station with nearly no idea that there was an election even happening. It is no surprise at all to find the country's most protest-obsessed socialist organisation in orgasmic rapture over the Extinction Rebellion protests, which, of course, have involved great courage and imagination. They are certainly a meatier morsel than the editors of *Socialist Worker* have been able to feed their readers for a time.

There is another reason for this enthusiasm, this time around. The moral force of these protestors feeds in part on the very much greater significance, in the grand scheme of things, of mass extinction and melting ice caps than the Brexit fiasco. As we have had cause to note recently,¹ the SWP has good reason to want to stay off what is also a touchy subject for it. Like the CPB, the SWP is holding to its historic Euroscepticism, in a situation where the right utterly dominates ‘their’ side, and is likely to marshal Brexit sentiment into a great chauvinist tide in the Euro elections.

So far as the SWP is prepared to touch the elections, it does so only indirectly, through its Stand Up to Racism front. Thus we read in its internal *Party Notes* circular to members (this time around from Amy Leather):

Nominations for the European elections have opened. These elections can open up the opportunity for the far right to build and cash in on the anger over the Brexit crisis. Nigel Farage is leading his new Brexit Party into the elections, while Ukip has said it will run candidates in every region across Britain ... There are also rumours that Tommy Robinson may stand somewhere. We shouldn't forget that in some



Elections should be about who you support, not who you detest the most

places only 9% of the vote is needed to win a seat.

SWP comrades are urged to participate in SUTR's campaign to “keep racism out of the elections”, and directed towards a flyer, notable for its exclusive focus on the UK Independence Party.² Various reasons are provided for why one really ought not to vote for the kippers. This runs from leader Gerard Batten's fruity opinions about Islam, through the baleful shadow of Mr Yaxley-Lennon and other unsavoury associates. The only mention of Farage is rather polite:

Even former Ukip leader Nigel Farage left the party because he says it is becoming ‘the new British National Party’. The BNP was a Nazi group that achieved significant electoral success in the 2000s.

The conclusion is obvious:

Ukip is trying to build the type of far-right party, aligned to a violent street movement, that we've seen growing across Europe. It thinks it can make an electoral breakthrough like its far-right friends on elsewhere [sic].

Alongside Ukip other far-right groups like For Britain and Britain First may also be standing. These people want to divide our communities and scapegoat migrants, refugees and Muslims for all our problems. We have to stop them. Let's celebrate our unity and our multicultural society. Use your vote to stop Ukip!

There are several remarkable things about this dismal leaflet. The first is how *unremarkable* it is - the leaflet is almost a duplicate of the sort of material we would have to wade through in the glory days of the BNP. Then, the headline would be ‘Don't vote Nazi’, as opposed to ‘Don't vote Ukip’ (but the passing reference to the BNP's supposed ‘Nazism’ gives us that nostalgic feeling). Also formally identical is the list of ne'er-do-wells associated with the target group, and the vapid exhortations about not letting racists “divide our communities” and defending the joys of “multicultural society”. (There is, moreover, an

unusual level of desperation even as regards the ne'er-do-wells; Leather's *Party Notes* make great play of Carl Benjamin, one of these snowflake-baiting pillocks who talk a lot on YouTube about how feminism is a Marxist conspiracy against video games. He is standing for Ukip in the west country, and we wish him the success he deserves, but - how to put this? - we are hardly quivering in fear of a thousand-year Reich with him at the helm.)

Farage

The second remarkable thing is that the comrades seem to be watching a different contest altogether from the rest of us. If you asked a random person in the street what the pre-eminent far-right participant in this election was, you would get a lot of mentions of the grinning man himself, Nigel Farage. Sure, he has made great play of ‘coalition building’ this time around, and so we find George Galloway in his camp, and also the clique of limp provocateurs formerly known as the Revolutionary Communist Party; but the bedrock of his support will come from the *right* of the Tory Party. Opinion polls suggest that Farage will attract 25%-30% of the vote, compared to 3%-5% for Ukip; it is the latter and the Tories whose votes have declined, as the Brexit Party's have soared.

The SWP is not exactly unaware of this. An op-ed by Alex Callinicos in the April 22 issue of *Socialist Worker* decries Farage's shiny new recruits. Comrade Alex is certainly under no illusions as to what the real point of the exercise is:

Farage says he isn't after a protest vote this time. He wants to reconstitute mainstream politics to include a strong party of the far right comparable to the Lega in Italy, the Rassemblement National in France or Fidesz in Hungary. As with these parties, anti-migrant racism is central to the project. But to fully exploit the opportunity offered by the Brexit crisis Farage must appeal as broadly as possible.

He concludes, quite correctly:

No-one should be fooled by Farage's soft, inclusive rhetoric

about democracy. The Brexit Party is about building a much stronger far right in Britain. No genuine socialist should be hoodwinked into becoming one of Farage's useful idiots.³

Yet, so far as SUTR is concerned, Farage seems almost not to exist; and, as a cursory reading of *Party Notes* shows, it is SUTR that is going to keep SWP members busy, where the election is concerned. (Indeed, if you look closely, Callinicos does not call for any active opposition to Farage's party - just for the left not to support it).

The absurdity of this line consists above all in the fact that it makes SWP members into - alas! - ‘Farage's useful idiots’. As Callinicos points out, Farage is making a show of taking distance from the far right. As the SUTR leaflet points out, he has done this in part by moving away from the Batten-Robinson incarnation of Ukip. So, if an oh-so-saintly anti-racist group like SUTR runs around denouncing Ukip as racists and borderline fascists, ask yourself: where do those votes go? The answer is plain as day - and it has a winning grin.

This was ever the problem with anti-fascism and anti-racism in the SWP style. If you take a concrete election, and pick out a specific contestant, and declare that they are “not a normal political party” and simply tell people ‘Don't vote Ukip’ or ‘Don't vote BNP’, you *must* implicitly endorse all the others as ‘normal political parties’. This is especially bizarre in the case of the Brexit Party - there are few things normal about it, barring its being reactionary and thus all too drearily typical of the age. But it was always an abdication of duty; for it enlisted purported ‘revolutionary socialists’ in the work of burnishing the credentials of the parties of the state.

The success of this strategy in combatting the far right may be measured by the absurdity of the current situation, where the main detachment of the far right (at any rate, the far right outside the Conservative Party) must simply be *ignored* in order to sustain the ‘broadest possible coalition’ of anti-racists. While such a coalition may profitably exclude Farage without incident, it

cannot exclude all those mainstream bourgeois politicians who are happy to address a SUTR rally, but believe that the fight against racism must include ‘listening’ to people's ‘legitimate concerns about mass migration’ ...

There is one direct contradiction here, which is that - for the SWP - these sorts of nods to ‘legitimate concerns’ are as such racist. The more profound problem, however, is that these phenomena are self-reinforcing: the use of this cynical demagoguery by bourgeois politicians combines with the inevitable failure to deliver on promises to limit migration, and the result is that popular alienation from politics becomes fused with anti-migrant sentiment. Farage understands this, as do many similar types in Europe and around the world. Playing patsy for ‘normal’ politicians *assists* the far right, for the far right feeds on the ‘normal’ hypocrisy in relation to its ‘legitimate concerns’.

Breaking the cycle, however, demands more than anti-racism; and, in fact, demands more than the arithmetical sum of anti-racism plus the Extinction Rebellion, plus the innumerable other occasions of spirited protests whose encouragement forms the backbone of SWP political strategy. It requires a total political alternative capable of grasping all these things together. No doubt, as the vote looms, the SWP will recommend a critical vote for Labour (in England and Wales at least) with a few lines of scholastic argument (probably about what a strong Labour showing will mean for the number and size of street demonstrations); meanwhile, all the actual energy will be focused on the chimera of ‘keeping racism out’.

