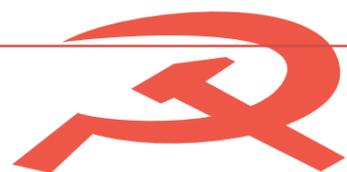


# weekly **worker**



**Jeremy Corbyn: main target of witch-hunt. LAW prepares for the battles ahead**

- Letters and debate
- Identity and biology
- Assessing Karl Kautsky
- Middle East dangers

No. 1250 May 9 2019

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

£1/€1.10

## Coup attempt fizzes out



# LETTERS



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

## Not the answer

Ian Birchall argues that we should learn from Extinction Rebellion rather than try to lecture them, but this misses the mark (Letters, May 2). The fact that XR doesn't have an anti-capitalist programme is caused by the fact that its composition is not working class: it is a movement of the liberal middle class. This becomes very clear in their relation to the police, where they can shout their love for them, while their comrades are being arrested. No regard for the police role under capitalism and white supremacy.

Furthermore, disjointed and random direct actions will never by themselves create structural change - and neither will seeing the struggle against climate change as its own independent struggle that all other struggles are subordinate to due to its urgency. 'Climate change' is in fact produced, and production is done by human labour. There is no short cut to saving the climate: it demands that the working class be organised for struggle against the current mode of production, which is based on overproduction. Workers also need to be conscious about the production that they take part in and build a culture of refusing to do work that damages the environment and climate.

This cannot be done without a socialist programme or without going past the use of 'civil disobedience', which thus far has been a tactic of raising opinions. Socialists should not be lowering themselves to the level of liberalism in a question that is resolutely about socialism: the struggle against a system that demands constant growth of profits.

It should also be noted that the production of climate change has been moved out of the imperialist core and into the global south. Both because production and waste dumping have been exported, and also because rougher weather will (and has) hit the global south first. This means that the struggle needs to be primarily anti-imperialist, as all anti-capitalist struggle should be.

What is XR's response to this? Putting forward arguments about stopping "mass immigration" caused by climate change, instead of actually exposing and opposing imperialism.

**Emma Silva**  
email

## Uncle Tony

While many comrades will no doubt be tempted, in response to Ian Birchall's sullen musings on Extinction Rebellion, to shrug their shoulders and conclude that it would have been better for Ian's political development if Tony Cliff *wasn't* the most remarkable person he had met in his life, I have a lot more sympathy.

I can quite see why Ian would be concerned about the issue of extinction, given the state of the opposition that only a few years ago was struggling against the Socialist Workers Party leadership. One group had an acrimonious split over a piece of furniture; Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century (RS21) is only notable for issuing a boring magazine that often reads like it has been written by 'comrade Delta' circa 2005 (albeit without the all-important testicles); while others, such as Ian, form 'sects of one' and remember the good old days when uncle Tony would poke his head out of the front door

to take a sniff of the Hackney air and work out the next diabolical wheeze. This certainly looks like extinction to me and something we should all rebel against.

Perhaps this is why Ian is also concerned about tiny groups that can't get their membership above 30. Uncharitable souls might suggest that this is a particularly egregious case of people in glass houses throwing stones but, again, this would be most unfair. After all, Ian probably doesn't know he is in a glass house, dreaming as he does of those glory days when SWP membership cards would be distributed with all the loving care of confetti and membership/demonstration figures had all those all-important random noughts added on the end.

**Lawrence Parker**  
London

## Dream world

Your correspondent, Ian Birchall, makes plain his contempt for Eddie Ford's article of the previous week ('Fill the jails', April 25). In turn, an entirely different set of thoughts fills my head.

Not only do I recoil in a multi-mix of disgust, fury and horror at Birchall's sadly archetypal example of pedantic nit-picking: I consider comrade Eddie to have gone some good way along the pathway of criticising both the arrival on the scene and activities themselves of Extinction Rebellion. That's to say, doing so in an open-eyed, clear-cut, but sensibly constructive, manner.

At least as I read it, the comrade not only pointed to the welcome questioning and "courageous" challenging of capitalist state narratives by XR, but more importantly placed overriding emphasis on the almost total absence of any political "strategy and programme" on their part - what otherwise might be called a far higher-grade *wokefulness* in harness with dramatically wider horizons.

All of that is unarguably valid - that is, if XR have any expectations whatsoever of making an impact or generating real change either for humankind or the condition of our planet Earth. Somewhat ironically, where they see a glaring connection between "eco-destruction" and functions/habits of lifestyle, tragically they fail to recognise the innate and *immutable* relationship of consumer capitalism with complete disaster. By which I mean disaster in terms of basic human dignity, as well as even more spiritual aspects of things - quite simply put: not only of practicalities, but also of higher values, such as beauty, soulfulness, aesthetics!

As far as I'm aware, comrade Eddie's article lies at the stronger and distinctly more *biting* end of responses from the UK's Marxist/communist organisations. Quite possibly, the most significant factor lying behind this situation is that current-times Marxism feels itself very reluctant to 'overly' criticise, where its own performance is so weak and ineffective - and, as a result, all but an irrelevance. It's in order to avoid facing up to those gross but undeniable deficiencies that Marxism hides behind its oblique, *softly-softly* approach to criticising what are - in all truth and any honest analysis - these attempts by children messing about in a playground sandpit. The ideological basis for the beliefs, processes and activities of Extinction Rebellion is equivalent to nothing much more than childish

(or certainly undeveloped and unsophisticated) dreaming of a '*nicer and safer world*'; where (in harsh but crystal-clear distinction) neither the innate *class* structure of capitalist society nor the direct consequences that flow from that reality get a mention.

That class structure, of course, is the main cog wheel within our engine room of ruthless, vicious, exploitative, oppressive, 'consumer' capitalist way of life - and thereby its immutably *destructive* relationship to the natural world. Surely, the absence of any solid awareness of these various interlocked factors justifies a description of XR as constituting little more than children messing around in their playground sandpit, within their charming but infantile 'dream world'?

**Bruno Kretzschmar**  
email

## Non-reply

I note that Dave Douglass (Letters, May 2) saw fit not to bother to answer what I asked: when was Sinn Fein ever a socialist organisation (April 25)? Understandable when he is presently engaged in an ongoing debate with others on capitalist constitutional niceties, but baffling when he still repeats his sympathy for a 32-county "socialist" republic, yet declines to offer a view on what sort of socialism this would entail.

The Irish Republican Socialist Party does present a clear definition: "Socialism means the ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange collectively by the entire working class, with an end to wage labour, an end to production for profit and its replacement by a system of production based on human need."

It shares, along with the Labour Party's clause four, the idea of the continued existence of "exchange". However, to talk of the collective ownership of the means of exchange by the entire working class is a contradiction in terms. Where there is collective ownership, there can be no exchange, since exchange can only take place between separate owners: ie, where there is private ownership (either individual, sectional, corporate or by the state), no collective ownership exists. In a socialist society goods are distributed, not exchanged. The IRSP's concept of socialism remains one of the state running capitalism, accompanied by the usual gamut of palliatives.

The removal of 'the border' will not remove one social ill from which the working class suffers and so it is not a problem which concerns the working class. To set up new governments will not help workers, north or south, in any meaningful manner. Dave, you seem to identify with the nation-state - the political creature of that system whose effects you frequently vilify: capitalism. Nationalism is near the top of the list of political illusions used to blinker capitalism's victims.

**Alan Johnstone**  
Socialist Party of Great Britain

## It didn't happen

Jim Creegan in his excellent and thought-provoking article juxtaposes the sainted Rosa Luxemburg's red-in-tooth-claw revolutionism against the equally-sainted (in some circles) Karl Kautsky's reformism ('Steady rightward trajectory', May 2).

We need to step back and take a view of the condition of the European working classes in the

early part of the 20th century prior to the cataclysm of the great war. In the United Kingdom the workers had never previously had it so good as they did in the Edwardian era. There was mass employment alongside rising wages. Working hours were shortened, giving genuine leisure time with plenty of opportunity to enjoy it - the bicycle to take you out of the city, the cheap excursion train to take you to the seaside, football and cricket matches to attend, the music hall and, as ever, the public houses, where men could fritter away their hard-won wages to the chagrin of their wives.

This material improvement of the working class didn't just happen - it was won by organised labour in the trade union movement. In the Edwardian era that movement gained a political, parliamentary wing in the Independent Labour Party. For the United Kingdom's proletariat there was a ballot-box means of achieving socialism ...

It didn't happen - and it didn't happen for Karl Kautsky's Social Democratic Party - but I think he can be forgiven for thinking that it might have ...

**Robbie Leslie**  
email

## Stan and Ollie

Call me 'shocked', 'gobsmacked' or even 'surprised' to read the report of the CPGB aggregate on April 27 and the resolution on the Labour leadership ('Critical, not unconditional', May 2). As reported, the main item was criticism of Jeremy Corbyn. Nobody trusted him because he is a moderate socialist - too little for real socialists and too much for the ruling class.

Corbyn was presented as a compromiser and appeaser. The ruling class still feared him, but they would only support his elevation to the top job as the crown's chief executive if the situation became dire - with street protests, a major downturn in the world economy or a crash triggered by a no-deal Brexit.

Speaker after speaker lined up to say the same - Jack Conrad, Marilyn Sterne, Carla Roberts, Bob Williams, Peter Manson, Mike Macnair, Mick Hurst, Farzad Kamangar, Stan Keable, William Sarsfield, Vernon Price, Phil Kent. Comrade Hurst uttered a note of dissent, because he did not want to "defend Corbyn against the right" and wondered about the CPGB position on the EU elections.

The mindset of the CPGB aggregate focused on matters largely within the Labour Party over anti-Semitism and party democracy. Nobody thought the battle over Brexit was relevant. The resolution ignored it. Yet the battle over Brexit posed a threat to the unity of the working class and the Labour Party.

The policy of the working class movement towards the EU is absolutely central to any serious discussion about the current Labour leadership. What is the political line and tactics of the Labour leadership? Will this help elevate Corbyn to power or bring about his overthrow?

The CPGB aggregate did not discuss the Labour leadership's strategy and tactics on Europe. Nobody argued Corbyn's tactics were mistaken or whether it was creating great danger for the working class and the Labour Party. Criticism of Labour tactics would require the CPGB to argue for alternative tactics and for Labour

Party Marxists to get stuck in by fighting for them.

The CPGB's view of the fight over Brexit currently appears as 'boycottist'. Don't mention the war! A plague on all their houses! Say nothing in hope it goes away. Yet the future of the Labour Party may hang on how this pans out.

The report on the aggregate is presented under a classic picture of Stan and Ollie saying "shush" by mime. It reminded me of the two Zionists who stalked Jeremy Corbyn and the Palestinian ambassador - Corbyn claimed they did not understand English irony.

These two Zionists are not the only ones. Stan and Ollie saying "shush" at the start of a report on a debate about Corbyn and the Labour leadership, which says nothing about the major strategic and tactical problem of the EU, is more irony than England can take.

**Steve Freeman**  
London

## Transform Labour

I welcome the discussion at the recent CPGB aggregate of the resolution, 'Attitude towards the current Labour leadership (May 2).

In my opinion, following the next general election, a minority Corbyn-led Labour government will be short-lived. The right wing will break away to form a national government and Marxists should be preparing for this eventuality. The experience of the formation of the national government in 1931 has many lessons for us today. The most important comes from what Ramsay MacDonald said to Herbert Morrison (Lord Peter Mandelson's grandfather) when they met on Westminster Bridge in 1931. He told him to stay in the Labour Party, "where he was needed".