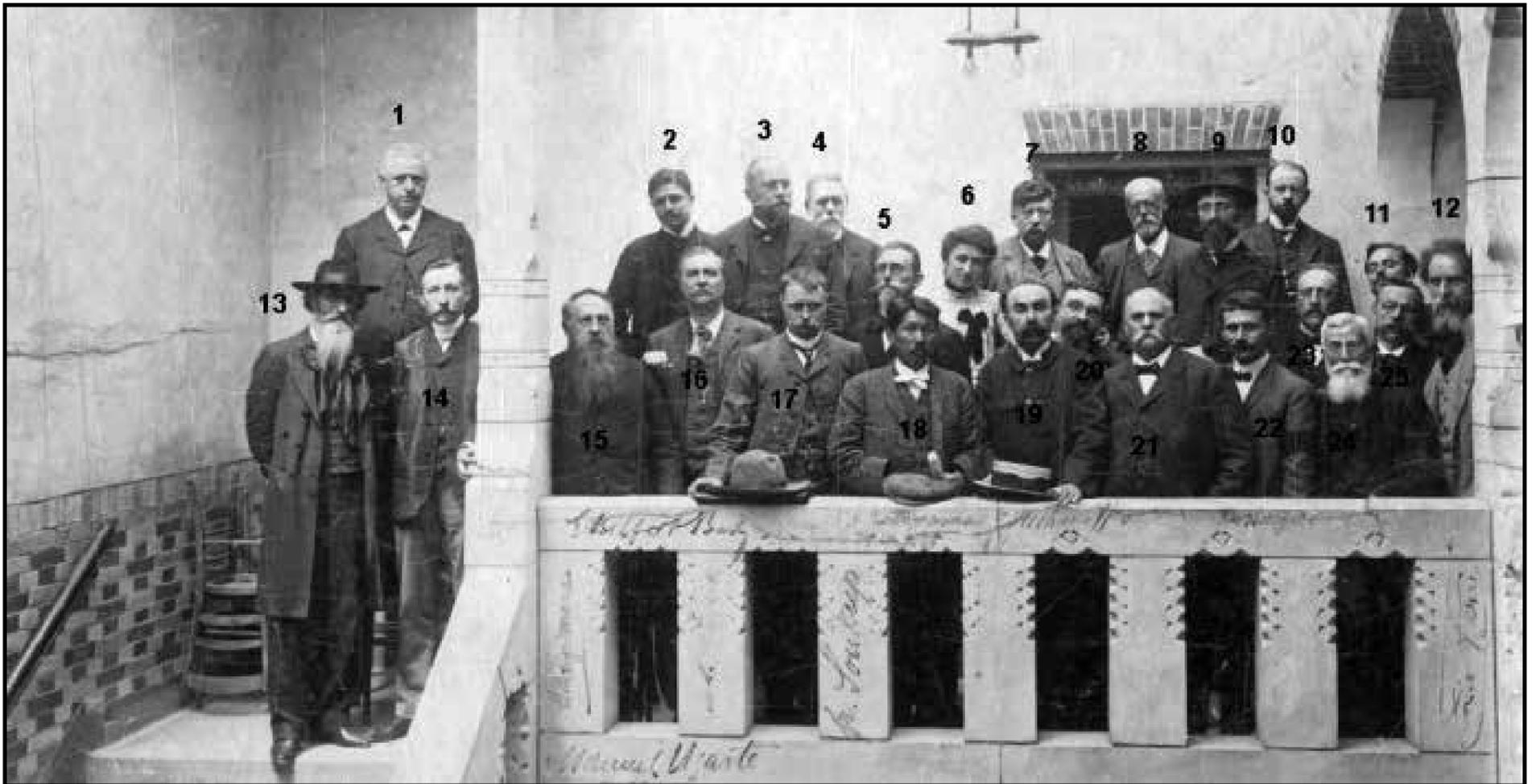
The exact reverse is needed. However, so wedded is the SWP to its strategy of cheerleading single-issue protest movements that we despair of the lesson being learned in time for Farage's triumph ●

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Notes

1. ‘Whatever happened to the Lexit lads?’ *Weekly Worker* April 11.
2. www.standuptoracism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Dont-vote-UKIP.pdf.
3. https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/48275/The+Brexit+Party+aims+to+strengthen+the+far+right+++dont+be+a+fool+for+Farage.

DEBATE



Prominent delegates to 1904 Amsterdam congress of Socialist International: 1. Henri Van Kol, 2. Manuel Ugarte, 3. Antonín Němec, 4. Edouard Vaillant, 5. Frantisek Soukup, 6. Rosa Luxemburg, 7. Victor Adler, 8. Karl Kautsky, 9. Maksymilian Walecki, 10. Emile Vandervelde, 11. Jean Longuet, 12. Enrico Ferri, 13. Amilcare Cipriani, 14. Pieter Jelles Troelstra, 15. Henry Hyndman, 16. Ernest Belfort Bax, 17. Olav Kringen, 18. Sen Katayama, 19. Georgii Plekhanov, 20. Alexandre Marie Bracke-Desrousseaux, 21. Morris Hillquit, 22. Achille Cambier, 23. Dadabhai Naoroji, 24. Edward Anseele, 25. Edward Anseele

Steady rightward trajectory

Responding to a flurry of debate, US comrade **Jim Creegan** gives his view on the evolution of Karl Kautsky in the first of a two-part article

Marx observed in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that political movements inevitably seek legitimacy from historical traditions and personalities. In our electoral moment, when the hopes of the left revolve around figures like Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, there is a name from socialist history that seems to be recurring with increasing regularity: Karl Kautsky.

The editor of *Jacobin*, Bhaskar Sunkara, when asked by an interviewer “to pick between Eduard Bernstein - the incrementalist German Marxist who sowed the seeds of modern social democracy - and Rosa Luxemburg, who assailed Bernstein for abandoning hope of revolution”, answered Kautsky, “naming Bernstein and Luxemburg’s contemporary who split the difference between the two”.¹ The historian of Bolshevism, Lars T Lih, has emphasised the continuities between Kautsky and Lenin before their famous falling out in 1914. And, in January of this year, the blog of *Jacobin* magazine featured an article, ‘Reclaiming the best of Kautsky’, by James Muldoon, who purports to have discovered in him the “original democratic socialist”. This article, in turn, elicited a reply from the Marxist activist-scholar Charlie Post, who stressed the potential conflict between parliamentary politics and mass struggle, and the need to emphasise the latter. In a riposte, Eric Blanc argued that Kautsky was right in his belief that the road to socialist revolution in western democracies must necessarily run through elections and parliaments.

Muldoon’s article allows that, between Kautsky and Lenin - who hurled at Kautsky the enduring epithet of “renegade” - there were “clear differences”. He limits himself, however, to a rather abstract discussion of government by workers’ councils

versus parliamentary democracy, without once mentioning the main event over which the two became foes: the outbreak of World War I. Although it is widely known that the war caused a permanent rift within the international socialist movement, the tendency of writers like Lih and Muldoon to downplay or ignore the importance of the split makes it worthwhile to revisit the particulars.

The great betrayal

When the guns of August erupted in 1914, Karl Kautsky enjoyed the prestige of being the leading interpreter of Marxism of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), which was the flagship party of the Second International - the biggest, best organised and most theoretically advanced.

The war did not strike Europe like a bolt from the blue: it was the result of years of mounting rivalry, military and economic, among the great European powers of the day - France, Britain and Russia, on the one side; Germany and Austria-Hungary, on the other. Sensing the danger of war, the Second International felt it necessary to declare in advance its position in the event of hostilities, which, by setting the workers of the belligerent countries against one another, would spell calamity for the international proletarian solidarity professed by all the member parties.

A resolution passed at a conference of the International at Stuttgart in 1907 pledged the national sections to do everything in their power to prevent the outbreak of what would be an imperialist war that workers should oppose in all countries, no matter who fired the first shot. Should war break out despite its efforts, the International vowed to use the crisis the conflict would create to hasten the downfall of the capitalist order. This commitment was reaffirmed by the Basel Manifesto

of 1912, adopted by the International in the midst of the Balkan wars - a prologue to World War I.

Yet, when the shooting started, the leaders of all the major socialist parties threw their solemn anti-war declarations to the winds in a frenzy of capitulation to their respective governments. Rationalisations flew thick and fast. French and British socialists proclaimed their loyalty to what they now conveniently described as a war of the democratic powers against Prussian militarism; German Social Democrats supported kaiser Wilhelm II’s purported struggle against Entente-allied tsarist despotism. A small group of internationalists - Lenin, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg among them - saw the descent of the socialist parties into national chauvinism as the bankruptcy of the Second International.

Karl Kautsky, the “pope” of social democracy, thought otherwise. Although not himself a delegate to the Reichstag, Kautsky was present in a consultative capacity among his party’s parliamentary caucus on August 3 1914, the day before the SPD voted in favour of war credits to the kaiser. Kautsky approved of voting the credits, with the stipulation that the war be confined to defensive aims - ludicrous, since the German army began its invasion of neutral Belgium the same day. When the government refused any such assurances, Kautsky nevertheless declined to condemn the delegation’s affirmative vote.

Unlike Luxemburg and Liebknecht, Kautsky did not think that the question of the war should stand in the way of SPD unity. He wrote that, while socialists should strive to prevent the outbreak of war, they could not hope to end it if they had not been strong enough to prevent it in the first place. Socialism, he further wrote, can only thrive in times of peace. All opposition

to the war now being futile, the SPD had no choice but to support all efforts that were aimed strictly at national defence, and wait until the war was over and the working class could resume its forward march. For Rosa Luxemburg, this meant: “The global historical appeal of the *Communist manifesto* [“Proletarians of all countries, unite!” - JC] undergoes a fundamental revision and, as amended by Kautsky, now reads: ‘Proletarians of all countries, unite in peace time and cut each other’s throats in war!’”²

Throughout the four years of the greatest mass bloodletting known to Europe up to that time, Kautsky would, it is true, hem his acquiescence with all manner of qualifications, caveats, stipulations and equivocations. But his refusal to take a clear anti-war stance had the convenient result of avoiding the kind of head-on confrontation with the imperial government that would force the opposition underground, and compel Luxemburg and Liebknecht to denounce the war from inside a prison cell, and ultimately pay for their opposition with their lives.