When the right wing of the Parliamentary Labour Party splits away from a Corbyn-led minority government, we must make sure that all present-day Herbert Morrisons are removed completely from the party. This is what Marxists need to prepare for. As point 10 of the CPGB aggregate resolution says, "Our task is to fully empower the Labour Party's mass membership ... whereby the Labour Party is thoroughly purged of the pro-capitalist right and the leadership won by real, not supposed Marxists."

To achieve this, all *Weekly Worker* readers and subscribers should become active in the Labour Party, and after thoroughly reading each edition pass on their copy to their Labour Party contacts. Better still, all readers and subscribers should ask to be sent a weekly pack of *Weekly Workers* to sell locally.

When James P Cannon (founder of the American Socialist Workers Party) was a teenager, his father sold the weekly mass-circulation newspaper *Appeal to Reason* in their hometown in the American mid-west. In 2019, the *Weekly Worker* is the embryo of a modern-day *Appeal to Reason*. Unlike *The Socialist*, *Socialist Appeal* and *Socialist Worker*, it is not at the moment aimed at the general public, but at members of the left. It is our job to make sure that it becomes the go-to newspaper of activists in the Labour Party across Britain.

By doing so, we can transform the Labour Party into a permanent united front of the working class and equip it with solid Marxist principles and a tried and tested Marxist leadership.

**John Smithee**  
Cambridgeshire

## IDENTITY

# Sex is not psyche

Amanda MacLean replies to Richard Farnos and Finlay Scott Gilmore

**M**y article, 'Decoupled from reality' (*Weekly Worker* April 18), prompted a letter from Richard Farnos (April 25) and a response from Finlay Scott Gilmore, entitled 'Against biological determinism' (May 2).

I have no interest in engaging with most of what Finlay Scott Gilmore had to say last week - if he wants to debate the number of angels that can dance on an empirio-critical positivist punctuation mark, then he will have to find another debating partner - but I do wish to correct some of the major errors in how both he and Farnos represent my thinking. (I suspect that Gilmore will be as disappointed by the lack of originality I display below as he was in my first offering - unfortunately there is little room for originality when explaining that, despite rumours, the earth still goes around the sun.)

But first, to Farnos, who has only one critique of the main substance of my argument: he suggests that my understanding of biology is outdated. Not enough to make a difference to this debate. I was working in academia up until 2002, and spent a significant proportion of my PhD and post-doctoral research investigating sexual maturation in fish. This involved seeing far more salmonid gonads than I ever want to see again, and I can confirm that, like humans, salmon and trout either have testes or ovaries. I may in that time have seen an intersex fish or two, but it is not something I remember: although notable for its rarity, it would have been no mystery.

What Farnos does not realise is that there is no 'new science' to support the 'sex spectrum' argument. When, about 18 months ago, I first heard of this 'new science', I have to admit I was astonished - even excited. Intrigued, I went in search of it, but was disappointed to find absolutely nothing new. The intersex conditions - hormonal and chromosomal variations on which the 'sex spectrum' argument is based - were all taught during my first degree zoology courses in the late 1980s, when John Zachary Young's *The life of vertebrates* was a core textbook. If Farnos thinks my science is outdated because I quote a general principle from that book, then he had better discount his 'new science' as well.

Farnos also suggests that I have made up false arguments as a straw doll in order to easily knock them down. Unfortunately not. I have neither the time, the imagination nor the malevolent will to make up arguments as bizarre as the ones that are daily put forward on this subject by genderist (not gender) ideologues. Most of the arguments - including the, frankly racist, one that transwomen are a type of woman just like black women - have been voiced and reiterated by activists within my branch of the Labour Party, not just in written articles or in the deep recesses of social media. If the people putting forward these arguments actually mean something else, then now would be a very good time to say so.

### Determinism

Turning to Gilmore, he suggests that I argue that "biological factors [are] the determining motivation for our psychology", and that I enforce the gender binary, "gleefully pointing out" that "boys will be boys and girls will be girls". If Farnos wants a straw doll, he can find one here. Biological determinism is the *exact opposite* of my argument, and I am as opposed



Biology: two sexes (artwork by Lydia Ortiz)

to it as Gilmore himself claims to be. The fact that Gilmore is incapable of grasping this suggests that he is far more wedded to the cultural constructs attached to sex than he realises. He cannot hear the words 'boy' and 'girl' without dragging along with them all the cultural baggage and expectations that he claims he wants to dismantle.

Gilmore proves my point that the left is at risk of ignoring the reality of sex. Insofar as he responds to the meat of my article at all, he argues that it presents a "biological-determinist understanding of the psyche". He seemingly cannot conceive of the body having any importance in its own right: only as an influence on the mind may it have significance.

But my argument says *nothing* about any effect of biology on the psyche. It is patently obvious from everyday life that the full range of personality, thought and behaviour exists across both sexes - only if you are looking through the blue and pink lens of gendered expectations could you think otherwise. Does Gilmore really think I meant that possessing a male or female body generates, in some mysterious way, a kind of masculine or feminine soul, spirit or mind that is impossible to attain if you have the other kind of body? This is something that has literally never occurred to me, although I have recently discovered that some past feminist thinkers ascribed to such a view. Gilmore only found it in my writing because he assumed it must be there and wanted to oppose it - or *vice versa*.

Gilmore may find it vulgar - maybe even obscene - but human beings are animals. We evolved from animals, and we remain animals. The concepts 'male' and 'female' mean the same for our species as they do for any other species on earth. Therefore it should be immediately apparent that the psyche does not come into my argument at all - unless he thinks that house mice, European eels, and lobsters also have a psyche worth the name. When I say that a person is male or female - a man or a woman, a boy or a girl - I aim to convey *only* some brute facts about the body, related to sexual and reproductive anatomy and functions. Those brute facts are very far from socially constructed. I defend the concept of two, and only two, sexes, because they truly are the facts of life - a constraint on our existence that cannot be escaped.