When, in 1917, the support of the official SPD for the Reich’s annexationist war aims became so abject, and the terms of the *Bergfrieden* (truce with the government decreed by the SPD during the war) became so repressive, that a faction of the party’s Reichstag deputies started abstaining on war credits and mildly criticising the government’s conduct, they were expelled from the SPD. They then formed the USPD (Independent Social Democrats). Kautsky joined the USPD only reluctantly, after having voted in a caucus of future members against the formation of a new party.

We also know from his private correspondence that Kautsky considered it necessary to take a more critical stance toward the government mainly because popular

disillusionment with the war was gaining ground, and with it the influence of the Spartakusbund, headed by Luxemburg and Liebknecht, which Kautsky hoped to outflank. And, even in opposition, Kautsky and his centrist faction limited themselves to appeals to the kaiser’s regime for a “democratic peace” without annexations or indemnities (which Lenin likened to preaching virtue to a brothel-keeper), and studiously avoided any hint of implementing the call of the Stuttgart resolution and Basel Manifesto to oppose the war with class-struggle methods. Kautsky was to rejoin the SPD in 1922.

I hope readers now have a better idea of at least one of the “clear differences” James Muldoon alludes to between Kautsky and Lenin, who asserted that the only realistic path to peace lay through the overthrow of the belligerent governments by the workers and the oppressed. It was Kautsky’s conduct during the war that first earned him the epithet of “renegade” in Lenin’s broadsides. He went along with a majority of European socialist leaders, who had reneged on their anti-war pledges in order to conciliate their governments and ruling classes.

Lenin denounced Kautsky with all the fury of a disillusioned follower. Lenin’s pre-war writings contain numerous favourable references to, and citations from, the works of the man that he, along with the entire International, regarded as the socialist movement’s most venerable theoretical mentor.

Yet, had he been more attentive to his mentor’s earlier evolution, Lenin may not have been as dumfounded as he was by Kautsky’s cowering in the face of imperialist war. Lars Lih and Eric Blanc appear to admit that Kautsky turned to the right some time before World War I, yet, in their efforts to rehabilitate the pre-1914 Kautsky, they

fail to specify the context or the content of this right turn, vaguely suggesting that it took place around 1910.

In what follows, we will attempt to show that Kautsky's career displays no sharp discontinuities. Kautsky did indeed abandon some of his earlier, seemingly revolutionary positions. But we will attempt to show that his career consists of a steady rightward trajectory whose major premise was present in his thinking before 1910, and which became increasingly pronounced in the course of events in the class struggle and the polemics they gave rise to within German social democracy.

Fragile synthesis

The SPD was beset from the beginning by a tension between the ultimate goal of socialist revolution and the day-to-day struggle for reforms. The 1891 Erfurt programme, of which Kautsky was the principal author and interpreter, attempted to address the tension by elaborating two kinds of aims.

The maximum programme saw the conquest of political power by the proletariat and the socialisation of the means of production as the only lasting answer to a capitalist system that was inherently crisis-ridden and class-divided. The programme was drawn up, however, during a period of economic expansion and relative prosperity, which all party leaders regarded as non-revolutionary. The activity of the SDP in such periods had therefore to be directed toward a series of reforms that would improve the position of the working class within capitalist confines. These goals comprised the party's minimum programme. On the political side, it called for universal male and female suffrage; proportional representation; the right of referendum and recall of elected officials and the formation of a popular militia in place of the existing professional army. The economic part demanded a graduated income tax; the eight-hour day; the right of workers to organise; prohibition of child labour; and the extension of social insurance, with workers as part of the administration.

The 'Erfurt synthesis' did not, however, successfully remove the tension between the party's reformist and revolutionary wings. On the theoretical plane, the main manifesto of what would become the party's reformist wing came in the form of a book whose German title is rendered into English as *Evolutionary socialism*, by Eduard Bernstein, also published in 1899.

Bernstein argued for a fundamental revision of Marxism. He asserted that, contrary to Marx's predictions, class antagonisms under capitalism were becoming less rather than more acute, and the middle classes were expanding rather than contracting. The lot of the working class showed steady improvement and the state, combined with high finance, had developed more sophisticated ways to ameliorate the cyclical economic crises to which the system was prone. Echoing the Fabian socialists, among whom he had spent time in London, Bernstein argued that the advancement of socialism was now an ethical question, as opposed to one of conflicting material interests.

The working class, in Bernstein's view, no longer enjoyed a privileged role as the agency of socialist advance. Progress toward socialism now became a matter of persuading all men and women of good will of its inherent rationality in the context of a parliamentary democracy that stood increasingly above class, and was more powerful than vested interests, however formidable. It was therefore the task of socialists to further this inexorable progress, to which revolution and talk of revolution could only be obstacles.

One of Bernstein's principal opponents to emerge from the 'revisionist controversy' started by his work was the young Rosa Luxemburg, who was unconvinced

of the permanence of *fin de siècle* prosperity. She argued that the gains of the proletariat were never secure in a fundamentally class-divided society. Luxemburg by no means disparaged the struggle for reforms, but argued that their main value was not to introduce socialism by small steps, but to train the working class politically for the titanic class battles that lay ahead.

The right-left clash within German social democracy did not remain confined to the literary plane. The Russian Revolution of 1905, together with a hard-fought spontaneous coal miners' strike in Germany's industrial Ruhr basin, gave rise to a keen interest within the party in the mass political strike as a weapon of class struggle and, ultimately, of workers' revolution. However, the trade union leadership, formally affiliated to the SPD, reacted to the very notion of the mass strike with unmitigated horror. The unions declared that such strikes would involve inordinate expense to their treasuries and disrupt their steady economic progress - carefully orchestrated and controlled from the top down. They quickly moved to ban even the discussion of the mass strike. In this they were supported by the right wing of the party's officialdom, who tended to measure the progress of socialism almost exclusively in terms of ballots cast and parliamentary benches filled.

The SPD executive equivocated. August Bebel, the party's éminence grise, made a report - ratified at a party congress - that the mass strike could at times be employed, but only if well thought out and carefully planned in advance. This notion was seriously at odds with the outlook of Luxemburg, who drew her conclusions on the basis of the Russian experience of 1905 and the strikes it triggered in Poland, which she witnessed first hand. In her book, *Mass strike, party and trade unions*, Luxemburg argued that the mass strike represented a spontaneous movement of the working class that could not be started or stopped from above, as conceived of in what she called the "parade ground" mentality of many SPD leaders. The party, rather than controlling such strike movements, must seek to give them political direction.

In the end, it was the union and party bureaucrats who came out on top of the mass strike debate, winning from the party leadership a veto over any decision to call or support such strikes - meaning, in effect, that the tactic would not receive SPD support.

The pope weighs in

Where did Kautsky stand in the widening left-right divide? In 1909, he published *The road to power* - thought of at the time to be a defence of Marxism's revolutionary mission against Bernstein and the 'revisionists', and since considered his most radical work. Lenin was to laud this book as a model of Marxist thinking even after the October revolution.

Here Kautsky reaffirmed that the goal of Marxism was the complete socialisation of the major means of production, and that the workers alone could accomplish this objective. This they could only do by conquering state power exclusively for themselves; to share power with the political representatives of other classes - which, unlike the workers, had no objective interest in achieving socialism - could only cripple the proletariat politically and implicate it in repressive measures taken by the ruling class.

(It should be noted, however, that even the pre-1909 Kautsky had not consistently adhered to this position. In 1900, a fight broke out at a congress of the Second International over whether it was appropriate for three French socialists to have joined the government of Waldeck-Rousseau, which had fired upon striking miners, and whose cabinet contained general Gaston Auguste, whose troops has

slaughtered 20,000 communards during the 'bloody week' of 1871. The congress passed a compromise resolution, written by Kautsky, which said that socialists should not enter bourgeois governments save in exceptional circumstances, without specifying what such circumstances were. One delegate characterised the resolution as made of rubber, meaning that it could be stretched to suit any purpose.)

Kautsky also argued, contrary to Bernstein, that, far from being attenuated, class contradictions were becoming sharper due to the reaction of the bourgeoisie against the progress of the working class and the socialist movement; capitalists were increasingly organising themselves into cartels, trusts and employer associations for the purpose of controlling prices, driving down wages and breaking unions. He observed that members of the ruling class, bereft since their political triumph of any higher unifying purpose, were now concerned almost exclusively with their own profits, which they used to bribe ever more venal politicians. Early 20th-century capitalism emitted an unmistakable effluvia of corruption and moral decay. The ruling classes were also driven by growing proletarian power to find a solution to intensifying class struggle in militarism and imperialism, which had now become the reigning policy in all advanced countries. All of these heightened contradictions made socialist revolution more imperative, and brought it closer to hand.

Thus far *The road to power* appears to be a thoroughly revolutionary work. Yet the picture may change somewhat when we examine more closely the way in which Kautsky visualises the proletariat's path to power. He asserts that, ever since the crushing of the Paris Commune in 1871 - which he says was due to the small size and inexperience of the French proletariat - the workers and their parties have "moved forward everywhere uninterruptedly".³ The working class was fast becoming the majority of the population in Europe and the US; it was growing ever more confident and unified, with only minor defeats and setbacks. It possessed the authority and means of moral suasion that came with the growing recognition (except by the bourgeoisie) that the workers were necessary to the existence of society, while capitalist exploiters were superfluous.