But, while I defend the reality of sexual dimorphism, I do not defend the gender binary, where 'gender' reflects social and cultural

expectations of how each sex should think or act. The complexities of gender - by which I mean the social roles and expectations, cultural and symbolic significance, that societies attach to the sexes, and which are often socially, sometimes violently, enforced - were not the subject of my previous article. Gilmore tritely assumes that, because I did not go into that area in detail, I must not understand it, and nonsensically proposes that I therefore think that trans and non-binary people "are not oppressed by the gender binary and by patriarchy". Of course they are. That is the point - they are actual males and females who are punished, bullied and vilified for acting in ways that are considered unacceptable for males and females to behave.

He argues that the notion of two genders is a product of western imperialism, imposed by colonialists on more open-minded cultures that recognised third genders, and sometimes more. (This may be partly true, although if he reads ancient texts like *The Iliad*, *Epic of Gilgamesh* or the *Torah* he will find plenty of examples of extremely 'binary' cultures that existed long before Europe invaded other continents.) But what should be glaringly obvious is that these third genders are a response to the actual existence of only two sexes. For instance the South Asian *hijra* - roughly equivalent to transwomen - are not considered to actually *be* women. Because they are male, they fall into a separate and distinct category, despite acting and presenting as feminine. Similarly, North American two-spirit, Samoan *fa'afafine* and all the myriad other genders found in traditional cultures are a creative social response to accommodating gender-dysphoric or gender-non-conforming individuals in a world where only two sexes exist. If genderists have reason to believe that there is (or was) a traditional culture where a single gender category includes both males and females without distinction, then why not present the evidence?

The transrational approach that I briefly referred to in 'Decoupled from reality' takes the third gender/third space argument and runs with it - arguing that transwomen are not men, but they are not women either; and that, likewise, transmen are their own, unique gender - a recognition that we as humans are neither mind nor body, but both indivisibly. Until sex-based stereotypes and expectations are abolished altogether, this is the way forward in my view ●

## ACTION

### London Communist Forum

**Sunday May 12, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimtz's *Lenin's electoral strategy from 1907 to the October Revolution of 1917*. This meeting: chapter 3: 'The "Great War", 1917 and beyond': 'The duma fraction and anti-war work'. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk) and Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk).

### Radical Anthropology Group

**Tuesday May 14, 6.30pm:** Series of talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. This meeting: 'How anthropology might inspire anti-capitalist and Extinction Rebellion activism'. Speaker: Chris Knight. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

### Care at night, pay us right!

**Friday May 10, 12 noon:** Alternative Futures Group workers strike rally, St George's Hall steps, Liverpool L1. Stand up for over 650 overnight care workers on strike against a pay cut to below the minimum wage. Speakers include Dave Prentis, Unison general secretary. Organised by Unison North West: [www.unisonnw.org/news\\_blogs](http://www.unisonnw.org/news_blogs).

### 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](http://www.facebook.com/events/260404684903442).

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

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

### 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](http://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/events](http://www.facebook.com/UKSCN/events).

### 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/331184307542225](http://www.facebook.com/events/331184307542225).

### 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](http://www.facebook.com/events/1448957158579543).

### Trump and transition

**Saturday June 1, 12 noon to 5pm:** Seminar, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. 'Are we entering a new stage of the post-World War II crisis?' Speakers: Hillel Ticktin and Mick Cox. Organised by *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*: [www.critiquejournal.net](http://www.critiquejournal.net).

### Protest against 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.facebook.com/events/2016964828402260).

### Derby Silk Mill

**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](http://www.facebook.com/DerbySilkMillRally).

### 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**

# Preparing for battles ahead

David Shearer of Labour Party Marxists reports on a meeting full of vigorous debate



Some 45 comrades attended the all-members meeting of Labour Against the Witchhunt on May 4. LAW, of course, was set up to oppose the Labour right's attempt to depose Jeremy Corbyn by targeting the left, using various false accusations - in particular allegations of anti-Semitism.

Opening the meeting, Tina Werkmann stressed from the chair LAW's important campaigning work, which has resulted in some (admittedly limited) recent successes - not least forcing the *Mail on Sunday* to withdraw its malicious accusation against Ken Livingstone, when it claimed he had said it was "not anti-Semitic to hate the Jews of Israel". In fact he had stated that the claim he had said such a thing was one of the lies spread about him.

But this was only one of many "outrageous attempts to smear" comrades, including, of course, Chris Williamson MP, who has been suspended merely for stating that Labour had been "too apologetic" over accusations of anti-Semitism (even though most have been totally false). And LAW has organised protests, drafted model motions used by various Constituency Labour Parties and branches, not least in relation

to comrade Williamson. Comrade Werkmann welcomed the letter Corbyn had just sent to the Board of Deputies of British Jews, where he complained about the "mischievous representation" of the foreword he wrote in 2011 to JA Hobson's 1902 book *Imperialism - a study*.

But she expected the smears to continue and said that LAW needed to "make a bigger impact" for that reason. However, the fact that almost 400 comrades had joined the organisation, while just under 2,000 have asked to receive its email bulletins, illustrates the progress already made.

## Motions

The two main motions discussed at the meeting concerned, firstly, the link between opposing the witch-hunt and building a fighting, democratic Labour left; and, secondly, LAW's attitude towards the May 23 European Union elections.

Moving the first motion on behalf of the steering committee, Jackie Walker - herself recently expelled from Labour over absurd allegations - stated that the witch-hunt was so "embedded" that many comrades are terrified in case what they say is taken out of context and used to make false

**Lobby in support of Jackie Walker: the outcome was always certain**

**Prime target of witch-hunt is Jeremy Corbyn**



accusations against them. And things are not helped when groups such as Momentum - what she called the "faux left" - in reality end up siding with the right by refusing to defend the witch-hunt's victims.

She agreed with comrade Werkmann that Corbyn may have finally "woken up" when it comes to the witch-hunt directed against himself, but he still will not admit that it is not just him who is being targeted. The problem is, he is still trying to accommodate the rightwing-dominated Parliamentary Labour Party. So we need to continue our work, aiming to raise people's consciousness in order to build an "anti-racist, anti-Zionist, left organisation" within Labour.

One of the first to speak from the floor was Pete Firmin, who opposed the whole motion, on the grounds that it was not the role of LAW to "build an alternative Labour left". In fact the motion stated that LAW should "help build" such an alternative - mainly through continuing our current campaigning - but, fortunately, he was the only comrade who took such a view.

However, a number of comrades opposed the

clause in the motion that recommended that LAW should include among its aims the disaffiliation from the party of the ultra-Zionist Jewish Labour Movement. Graham Bash moved an amendment to delete the clause, stating that, while he was, of course, opposed to the JLM, this should not be "our campaigning priority", especially in view of the current balance of forces - there was a risk that we could "end up isolating ourselves".

In opposing this amendment, John Bridge of Labour Party Marxists said that JLM was a major force amongst those demanding a purge of the left and "the best form of defence is attack". As for the opposition to LAW's role in helping to build an alternative Labour left, no-one is saying that LAW should be at the centre of such a campaign, but we must play a full part in developing it as part and parcel of combating what is an attack on the whole Labour left.

But Moshé Machover - himself an early victim of the witch-hunt, who was quickly reinstated into the party after a vigorous campaign - stated it was not LAW's function even to "help build" an alternative Labour left: we should merely "support" such an aim, he thought. His amendment to that effect was carried, although another

amendment of his, opposing the call for LAW to “approach other local, regional and national organisations and individuals who are interested in building a democratic and transparent Labour left”, was - rather mysteriously - narrowly defeated.

Similarly, comrade Bash’s amendment to delete reference to the JLM was carried, by 18 votes to 15. However, the motion, as amended, was overwhelmingly supported, with only comrade Firmin voting against.

Tony Greenstein’s amendment, stressing that we need to prioritise three campaigns - for the reinstatement of Chris Williamson; for Labour to reject the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance ‘definition’ of anti-Semitism; and for Zionism to become “a legitimate topic of discussion” - was carried overwhelmingly.

The second important motion debated concerned LAW’s attitude to the European elections - especially in view of George Galloway’s call to support the rightwing Brexit Party on May 23. Perhaps surprisingly, this had been met with various degrees of approval from some Lexiteers, including comrades on LAW’s unofficial Facebook group.

In moving this, Mark Lewis emphasised the need to vote Labour. That was the motion’s whole purpose - as opposed to associating with the right. It was not about our attitude on Brexit - he accepted that LAW comrades held varying views on that one. However, that topic crept into the subsequent debate - as did a discussion on Galloway’s own merits and weaknesses. For instance, comrade Firmin said that we should “be wary” of such “mavericks”, while others recalled positively his various past roles on the left.

But comrade Bridge reiterated that the motion was not about Galloway *per se*: it was about the need to fight within Labour and vote for its candidates - it is essential to clarify that we are a *Labour* campaign. But that did not stop some comrades from stating that we should not be discussing “our attitude to Brexit” and there were amendments moved calling for the removal of all reference to Galloway and the Brexit Party. But these were overwhelmingly defeated and the motion was carried with only four comrades voting against.

## Controversy

Before these two major motions were discussed, however, there was an item of controversy regarding an individual LAW member. The steering committee proposed to expel Peter Gregson over his refusal to remove a link from his personal website to someone who was recommending an article posted on the well-known holocaust-denial site, *Codoh*.

In moving the motion, Tony Greenstein said that every campaign had to “set borders” on who can or cannot be a member. He said that comrade Gregson seemed to have “no problems” in associating with holocaust deniers and that this was not just a matter of “free speech”, as Gregson had said. The motion stated: “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.”

Not that the comrade himself was accused of anti-Semitism: he was simply being stubborn in refusing to remove the link to someone advocating an article posted on a holocaust-denial website. Comrade Greenstein put this down to the fact that Gregson had elevated the question of personal pride over and above political principle. In the email exchange that followed Greenstein’s objection to the link,

comrade Gregson had said, “If he had asked me in a polite, civil, reasonable manner, I would have taken it down.” In fact he is still repeating that remark.

The first to speak from the floor was comrade Gregson himself, who simply repeated his arguments about free speech, people motivated by personal antagonism, etc. He complained that he had been dubbed a “loose cannon”, amongst other things, but he was simply a rebel who refused to comply with people’s ‘unreasonable’ demands. He seemed to take pride in the fact that he has been expelled from numerous groups - he reported that he had just been “kicked out” of a local campaign he had been involved in.

Other comrades from the floor tried to assure comrade Gregson that “we’re not against you” - “We’re your friends,” said one, but you need to “retract your position” so as not to undermine LAW. But unfortunately this had no effect on Gregson - he would not undertake to remove the link, no matter how “polite, civil [or] reasonable” the request.

However, other comrades did not agree that comrade Gregson should be expelled. They argued that there was great irony in a situation where a group set up specifically to campaign against expulsions was itself expelling people and that this would set up a “dangerous precedent”. One comrade said it was a case of “guilt by association”, in that Gregson was not himself accused of holocaust denial, but merely of recommending an article that included a link to the *Codoh* website.