One major index of proletarian strength was the steady accretion of the numbers and influence of its parties in the parliaments of Europe. Parliamentary democracy did not abolish capitalist class rule or obviate the necessity for revolution. But it did provide the working classes with an accurate measure of their strength relative to other social strata, and allowed them to avoid the minoritarian revolutionary adventures that predated the conquest of electoral democracy.

How then did Kautsky, in affirming the necessity of revolution, contemplate the possibility of a revolutionary conjuncture? The proletariat, he writes, was now possessed of the deliberate calm and confidence that resulted from its unbroken upward march. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, was increasingly beleaguered and prone to panic. If it felt its power threatened, it could easily resort to violence, and move to abrogate democratic liberties and representative government. In such an eventuality, the working class would have no alternative but to resort to defensive violence of its own to ensure its steady advance toward socialism. This appears to be the major revolutionary scenario contemplated by Kautsky *circa* 1909.

From the distance of more than a century, few would deny that Kautsky's revolutionary prognosis is over-optimistic to the point of complacency. Even in his time, the working class was multi-layered - foreign and immigrant,

skilled and unskilled, and, in the US, black and white - and conflicts within it could at times be exploited by the ruling classes; some workers could be influenced by reactionary petty bourgeois moods. Kautsky appears greatly to underestimate the undoubted appeal that chauvinism and imperialism has had historically for sections of the working class. And, far from marching from strength to strength, the course of class struggle takes a much more jagged line, with waves of high energy and initiative often followed by the extended spells of the demoralisation that accompany the major defeats that Kautsky seemed to rule out.

Kautsky, in short, appears to regard the advance of the proletariat as a quasi-automatic process - a view that tends to de-emphasise the need for bold initiatives on the part of the class and its leaders at crucial points in the struggle. While Kautsky states that the mass strike should be added to the SPD's tactical repertoire, it receives only the most perfunctory mention, and then to say that it is not suitable in all situations. As the historian, Karl Schorske put it, "Where Luxemburg viewed the proletariat as an irresistible force, Kautsky seemed to see it as an immovable object."⁴ All it had to do was stand its ground, while the bourgeoisie would lash out desperately and self-destruct amid its own decay.

Moreover, while bourgeois politicians may have been thoroughly corrupt in Kautsky's view, there is little mention of the power of the ruling classes to corrupt working class politicians as well. The socialist movement could simply look forward to a linear parliamentary advance that would reflect the growing numbers of the proletariat in the population as a whole, until it was able to capture a parliamentary majority, the existence of which he viewed as a precondition for revolution. Indeed, Kautsky states that the form of the proletarian dictatorship can be nothing other than the - fully democratised - democratic republic. In this assumption, he ignores the conclusion drawn by Marx as a result of the Paris Commune - and taken greatly to heart by Lenin and the Bolsheviks - that the working class cannot simply take over the bourgeois governing apparatus ready-made and deploy it for its own purposes, but must construct a new, radically democratised form of state power. Kautsky was later to polemicise directly against the idea of a "commune state".

Thus, had Lenin read the most radical of Kautsky's writings with greater care, he could have detected distinct elements of what would later become the basis for an overtly reformist politics. We shall see below how, in response to subsequent events, everything that supported *The road to power's* claim to being a revolutionary text - its belief in sharpening class contradictions; its rejection of coalition politics; its view of imperialism as integral to the capitalism of the time; indeed everything that distinguished Kautsky's thought from the revisionism of Eduard Bernstein - was to fall by the wayside. What remained was Kautsky's insistence on a controlled and orderly transition to socialism, coupled with an almost religious reverence for parliamentary institutions.

Suffrage crisis

Kautsky's rightward inclinations did not take long to reveal themselves. The greatest intensification of class struggle in Germany during the entire pre-World War I period took pace in 1910. The SPD was then conducting a vigorous campaign to replace the three-class Prussian municipal voting system with one of direct and equal suffrage. In addition, workers struck in great numbers against a general fall in wages, as employers and the state pushed back hard. Troops were dispatched to quell a bitter strike that erupted in the Mansfeld coal region; an employers' association

locked out 175,000 building workers throughout the country; and strikers were fired upon by troops in the Berlin district of Moabit.

The kaiser's government had banned an SPD demonstration on the suffrage issue, scheduled to take place in the Treptow district on the southern edge of Berlin. But, instead of assembling there and confronting the police, the party secretly directed its members to gather in the centre of the city, in the Tiergarten, near the Reichstag. The 150,000 workers who answered the call threw the ruling class into a state of virtual panic, as their newspapers screamed that society was on the brink of anarchy. Talk of a mass strike began to percolate through the SPD ranks. Rosa Luxemburg became the spokesperson for this sentiment, calling for a limited demonstration strike to gauge the will of German workers for larger action - possibly a mass strike of the kind she had earlier championed. She called for a thorough discussion of this question in the SPD.

The party's reformist right wing, on the other hand, took fright, along with the bourgeoisie. It fretted that such anger in the streets might endanger support of a bourgeois party, the National Liberals, for the passage of a tepid suffrage-broadening bill, and hurt their chances in an upcoming Reichstag election by scaring off more moderate provincial voters. While still attempting to steer something of a middle course between left and right, Kautsky came down substantially on the side of the parliamentarians. He emphasised the primary importance of elections, and branded advocacy of a mass strike in these circumstances adventurist; the tactic was appropriate perhaps for Russian conditions, but misguided in the conditions of legality and (limited) electoral democracy that prevailed in Germany. He wrote that the efforts of the party should be directed at obtaining a majority in the Reichstag - a goal he thought achievable in two years. Kautsky refused to allow Luxemburg's dissenting views to be published in *Die Neue Zeit*, the party monthly he edited, thus attempting to suppress discussion of her views in the broader party. From this time on, he was inclined to regard Luxemburg and her revolutionary cohort - as opposed to Eduard Bernstein and the reformist right - as his main adversary within the SPD.

The question posed by this dispute was not the worthiness of the fight for electoral reform. Both Kautsky and Luxemburg supported this elementary democratic demand. The argument was over whether the principal tactic in this struggle should be extra-parliamentary mobilisations, augmenting workers' fighting capacity and preparing them for an ultimate contest for power, or subordinating such actions to winning a parliamentary majority.

Polemical exchanges followed in the next two years between Kautsky, representing the now right-tending centre, and, on the left, Rosa Luxemburg and Anton Pannekoek (a Dutch socialist then resident in Berlin, who in later years was to become a leading exponent of 'council communism'). These debates - especially those between Kautsky and Pannekoek - reveal two starkly contrasting visions of the transition to socialism, and prefigure, even more than the 'revisionist controversy' of years earlier, the great schism in the International that followed World War I and the Russian Revolution ●

Notes

1. D Matthews, 'Inside Jacobin: how a socialist magazine is winning the left's war of ideas' *Vox* March 26 2016.
2. R Luxemburg *Selected political writings* New York 1974.
3. K Kautsky *The road to power* chapter 5: www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1909/power/ch05.htm.
4. CE Schorske *German Social Democracy 1905-1917* London 1955, p115.

UKRAINE

Politics of disenchantment

Voting for a comedian as president is an act of sheer desperation, writes **Eddie Ford**

As readers will know, last month saw the election of an actor and comedian, Volodymyr Zelensky, as president of Ukraine. This has a certain poetry to it, as his most famous role is playing a history teacher who almost accidentally becomes the president in the television series, *Servant of the people* - which is also the name of his political 'party', only founded in March last year.

There were 39 candidates on the ballot paper for the first round of the two-round voting system. Of course, due to the 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia and then the effective occupation-cum-secession of Donetsk and Luhansk in the east of the country, 12% of eligible voters were unable to participate in the presidential election - even if they wanted to, which is debatable. In the first round, Zelensky got 30.24% whilst the incumbent president, Petro Poroshenko, received 15.95% and, as predicted, Zelensky won the second round between with 73.22% in a landslide victory.

Of course, it is easy to laugh at the election of a comedian who has no political experience. But hang on, what about Britain's most important ally, Donald John Trump? Before he became president he never held any political office. Indeed, he appeared to have had no particular political loyalty. He registered as a Republican in 1987, switched to Ross Perot's Reform Party in 1999, the Democratic Party in 2001, and then back to the Republican Party in 2009 - making donations to both the main parties along the way. Always hedge your bets. Having said that, by definition all billionaires have to be a political operator of some sort - there is no other way to do business.

But, returning to Zelensky, what is especially interesting about him, apart from his acting abilities, is the fact that his first language is Russian - he has spoken publicly about his efforts to improve his Ukrainian - and he is Jewish. This must be of some sort of significance, given that there are *open* fascists in the Ukrainian government - which does not appear to bother many people in the west. In fact, one of the very first acts of the new Kiev government in 2014 after the enthusiastically western-backed orange-brown Maidan 'revolution' was to appoint six members of far-right and fascist groups to the most senior positions in the new cabinet. They also stripped Russian of its official language status and outlawed the Communist Party of Ukraine.

Bandera

Perhaps telling you all you need to know about the current state of Ukrainian politics, parliament tried unsuccessfully in December to confer the posthumous award of 'Hero of Ukraine' to Stepan Bandera for a second time. An attempt to do this in January 2010 by the outgoing president, Viktor Yushchenko, was annulled by the incoming and broadly pro-Kremlin president, Viktor Yanukovich. Bandera was a virulently anti-Semitic and anti-Polish Nazi collaborator and his organisation was largely responsible for the Volhynian genocide between 1943 and 1945 - the goal being to purge all "non-Ukrainians" from a future Ukrainian state.¹ Nice guy to have as a national hero.

It is obvious that Zelensky's election had far more to do with a complete and understandable disenchantment of the Ukrainian people with the 'political



More a third-world country

elite' rather than any particular support for his programme - which was distinctly thin and unelaborated. Did you know that corruption is bad? During the campaign, Zelensky said that he supported the free distribution of medical cannabis, free abortion and the legalisation of prostitution and gambling.

So maybe you can classify him as some kind of liberal? Then again, perhaps not. He had previously supported both the Maidan movement in 2013-14 and the Ukrainian army during the ongoing armed conflict (despite last month's latest ceasefire) in Donbass with the strongly Russian-backed separatist forces. Zelensky also thinks that Ukraine should become a member of the European Union and Nato, but only after referendums are held. Indeed, he is very keen on referendums for just about everything - promising that his first bill on "people's power" will provide a greater role for them.

When it comes to Bandera, Zelensky has said that he was "a hero for a certain part of Ukrainians, and this is a normal and cool thing" - after all, he was "one of those who defended the freedom of Ukraine". This, of course, is a view upheld by a large section of the establishment. But, on the other hand, Zelensky wondered if it was "quite right" to give so many streets and bridges with the "same name".

However, the main reason why so many supported a TV entertainer with very little by way of politics was precisely because he has no political experience - therefore is not yet corrupt or up to his neck in dodgy deals. Yet it is equally clear that oligarchs and others will be thinking that this is a wonderful chance to get their snouts even deeper in the trough - such a political novice will have to rely on 'influential people', won't he? Alarm has already been expressed about his close relationship with the billionaire

oligarch, Ihor Kolomoyskyi, who is the second or third richest person in the country. Kolomoyskyi, it just so happens, owns 70% of the company whose TV channel airs *Servant of the people* - and three years ago he and his business partner were accused of defrauding Ukraine's largest bank of billions of dollars (although the case was eventually dropped). One thing it is safe to say is that corruption will not go away and, as quickly as people became enamoured with Volodymyr Zelensky, they will just as quickly become disillusioned. Economic and political realities are not about to change just because the country has a new president, however bright and shiny he might seem.

Zelensky or no Zelensky, Ukrainian nationalism and rampant anti-Russian chauvinism is still on the rise. For example, in January the Orthodox Church of Ukraine formally split from the Russian Orthodox church. Naturally Russia was outraged - the Ukrainian church having been under the Moscow patriarchate since 1686.

Then, under Zelensky's watch, parliament on April 25 passed a new law by a 278-38 majority decreeing that 90% of TV and film content must be in Ukrainian, while Ukrainian-language printed media and books must make up at least 50% of the total output. The law also stipulates that Ukrainian must be used for signs, letters and in adverts, as well as by all public servants. When passed, the vote was met with cheers, as politicians snapped selfies and shouted "Glory to Ukraine" before breaking into a rendition of the country's national anthem. This bill was first championed by ex-president Poroshenko, who had campaigned on an aggressively patriotic platform, proclaiming his support for the army, the newly independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the never-ending glories of the Ukrainian language.

All this despite the fact that, according to the Kiev International Institute of Sociology, 28.1% of Ukrainians speak Russian with their families, 15.8% speak only Russian, while 24.9% speak Russian and Ukrainian in equal proportion. Needless to say, in the east and south-east of the country the native language for the majority is Russian, and we now have a president whose Ukrainian is less than perfect. In other words, Ukraine has a mixed population. The new language law sends out the unmistakable message that Russian-speakers are second-class citizens, and Zelensky has conspicuously avoided speaking out against it.

Then there is the rather absurd 'passport war'. Vladimir Putin has offered *all* Ukrainians a Russian passport. Whatever the motive, it cannot be denied that this will matter for people, whether in terms of work or visiting relatives. But Zelensky mocked the move as providing "the right to be arrested" and in return - or retaliation? - offered any Russian a Ukrainian passport, which in reality is a bit of a joke. Frankly, who on earth wants a Ukrainian passport?

The truth is, we are dealing with a state that quite recently has had part of its territory annexed. For all of the dreams of the Banderites, the country has been truncated and humiliated.

Statistics

The condition of today's Ukraine needs to be illustrated using the language of statistics. When the Soviet Union collapsed, there was a huge decline in living standards. Life expectancy in Russia plummeted downwards at a horrendous rate - for men at one stage it went down from around 72 to 54. According to the International Monetary Fund, in 2018 Russian gross domestic product per person worked out at \$11,327 per year (compared to the highest ranked country - Luxemburg - where it was

\$114,234.²

However, if you think that is bad, then just take a look at Ukraine - at the moment its figure is \$2,963, making Russia almost look rich. But at its *lowest* between 1991 and 1992 it was an appalling \$1,686, almost putting the country at the level of Indonesia, India or Pakistan. In January 2014 average real wages were about 75% of their level from the year before³ and during 2015 they fell by a further 18.5%. Unemployment rose from 7.2% at the end of 2013 to 9.1% two years later. At the same time, Ukraine's population has been decreasing ever since it declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.⁴ By the end of 2016, Ukraine's population had decreased by about 9.5 million from its 1993 peak of over 52 million - even bearing in mind the loss of Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk, that is an enormous drop.

In other words, considering Ukraine in terms of its productivity, industries and people, it has been thrown into devastating poverty - reduced in status from a second-world country in terms of social services, education, housing and so on, to a poor third-world country on the European continent (albeit not on the same level as sub-Saharan Africa). This terrible misery goes a long way to explaining why Ukrainians - desperate for any way out - elected a comedian as president. But what will happen when they get fed up with Zelensky - which will almost certainly be sooner rather than later? ●

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Notes

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- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_\(nominal\)_per_capita](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(nominal)_per_capita).
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IDENTITY**Against biological determinism**

Finlay Scott Gilmour responds to Amanda MacLean's critique of genderism

Recently the *Weekly Worker* published an article on the subject of gender and sex: whether one takes precedence over the other and which determines the true 'nature' of transgender and non-binary peoples ('Decoupled from reality', April 18). This defence of traditional understandings of what constitutes the validity of one's gender identity is a hangover of empirio-criticism and vulgar materialist understandings of the subject. Further, it only aids the reinforcement of reactionary notions of gender identity among Marxists, who ought to be fighting for a nuanced and highly developed understanding of gender nonconformity and be at the vanguard of the fight for sexual freedom.

To begin, we have to ask ourselves an important question: are biological factors the determining motivation for our psychology, or does the intricacy of human psychology come above that of our biology? All throughout modern history scientists and professionals of fields that deal with the human brain and human biology in general have argued for a different understanding of the concept of psychology. But as Marxists we must surely understand that human psychology is inherently related to class society and with that the traditional structure of the family along lines of heterosexuality and gender conformity, which exists as both the product and producer of this structure.

To say that radical opposition to traditional conceptions and structures of sex, sexuality, gender and personal relationships is anti-materialist misunderstands the nature of human relations and their development from the beginning of class society. My statement that this form of biological determinism is a hangover of empirio-criticism may seem at first glance profoundly foolish. But we must go back to the context of the debate among Russian Marxists around the relevance of bourgeois developments on Marxism and if they supersede materialism. Lenin took issue with the empirio-critics, Ernst Mach and Richard Avenarius (supporters of the concept within science) and Alexander Bogdanov (the main supporter of the idea of empirio-criticism within Marxism). Let us take a look at what Lenin states on the understanding of the human psyche in Marxism and empirio-criticism:

If bodies are "complexes of sensations", as Mach says, or "combinations of sensations", as Berkeley said, it inevitably follows that the whole world is but my idea. Starting from such a premise, it is impossible to arrive at the existence of other people besides oneself: it is the purest solipsism.¹

And Lenin explains this understanding:

Not a single idea, not a glimmer of thought, except that "we sense only our sensations". From which there is only one possible inference: namely, that the "world consists only of my sensations". The word 'our' employed by Mach instead of 'my' is employed illegitimately. By this word alone Mach betrays that "half-heartedness" of which he accuses others. For if the "assumption" of the existence of the external world is "idle", if the assumption that the needle exists independently of me and that an interaction takes place between my body and the point of the needle is really "idle and superfluous", then primarily the "assumption" of the

existence of other people is idle and superfluous.

Let us look more closely at these two rather large quotes, so we can understand Lenin's critique of empirio-criticism and how it applies to us in this argument. First of all, we must understand the argument of the empirio-critics on metaphysics and, most importantly, the conception of the 'self' and how we see the relation of matter to sensation *viz* psychological reaction. To begin, Lenin attacks the notion of the empirio-critics that our existence is composed primarily of our sensations; that, being an individual, I feel, therefore I am. What Lenin points out here is that we cannot understand biological matter separately from the psyche that forms as a reaction to it. What we can discern from this is an important understanding of materialism and the analysis of the self: material existence is primary; undeniably, our psychical reactions develop as part of the existence of matter.