But the majority were adamant that he was being stubborn and unreasonable. Comrade Bash stated that we had two linked tasks - opposing all the fake accusations of anti-Semitism and holocaust denial, while also doing everything we could to combat all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism and holocaust denial. Comrade Bridge said it was essential to “draw a line” - LAW was a group which, like all political organisations, needed to impose limits on what views its members expressed, whether directly or indirectly through what they recommended. We decided soon after the start of the campaign to exclude groups that either themselves expressed a form of anti-Semitism (Socialist Fight) or were in reality siding with the witch-hunters (Alliance for Workers’ Liberty).

In his reply to the debate, comrade Greenstein stressed that he had no personal antagonism towards comrade Gregson - in fact he had agreed to be a witness on his behalf at the hearing of the GMB union, which decided to expel him for organising a petition for those who agreed that Israel is a “racist endeavour”. As comrade Greenstein put it, Gregson himself is neither an anti-Semite nor a holocaust denier, but he sees no problem in associating with holocaust deniers.

Gregson himself was given considerable time to respond as the final speaker after a debate that lasted an hour. But in the end it was to no avail - 24 comrades voted for his expulsion, while nine opposed it and eight abstained. Comrade Gregson then quickly left the meeting without fuss.

Despite this controversy, the meeting had successfully set out the tasks that LAW needed to undertake in the near future and, in order to aid this process, four additional comrades - Graham Bash, Kevin Bean, John Dunn and Suzanne Gannon - were unanimously elected to the steering committee, where they joined comrades Walker and Werkmann, plus Stan Keable and Steve Price ●

# AGREED RESOLUTIONS

## Fighting the witch-hunt as a key part of building the foundations for an independent, democratic Labour left

### Moved by steering committee

1. The witch-hunt in the Labour Party is accelerating. There are many new allegations, suspensions and investigations. In the run-up to the May local and European elections, the campaign of the right in and outside the Labour Party is designed to smear Jeremy Corbyn in particular, and the left in general.
2. Overwhelmingly, it is clear that a number of party members under attack (often election candidates) are not guilty of anti-Semitic comments. Words are often taken out of context, twisted and misrepresented to prove their ‘guilt’. In the few cases where there is real evidence of prejudiced views or support for questionable conspiracy theories, patient discussion is usually the best option, with suspension or expulsion the last resort. As socialists, we believe in the potential for change; that people, through experience, joint struggles and rational argument, can learn.
3. Instead, we are again seeing automatic suspensions. The Labour right is energetically promoting this approach, of course - it facilitates the purge of Corbyn supporters and awkward trouble-makers.
4. Meanwhile, those like Margaret Hodge, Louise Ellman and Tom Watson insult, sabotage, make bogus accusations and work hand-in-glove with the capitalist media - without any repercussions.
5. That such behaviour goes unpunished is the product of the short-sighted and futile attempt to appease the right. This can only undermine the Corbyn leadership and often plays into the false ‘Anti-Zionism

equals anti-Semitism’ narrative.

Now it is “common knowledge” that Jeremy Corbyn is “responsible for anti-Semitism inside and outside the Labour Party”, as Ruth Smeeth MP recently claimed.

6. Appeasement is designed to stop more rightwingers leaving and getting Corbyn into No10. LAW notes the delay to the roll-out of trigger ballots, which conference in 2018 voted for. The delay is particularly worrying in the context of a possible snap election or, worse, a national government. The vast majority of Labour MPs are clearly deeply hostile to Corbyn and his politics. Even if he was prime minister, the right inside and outside the Labour Party would not stop their campaign against him. They want him either removed, taken prisoner or tamed. Labour Party members must be allowed to hold all their representatives to account.

7. Momentum has proved unfit for purpose. While a number of local Momentum branches continue to do good work, the national leadership of the organisation has often been deafeningly silent or actually supported suspensions and expulsions - something that even the Jewish Labour Movement recognised when it praised Momentum in the lead motion at its recent AGM.

8. LAW supports a 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;
  - is consistently anti-racist and internationalist - a stance which by

definition includes anti-Zionism and supporting the Palestinians.

9. In addition to our aims and priorities outlined above, we also resolve to campaign:

- for Labour CLPs and trade union branches to affiliate to LAW and Jewish Voice for Labour;
- for the immediate implementation of the reformed trigger ballots;
- for the scrapping of all bans and proscriptions: 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.
- 10. In addition to our ongoing public campaigning we therefore instruct the steering committee to:
  - produce more model motions, statements and public interventions on the subjects and issues above;
  - approach other local, regional and national organisations and individuals who are interested in building a democratic and transparent Labour left;
  - start planning for an intervention around those aims at Labour Party conference 2019 in Brighton.
  - produce basic information for members who have been suspended or are put under investigation, including details of potential *pro bono* legal advisors.
  - 11. We will prioritise the following three campaigns:
    - For the reinstatement of Chris Williamson MP.
    - For the Labour Party and other organisations to reject the definition of anti-Semitism published by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.
    - To make Zionism a legitimate topic of discussion.

## George Galloway and the EU elections

### Moved by Mark Lewis

LAW believes that:

1. George Galloway’s decision to support Nigel Farage’s Brexit Party at the May 23 EU elections is a reactionary stance. Galloway is an outspoken supporter of the rights of the Palestinians and has made useful interventions opposing the witch-hunt in the Labour Party. But on this issue he is badly mistaken. A vote for Nigel Farage’s Brexit Party is a vote for rightwing chauvinism

and an anti-migrant stance.

2. No ‘tactical’ consideration can justify support for the Brexit Party and we are disturbed to see comments along those lines in pro-Corbyn Facebook groups, including the ‘LAW Unofficial’ group.

3. Despite our public criticisms of the current dire situation in the party, with a rightwing witch-hunt tearing through its ranks, Labour Against the Witchhunt is a campaign centred on driving through changes in

the *Labour Party*. We urge all our supporters and members to join or rejoin the party - if they are allowed. This does not mean we exclude from LAW anybody who has been illegitimately suspended, expelled or barred from membership as part of the witch-hunt against Corbyn and his supporters.

4. Given this orientation, we naturally urge all our supporters and members to vote and campaign for the Labour Party in the May 2019 EU elections.

## Pete Gregson and LAW

### Moved by steering committee

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.

**DEBATE**

German revolution saw soldiers streaming home from the front and joining with the revolutionary workers

# Commitment to orderly progress

**Jim Creegan** argues, in his second and concluding article, that while Karl Kautsky's writings contained insights, his entire political career can only serve as a negative example. We intend to carry a rejoinder in the near future

**W**e have seen in my previous article how the Prussian suffrage crisis of 1910 marked the beginning of a rift between Karl Kautsky and the left wing of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD).<sup>1</sup> A series of polemics followed between Luxemburg and the Dutch socialist, Anton Pannekoek, on the left, and Karl Kautsky in the now rightward-moving SPD centre. This article traces Kautsky's evolution from that point onward.

In a 1912 essay, *'Massenaktion und Revolution'*, Pannekoek argued in essence that capitalism - or at least its German version - had entered a new period, in which the steady, gradual progress of the working class was no longer possible. Such advancement, he held, was tolerated by the ruling class only when the workers' movement had been weak. But growing proletarian strength, combined with intensified competition among imperialist powers, made the bourgeoisie much more prone to militarism and repression. German parliamentary democracy - truncated to begin with in the constitutional monarchy that then existed - was becoming even more impotent. The enemy of the workers did not consist of particular political parties, but the armed power of the state as a whole, to which the workers could counterpose nothing but their own concentrated force.

Under these conditions, the workers would be compelled to rely chiefly upon extra-parliamentary struggle, the major weapon of which was the mass strike. Contrary to Kautsky, Pannekoek asserted the mass strike could not be understood as a discretely employed tactic or single event, but rather as a recurring - and sometimes spontaneous - inflection point in an ongoing mass struggle.

Moreover, he asserted that such a struggle could not be confined to the existing organisations of the proletariat - unions and party - as in what Pannekoek decried as Kautsky's "cult of formal structures".

He viewed revolution as a profound social paroxysm that would inevitably overflow established organisational bounds and draw in new layers, which were not mainly the marginal lumpen elements of times past, but part of a larger, proletarianised mass. The revolutionary process would consist of both organised efforts and spontaneous improvisations. Following Marx in the aftermath of the Paris Commune, Pannekoek argued that one of the most important things to emerge from revolutionary struggle would be alternative, more radically democratic forms of political power, distinct from, and destined to replace, bourgeois parliaments and state structures.

He also took exception to a view of imperialist war that Kautsky had expressed earlier: that a socialist party too weak to prevent a war could do little to stop it once begun. On the contrary, Pannekoek declared, wars create social crises by straining the resources of the nation to the limit, and imposing heavy burdens upon the working class. Its sons comprise most of imperialism's mass armies, and could therefore not necessarily be relied upon to repress the revolts that war could trigger.

It was in answer to Pannekoek that Kautsky clarified his own contrasting views on the transition to socialism, as they evolved since he had taken up the cudgels against Bernstein and the revisionists in 1909. Kautsky reaffirmed his belief in the slow, but unstoppable advance of the working class. The SPD and the unions were

far too big and powerful ever to be annihilated by the state or rightwing forces - reactionary thrusts aimed at breaking their power could be nothing more than transient episodes. The vehicles of proletarian progress were, and could only be, the party and the trade unions. In championing the 'new tactic' of mass action, Pannekoek and Luxemburg were indulging in romantic pipe dreams. Spontaneous initiatives on the part of unorganised elements - being both unpredictable and beyond party and union control - were highly suspect, and potentially damaging to the planned and methodical efforts of workers' organisations. The attempts of the left to import the methods of a backward and undemocratic country like Russia into an advanced semi-democracy like Germany ignored all the obvious differences between the two countries. Germany had a stronger state, and to confront it directly would spell certain defeat:

To direct the workers' movement toward mass actions is merely to replace the old one-sidedness, for which Marx coined the expression 'parliamentary cretinism', with a new cretinism, which we may define, continuing the metaphor, as a cretinism of mass actions.<sup>2</sup>

Equally wild-eyed, according to Kautsky, was all talk of 'smashing' or replacing the existing state. It was utopian, he said, to imagine that the modern state, with all its complex functions and intricate division of labour, could be replaced by ordinary citizens, who would run the state in their spare time (although it is not clear that Pannekoek or Luxemburg ever argued this position: Pannekoek said only that new, more democratic

state forms would grow up in the course of mass struggle). Under a socialist regime, parliament, as well as all the old ministries, would remain intact, although more decentralised and responsive to the people. What socialists should aim at was not a new state, but a shift of power *within* the state, ie, not new state forms, but a new government, which would direct the old apparatus in working class interests. He wrote:

The objective of our political struggle remains what it has been up to now: the conquest of state power through the conquest of a majority in parliament and the elevation of parliament to a commanding position within the state [as opposed to the then commanding position of the kaiser - JC]. Certainly not the destruction of state power.<sup>3</sup>

## 'Ultra-imperialism'

If Kautsky's polemic with Luxemburg and Pannekoek made explicit certain tendencies in his thinking that were implicit even in 1909, his writings on war and imperialism between 1912 and 1913 represent a complete abandonment of earlier views. At the Second Congress of the Second International in 1910, Kautsky reaffirmed his position that militarism and an armaments race were necessary parts of the foreign policies of all major capitalist powers:

... It is utopian to believe that bourgeois pacifist conferences or visits by friends of peace to foreign governments can abolish the danger of war and introduce disarmament and submission to international courts ... national conflicts, like social conflicts,

cannot be overcome in the bourgeois world of competition.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, in an article titled 'Ultra-imperialism' - published after the outbreak of the war, but completed beforehand - Kautsky argues that imperialism, while it arises for economic reasons, is not an economic necessity for capitalism. Just as competition within advanced countries leads to the formation of cartels, by which competition is restrained, so the calamities brought about by inter-imperialist rivalries can jolt the rival states into recognising the necessity of restraining themselves in order to promote free trade, and come to international agreements to respect each other's spheres of influence.