This, of course, within the field of natural science is a perfectly reasonable explanation, but we must take a step back from the 'natural' and step towards the 'unnatural': that is, the existence of societal constructs in relation to our psyche. The natural exists as is - invariable, unchanging - in contrast to that of the construct, which exists as a complete variable, and only insofar as we allow it to exist.

Distinction

This is where we begin with our analysis of gender. Some draw a distinction between sex and gender, as if it were some great wall that divides a river, yet this only adds to the misunderstanding of the subject (I will deal with the subject of 'biological' sex later).

What do we use as our basis for the understanding of gender? Some say it is the presence of dysphoria, yet the existence of non-dysphoric trans people contradicts this. Others say it is one who is in a state of 'passing': *viz* they are recognised by others as their identified gender and thus exist as such on the basis of others' perceptions. This as well is flawed, as it opens the door to many questions. Is someone who was born and identifies as a man, but has a feminine voice and build, then not a man, since the perception of others must define their identity? This is the first glaring issue with the traditional understanding of gender or, as it is better understood, 'Boys will be boys and girls will be girls' - as MacLean gleefully points out. How far does one's existence depend upon the perceptions of others? And how far should this be taken? If we enforce strict rules on bathrooms, for example, along the lines of 'biological sex', do we stop every person who wishes to enter and force them to reveal themselves? After all, physical perception is defined by others: surely we must seek empirical evidence before we allow anyone to use a toilet?

The issue with perceiving as an invariable the workings of human psychology is that it ignores the developments of class society and its relation to our psychology. It is undeniable that the realisation of communism will see a radical transformation in our psyche. There is no ingrained biological determination for how we perceive things on the conscious level: we understand that the conscious - that is, independent thought - is inherently influenced by societal constructs and our own development. When we are raised to see heterosexuality as 'normal', then

**Sex: part biology, part culture**

the psyche reacts with anger if non-heteronormative attraction is present. The subconscious expunges the pent-up emotion in a form of catharsis through the conscious hatred of that which defines ourselves.

How then does this relate to our understanding of psychology and gender in capitalist class society? Most importantly it provides us with the understanding that the psyche is a variable: we are not defined by biology; we are defined by our societal influences. Gender exists as a societal construct that uses a *faux* materialist argument of 'natural science' to dissuade others from attempting to analyse the nature of gender and class.

We are raised to see heterosexual nuclear families as the building block of society, but what is the basis for the nuclear family in the modern age of capitalist production? One may say it is exactly that: production; we subconsciously desire to have families because society tells us it means we will be cared for when we are old or ill. The point is that the development of class society is intricate and complex; the exact development of these constructs may be beyond our understanding, but their relation is clear to see.

MacLean insists on defending the modern gender binary without the slightest idea of what then ensues. When our ancestors lived in the time of primitive communism, did they uphold a strict definition of gender? Across the world various cultures are not unfamiliar with the presence of a third gender - the gender binary we know of today was largely a colonial construct upheld against what were perceived to be 'barbaric' cultures that lacked the 'sure-fire science' of the European colonists. We find this construct ingrained in capitalist class society and evidently still present today.

Here is what Amanda MacLean says in regard to the way we perceive the nature of transgender existence: "But tolerance and understanding of the trans experience will fail if they are based on bad and disingenuous interpretations of science." MacLean also signals some ambiguous "return to class analysis" without realising the poverty and lack of any real understanding of materialism in their argument:

The fact that much of the left unquestioningly accepts and

regurgitates an ideology in which the subjective feelings of the individual trump objectively observable conditions is a sign that we have abandoned the physical, material reality on which our politics is based, and replaced it with a subjective individualism that is alien to any class-based analysis.

It seems MacLean has no shame in their blatant positivism: must we always turn to statistics to win ourselves a trump card? In reality MacLean's article simply reads as *faux* utilitarianism: it concedes the existence and validity of trans and non-binary people, whilst refusing to address the actual issue at hand: that is, the existence of gender itself. The mathematisation of ethics, the adherence of numerical values to abstract concepts, the ultimate attempt at the rationalisation of human ethics - these are all part of a historical trend towards positivism. And, in a theoretical expression that mirrors value relations, positivism and the rationality of bourgeois society are an ideological cover - a mask of methodology that does not reflect any true search for knowledge or absolute truth. It restricts everything to its form - one that consecrates the emergence of positivism, of bureaucratisation, of standardisation of the bourgeois society of its time. This vulgarity is present throughout MacLean's article and serves only to devalue it in the eyes on any well-read Marxist.

The reek of positivism not uncommon among anti-materialist Rad Fems. MacLean does to trans people and the struggle for liberation what bourgeois theorists do to the working class: they recognise rights and deny struggle; they concede scraps in disgust with a tight hand, whilst starkly opposing any true battle for trans existence.

MacLean's claim to a 'scientific' superiority over perceived 'genderists' - a term constructed by those opposed to any form of comprehensive study on transgender existence - is exactly what exposes the vulgarity of the article. Returning to the presence of empirio-criticism on the left, we see it present all through the article, as statistics and raw empirical evidence are thrown about to reinforce the bare bones and MacLean's hilariously bad argument; what little scraps of originality exist are laughable at best and highlight the poverty of empirio-critical

analysis. MacLean cannot form a comprehensive analysis of the subject, so they rely on empirical evidence like the bourgeois statistician, who relies on all the numbers of the imaginative bourgeois economists. That is the polar opposite of the dialectical method.

Transphobia

Now we have laid down a thorough Marxist criticism of the theory itself, we must turn to the superficial area of the article: that is, the direct presence of biological-determinist rhetoric and transphobic language. Let us begin with this quote:

In other words, a fully intact male is literally a woman if he believes himself to be a woman. This is on the basis of a self-reported 'gender identity' that is alleged to be the only reliable indicator of 'gender' and is claimed to exist independently of biological sex.

Not even a quarter way into the article do we find MacLean making clear their thought on pre-sex reassignment surgery/hormone replacement therapy trans women: they are men who 'can't hack it'. Is this the height of what MacLean can offer? Promising their devotion to defending trans people, whilst invalidating them in the exact same sentence?

Again, MacLean uses a complete falsity to reinforce their argument:

The left's response has not been to stand for the rights of lesbians and other women and girls, but, along with every mainstream political party, to suppress debate and to brand anyone who raises concerns or even asks questions with accusations of transphobia, bigotry and, bizarrely, fascism.

The mainstream of bourgeois politics are pro-trans? What level of dissonance does one require to think this? The bourgeois political sphere uses liberal renditions of identity politics to try to maintain their relevance, but the idea that the voter base or even the leadership of the Republican Party or Conservatives hold some unshaken devotion to trans existence is laughable. The exploitation, abuse and murder of trans people is ignored by bourgeois politicians. To say that bourgeois politicians 'support' trans people is as laughable as saying bourgeois politicians 'support' the working class by giving them concessions. No-one denies the exploitation and continued oppression of women - to do so is to betray the very basis of what Marxism is - but to say that trans people are invalid, that they are not oppressed by the gender binary and by patriarchy is a joke.

This running tradition of 'anti-genderism' on the British left has to stop; otherwise we will continue to be no better than charlatans lying to the working class about the nature of capitalism or the realisation of communism. Marxism is the ideology of the exploited, the starving, the weak and those trod underfoot. The struggle of all peoples against the corrosive nature of capitalism is the struggle we share and only solidarity and the full support of emancipation will bring about the realisation of that struggle.

This biological-determinist understanding of the psyche is dangerous and anti-materialist. It takes us along the same path as any biologically determinist understanding of psychology ●

Notes

1. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/mec/01.htm.

AGGREGATE

Critical not unconditional

Peter Manson reports on a lively internal debate that centred on a backsliding Jeremy Corbyn



The April 27 aggregate meeting of comrades from the CPGB and Labour Party Marxists discussed a motion, proposed by the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee, on the precise attitude the left should take towards the Labour leadership. The background to this is, of course, the ongoing strategy of accommodation to the Labour right adopted by Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell.

Introducing the motion, Jack Conrad reiterated that Corbyn is unlikely to head a Labour government. It is true that he could become so tamed and compromised that some would regard him as having defected completely to the side of the establishment. On the other hand, there could be a "mass accident", whereby a large number of rightwing Labour MPs were deselected. But that is so unlikely, obviously - whatever happened to the new trigger ballot procedure that Labour's national executive committee was supposed to implement?

Leaving those possibilities to one side, comrade Conrad stated that he still remained of the view that Corbyn was regarded as completely unreliable by the ruling class, because of his previous opposition to imperialist wars and association with the working class movement,

that he could not be trusted to head a government. If Labour was the biggest party after an election, he thought the monarch would be advised that he would not be able to command majority support in parliament and someone 'more suitable' - from the Labour right - would be called to Buckingham Palace instead. And the possibility of a cross-party national government remains on the cards.

However, the motion was about our attitude to the Labour leadership, comrade Conrad continued. It was, after all, not what we had hoped it would be under Corbyn. Of course, *For the many, not the few* was not Labour's "most radical" ever manifesto, as some seemed to believe. It was, well to the left of those we had seen under Tony Blair, but that is hardly saying very much. Nevertheless, there remains a fear of a Labour government amongst the establishment - not, in the main, because of possible increased taxation on business or limited renationalisation, but because of the "crisis of expectations" that the election of a Corbyn-led government might produce in the shape of mass militancy on the part of the working class.

Despite that, the leadership's strategy of retreat and accommodation is so all-embracing

To be silent in the face of a baseless, concerted and utterly cynical witch-hunt is to be complicit in that witch-hunt

that Corbyn cannot bring himself to speak out against the right-led witch-hunt against his own supporters using false accusations of anti-Semitism, while, for his part, McDonnell is in denial - there is no witch-hunt, he claims. Back in the days of Neil Kinnock's drive against the Militant Tendency, a dozen or more Labour MPs could be relied upon to speak out against it. But today only Chris Williamson has done so - and then, after he was suspended for saying Labour had been "too apologetic" over accusations of virtually non-existent anti-Semitism, he himself issued an apology for having said something that was essentially correct. Meanwhile those who make blatantly false accusations - such as Margaret Hodge, Tom Watson and Ruth Smeeth - are not called to account, let alone disciplined.

Corbyn can no longer be included in the "socialist left", as many insist, said comrade Conrad. He is clearly now committed to running capitalism, no matter how much he and McDonnell claim that their government would implement reforms that favour workers. Yes, we must continue to defend Corbyn against the Labour right, but we must attack him for his retreats, not "criticise him as a friend".

We must continue to fight for

a Labour Party with a Marxist leadership - that is what is necessary to transform it into a united front of the entire working class. Because you are surrounded by traitors, concluded comrade Conrad, that does not mean you have to become a traitor yourself. A Marxist would use the position of leader to appeal to the rank and file, not become a prisoner of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Debate

In the debate that followed, first to speak was a non-CPGB/LPM guest, Marilyn Sterne. While she agreed with much of what comrade Conrad had to say, she wondered how she should now work within her Labour branch. We have to explain that we cannot collaborate with the capitalist system, she said, yet we also have to reckon with the leadership's shift to the right.

Next to speak was Carla Roberts of LPM. She pointed out that some on the Labour left were becoming demoralised with the leadership. Many would like to openly criticise his appeasement, but there was a fear, in the current climate, that such criticism might lead to their own expulsion. Much of the left has, for instance, stopped pursuing the question of trigger ballots, she thought, but we must continue to fight to push comrades to the left and

What we fight for

Labour Against the Witchhunt had a key role to play in doing that.

In his contribution Bob Williams talked of the totally uncritical attitude towards the Corbyn leadership he had come across at Momentum meetings. We should be "100% behind the leader" - that was the attitude. Some were now saying there were "more important issues" than combating false claims of anti-Semitism, which they considered now to be a lost cause. But he stressed that the fight for democracy was our greatest weapon against the right.

I pointed out that the press was continuing to target Corbyn - for example, over his remarks in favour of 'leftwing dictators' and 'terrorists'. In other words, there was no sign that Corbyn is viewed as an acceptable prime minister.

Next up was Mike Macnair - like comrade Conrad a member of the CPGB's PCC. He reminded us of the common argument we encounter amongst those in the Labour Party who consider themselves to be socialists or even Marxists: above everything else we need a Labour government and therefore we have to "manage the media". This, of course, only encouraged the appeasement of the right. Comrade Macnair noted that for the right *allegations* of anti-Semitism were now regarded as proof.

Mick Hurst criticised the PCC motion from the left. He said Corbyn was fast becoming a "normal Labour leader" and Momentum was a "very conservative organisation". Corbyn and McDonnell can no longer be classified as 'left', so we must prioritise LPM and LAW and expose Corbyn and McDonnell for what they are. He proposed deleting point 9 in the motion, which talks of the need to "defend the Labour leadership" against the right. We should reject "auto-Corbynism", he said - our task was to "empower the working class". He also queried the CPGB position on the European Union elections. We cannot support every single Labour candidate. We should abstain.

He was followed by Farzad Kamangar, who said that, while Corbyn and McDonnell had lowered themselves to the level of the right on many issues, they are still regarded as left leaders by those like the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party in England and Wales. But it was important to "strike a balance", she said, between expressing strong criticism and attempting to defeat the right.

Stan Keable of LPM thought it was important to be clear on the extent to which Corbyn and McDonnell had changed. It was important to establish exactly how they should be classified now, especially in the context of the call for a new organisation of the Labour left - such unity would require a struggle for the correct position, he said.

William Sarsfield contended that the motion, including point 9, was "timely". He thought that in general the opposition of the Labour rank and file to the false 'anti-Semitism' charges was healthy, but there was a feeling that 'we've lost this one' and so we should look for 'more fertile ground' on which to fight. However, one act of surrender would lead to others and he urged comrades to seriously address how LPM could take things forward.

Vernon Price agreed that many thought the struggle to democratise Labour had been lost and so there now needed to be a differentiation on the left. But how should this be given organisational form? We should also look at how to take forward LAW and discuss the motions put forward by the steering committee for the May 4 meeting, he said. Like other comrades Phil Kent was in favour

of retaining point 9. The idea was to "create space" to take on the right, he said, while at the same time opposing Corbyn's retreats.

'Auto-Corbynism'

Responding to the debate, comrade Conrad said that after Corbyn's election as leader in 2015 he had expected that Labour Party Marxists would soon be exercising a "huge draw". Its message is indeed popular, but very few are ready to act along the lines LPM recommends. The day he was confirmed as Labour leader, Corbyn went out of his way to address a left-led demonstration rather than appearing on the Andrew Marr show. Unfortunately, however, he soon learnt to be 'sensible' and now cuts a rather different political figure.

He reiterated that Corbyn does not have any "ambitious programme" to transform Labour - indeed Tony Blair was more ambitious (and successful) in this regard. Nevertheless, the establishment still fears that Corbyn cannot be relied upon - the queen would perhaps call someone like Tom Watson rather than Corbyn to form a government.

However, he disagreed with comrade Hurst's argument that we should no longer defend Corbyn against the right. After all, in doing so we are defending the space in which we can fight for Labour's transformation. So our support needs to be critical, most definitely - but not unconditional. It includes the need to make demands on the leadership. So he rejected comrade Hurst's implication that point 9 was an example of "auto-Corbynism".

He pointed out that Labour's membership had doubled and there were many thousands who are beginning to think. Our task is to engage with the ideas and programme of Marxism. Certainly the Labour Party is at the moment a key site of struggle - and we should certainly advocate that organisations such as the *Morning Star's* CPB, the SWP and SPEW join us in fighting for a good Labour vote in both the local and EU elections.

After this full debate, the motion was put to a vote. Comrade Hurst's argument was clearly rejected by most comrades and he withdrew his amendment. The motion itself was agreed unanimously.

Following the main debate, the aggregate was addressed by comrade Yasmine Mather on the possibility of an imperialist-led war in the Middle East. This focussed on Iran, following Donald Trump's dubbing of the Revolutionary Guards as a "terrorist organisation", but also dealt with, among other things, the situation in Syria and Israel/Palestine, and the enduring power of Islamic State, which, she contended, had "not been defeated".

Comrade Mather pointed out that the RG were in reality incorporated into the Iranian army and so Iran itself was being labelled terrorist. It looked as though the Trump administration was hoping to provoke Tehran into "doing something stupid", which would then be met by an Israeli military response. If that happened the US would insist it had to 'defend its ally'.

Comrade Mather warned of the likely response of some on the left, who would offer the Islamic regime unconditional and perhaps uncritical support. That is why the left needs to build Hands Off the People of Iran, which opposes not only any imperialist intervention, including sanctions, but also the Tehran regime itself.

It was a fascinating talk, which the *Weekly Worker* will shortly be publishing ●

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Attitude towards the current Labour leadership



Given a platform by bosses ... but not trusted by bosses

1. Our position on the Corbyn leadership of the Labour Party was worked out in advance - that is, well before his actual election - and with far greater foresight and precision than any other campaign, committee, group or party on the left. We are committed to the complete transformation of the Labour Party, forging it into a permanent united front of the working class and equipping it with solid Marxist principles and a tried and tested Marxist leadership.

2. Whatever the idiot rightwing press, Tory ERGers and Tom Watson's Future Britain say, Corbyn is no Marxist. He is, in fact, a sincere, but weak, badly advised, dithering left reformist. True, Corbyn and his closest allies have a record of opposing imperialist wars and adventures, standing in solidarity with striking workers and voting against Tory attacks on migrants, democratic rights and public services.

3. However, since his election it has become abundantly clear what the class character of a Corbyn government would be. The Corbyn leadership is committed to reversing austerity, increasing the economic role of the state, repealing some anti-trade union laws and introducing a few minor constitutional reforms. At best that amounts to an illusory attempt to run British capitalism in the interests of the working class. Meanwhile, in the name of *For the many, not the few*, wage-slavery continues, Britain remains a monarchy, subject to judge-made law, one of the Five Eyes, a core imperialist power, a member of Nato and armed with US-controlled nuclear weapons. To call such a programme "socialist" is to violate the commonly accepted language of the left.

4. At present, even such a modest change of course is totally unacceptable to the capitalist class. The biggest fear is that a Corbyn-led government would trigger a crisis of expectations and unleash a wave of class struggles. The Labour right would therefore act to prevent the formation of such a government. Associated with that probability there lies the possibility of the monarch calling another candidate for prime minister for an audience at Buckingham Palace. That could result in the formation of a national government.

5. Nonetheless, a Corbyn-led government cannot be categorically ruled out. But, if it happened, we

should expect constitutional and anti-constitutional moves by the privy council, the army, the deep state, etc. Those on the left who downplay such threats, whatever their subjective intentions, constitute themselves as agents of a criminal complacency.

6. Conceivably, the ruling class could reconcile itself to a Corbyn-led government. But only if: (a) it further denounces its own past and further waters down its own programme; and/or (b) in the event of a dangerous upsurge in popular protests, a major downturn in the world economy or a crash caused by a no-deal Brexit, which temporarily necessitated a left Labour government to serve as the best means of mass deception.

7. The collapse before the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' witch-hunt in the Labour Party is a telling warning sign. The appeasement of the Labour right, the failure to challenge blatant lies, the willingness to see good socialists investigated, suspended, sacked, expelled and publicly traduced cannot be excused. And, where Jeremy Corbyn has been silent, John McDonnell has actually given succour to the witch-hunt. Then there is the truly appalling role played by Jon Lansman and his Momentum organisation - praised by the Zionist Jewish Labour Movement. Note: to their everlasting shame Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and Diane Abbott supported Lansman's anti-democratic coup in Momentum.

8. If the Labour leadership is unable to show elementary solidarity with those targeted by a totally cynical witch-hunt, if the Labour leadership calculates that the bigger cause is served by taking such a course, it has betrayed not only its past: it has betrayed its future. Giving them a platform in the left press, treating them as prestigious sponsors, calling such people 'comrades' is no longer in any way acceptable.

9. We should defend the Corbyn leadership against Tom Watson and Future Britain, the liberal and rightwing media, the Tories, the deep state, etc. By that we mean, first and foremost, defending the conditions in the Labour Party which allow for the rooting of socialist consciousness and the further spread of Marxist ideas.

10. Our task is to fully empower the Labour Party's mass membership, open eyes as to the real nature of the Corbyn leadership and bring about the circumstances whereby the Labour Party is thoroughly purged of the pro-capitalist right and the leadership is won by real, not supposed, Marxists ●

■ 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

Exploiting
the many for
the benefit
of the few

Not an oxymoron?

Can there be a return to 'progressive capitalism'? Don't hold your breath, says Michael Roberts

Joseph Stiglitz is a Nobel prize winner in economics and former chief economist at the World Bank, as well as an advisor to the Labour leadership. He stands to the left in the spectrum of mainstream economics.

He has just published a new book called *People, power and profits: progressive capitalism for an age of discontent*, in which he proclaims: "We can save our broken economic system from itself." He is very concerned about the rising inequality of incomes and wealth in the major economies, especially in the US:

Some 90% have seen their incomes stagnate or decline in the past 30 years. This is not surprising, given that the United States has the highest level of inequality¹ among the advanced countries and one of the lowest levels of opportunity - with the fortunes of young Americans more dependent on the income and education of their parents than elsewhere.²



No return to the 1950s

You see, capitalism used to be "progressive", in that it developed the economy and raised the human condition, using scientific knowledge and innovation; and it worked well, with the rule of law and democratic checks on 'excesses'. But then, in the 1980s, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher came along and changed the rules,³ deregulating the economy - and now Trump is breaking down the checks and balances. So the "progressive capitalism" of the 1960s has been destroyed. Because it now relies on uncontrolled markets, exploitation and inequality have run riot. According to Stiglitz,

The result is an economy with more exploitation - whether it's abusive practices in the financial sector or the technology sector using our own data to take advantage of us at the cost of our privacy. The weakening of anti-trust enforcement, and the failure of regulation to keep up with changes in our economy and the innovations in creating and leveraging market power, meant that markets became more concentrated and less competitive.

What is Stiglitz's solution?

Things don't have to be that way. There is an alternative: progressive capitalism. Progressive capitalism is not an oxymoron; we can indeed channel the power of the market to serve society.

It is not capitalism that is the problem, of course, but vested interests, especially among monopolists and bankers. The answer is to return to the days of managed capitalism that Stiglitz believes existed in the golden age of the 1950s and 1960s.

So how are we to do that? Stiglitz was asked in an interview: "Should it be progressive capitalism or workers'

power?" He replied:

The market is going to have to play an important role. So that's why I wanted to use the word 'capitalism'. But I wanted to signal that the form of capitalism that we've seen over the last 40 years has not been working for most people. And that's why I talk about people. We have to have progressive capitalism. We have to tame capitalism and redirect capitalism, so it serves our society. You know, people are not supposed to serve the economy; the economy is supposed to serve our people.⁴

When he was asked, "Hasn't capitalism always done that [ie, serve the rich and the monopolies rather than the poor and workers]?", he responded, "Not to the extent that it has."

Stiglitz's views are either pure naivety or clever sophistry - or maybe both. Does he really think that there was a period when capitalism benefited both workers and corporations; rich and poor? The 'golden age' after 1945 up to the late 1960s was the exception in advanced capitalist economies and then only for their own economies, not for Latin America, Asia, the Middle

East and Africa. For the greater part of the globe, those decades were ones of dire poverty and a battle against imperialist exploitation.

Anyway, it is a myth that in the 1950s and 1960s everybody gained from 'progressive' capitalism in the west. And what gains that were made - in public services, a welfare state, relatively full employment and rising incomes - were mainly the result of struggle and pressure by the labour movement, forcing concessions from the owners of capital.

And Stiglitz never explains why this supposed regulated, democratic, progressive capitalism came to an end in the 1970s, except to suggest it was down to the vile politics of Reagan, Thatcher, etc. But readers will know that there was a change of objective conditions from the mid-1960s: namely a sharp fall in the profitability of capital globally.

That meant that capital could no longer accede to rising real incomes, more public services, free education and health, etc. The years of high profitability that allowed for concessions were over. Profitability is the driving force of capitalism, so politicians were elected (both right and left) committed to reducing the welfare state and labour's power; privatising and deregulating. Above

all, "progressive" capitalism had a series of major slumps that weakened the labour movement and restored (to some extent) profitability.

Indeed, Stiglitz never mentions the causes of recessions at all, except to suggest that they are due to rising inequality:

If we had curbed exploitation in all of its forms and encouraged wealth creation, we would have had a more dynamic economy with less inequality. We might have curbed the opioid crisis and avoided the 2008 financial crisis.

And yet the international slumps of 1974-75 and 1980-82 took place when inequality was at its lowest since industrial capitalism began, according to Thomas Piketty. So rising inequality was not the cause of the great recession, but the result of efforts to raise profitability after the 1980s.⁵

And how do we get back to this "progressive capitalism" anyway? Stiglitz proposes regulation, breaking up the "monopolies", progressive taxation, ending corruption and enforcing the rule of law in trade:

The prescription follows from the diagnosis: it begins by recognising

the vital role that the state plays in making markets serve society. We need regulations that ensure strong competition without abusive exploitation, realigning the relationship between corporations and the workers they employ and the customers they are supposed to serve. We must be as resolute in combating market power as the corporate sector is in increasing it.

These prescriptions are the stock of the reformist left in the US and elsewhere. America's left Democrat senator, Elizabeth Warren, has made similar proposals with her "accountable capitalism" plan.⁶

What on earth would make the top 1% and the very rich owners of capital agree to reduce their gains in order to get a 'more equal and successful economy'? And how would regulation and more equality deal with the impending disaster that is global warming, as capitalism accumulates rapaciously without any regard for the planet's resources and viability? Programmes of redistribution do little for this. And if an economy is made more equal, would it stop future slumps under capitalism or future great recessions? 'More equal' economies in the past did not avoid these slumps.

Unlike in 1949, in 2019 none of Stiglitz's 'progressive' measures are possible. Indeed, radical change is now probably only possible with "workers' power", and if that became a reality we could move beyond such measures to real democratic control of the economy - by replacing capitalism, rather than 'saving it from itself' ●

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

Notes

1. www.stlouisfed.org/on-the-economy/2017/october/how-us-income-inequality-compare-worldwide.
2. J Stiglitz *People, power and profits: progressive capitalism for an age of discontent* New York 2019.
3. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/03/02/changing-the-rules-or-changing-the-game>.
4. www.democracynow.org/2019/4/24/economist_joseph_stiglitz_capitalism_hasnt_been.
5. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2014/03/11/is-inequality-the-cause-of-capitalist-crises>.
6. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2018/08/21/accountable-inclusive-or-responsible-capitalism>.

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