Such an arrangement Kautsky dubs "ultra-imperialism" - reprising a term coined by the German socialist and economic theorist, Rudolf Hilferding. Kautsky further avers that, while imperialist nationalism is in the interest of finance capital, it is contrary to the interests of industrial capital, and socialists should therefore encourage the pacific sections of capital against the more bellicose ones.

Kautsky had written in 1907 that, in the event of war,

The German government could convince the workers that they were under attack, the French government could likewise convince the French workers, and we would then find ourselves confronted with a war in which the German and French proletariats would march with equal enthusiasm behind their own governments, and massacre and slaughter each other. This must be averted, and it will be averted

if we reject the criterion of a war of aggression and instead adopt the criterion of the interests of the proletariat, which are international interests.<sup>5</sup>

But also around this time, Kautsky had discovered the distinction between offensive and defensive wars. He wrote that, while the working class might be persuaded to oppose a war of aggression on its government's part, attempting to turn it against a war for the defence of its own soil against invaders was a fool's errand. It was this distinction that Kautsky invoked when he advised the SPD Reichstag deputies to vote for war credits in 1914. One cannot but suspect that, beneath his resignation to the proletariat's sympathy for a supposedly defensive war, lay a sneaking sympathy of his own.

Thus, by August 1914, all the theoretical arguments used to justify Kautsky's capitulation had already been elaborated. Their guiding thread - from a reverence of parliamentary forms to ultra-imperialism - is a worship of order, methodical action and incremental progress, combined with a correlative abhorrence of spontaneity and confrontation. Kautsky even goes so far as to impute his faith in peaceful, reason-governed progress to the imperialist powers, or factions thereof, at the very time when inter-imperialist rivalries were exploding in salvos of machine gun and cannon fire, and the class struggle in many European countries was overflowing parliamentary sluice gates.

## In the crucible

Kautsky's post-World War I political thought cannot be usefully approached as an abstract debate over governmental forms - class dictatorship *versus* universal suffrage - as it is by James Muldoon in *Jacobin*.<sup>6</sup> It must rather be understood concretely, amid the political cross-currents of the time.

As German soldiers streamed home in defeat from the front in 1918, they joined forces with rebellious sailors and workers to follow the Russian example by setting up democratically elected councils and overthrowing the kaiser. The more radical of these insurgents were also inspired by the October revolution to attempt to replace the kaiser with a government based upon the active, participatory democracy of the councils. The majority Social Democrats adamantly rejected such efforts, insisting upon limiting the mass movement to the goal of establishing a conventional parliamentary republic.

But more was at stake here than a political preference. Behind the mask of parliamentary democracy, the ruling strata of German society - Junkers, capitalists and the army general staff - scrambled desperately to preserve their dominion. The more astute among them knew that the official representatives of the status quo were now too thoroughly discredited to intervene effectively. They were forced to rely upon a party that wielded some influence amongst the masses. The leaders of the SPD, who were only too willing to lend themselves to these counterrevolutionary designs, were therefore allowed to form a government and proclaim a republic.

But, unknown to the people, the new president, Friedrich Ebert, was colluding with the German commander of internal troops, Wilhelm Groener, to suppress the growing revolt, which much of the SPD rank and file had joined. The SPD placed itself at the head of many workers' and soldiers' councils, with the concealed aim of disempowering them. Military detachments were moved into Berlin to suppress the workers. Ebert's minister of defence, the rightwing social democrat, Gustav Noske,

engaged and trained a proto-Nazi elite military unit called the Freikorps, which, in the sanguinary finale to the first phase of the German revolution in January 1919, slaughtered Berlin red guards and smashed in the skulls of the two principal leaders of the *Spartakusbund*, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.

During these events, and for some time after, Kautsky still adhered to the centrist USPD, or Independent Social Democrats, and realised that the repressions of the so-called Spartakus Week represented a victory for reactionary forces in the country. Yet he assigned the principal blame for this reversal to the *Spartakusbund*, which he claimed had provoked the right by misreading the temper of German workers, and leading a minority into a confrontation in which they were bound to be defeated.

While it was true that the rising of January 1919 was premature, in that the majority of workers had not been won to the revolutionary cause, it was not the work of a small band of revolutionary conspirators in the newly formed German Communist Party (KPD - still widely called Spartacists), which was still far too small to wield any mass influence. The rising rather took place on the initiative of the more militant sections of the workers, centred in Berlin, who were intent on making a bid for state power despite Luxemburg's warning that the German revolution was still in an early phase. The other principal leader of the KPD, Karl Liebknecht, although he had displayed exemplary courage in opposing the war, was not a level-headed leader, and, much to Luxemburg's reproof, allowed himself to be carried along by the wave of revolutionary enthusiasm that enveloped his Berlin precincts.

Yet, once the die had been cast, Luxemburg put aside all reservations to voice her complete solidarity with the revolutionary workers. Kautsky, on the other hand, moved rapidly in the opposite direction. From this time forth, his major efforts were directed at denouncing the German revolutionary left and the 'Bolshevik menace'.

## Mending fences

Kautsky attempted to justify his rightward motion in theoretical terms. In the early 20s, when socialist revolution seemed to many a more immediate prospect than ever before, Kautsky argued that the socialist goal had to be put on indefinite hold. Socialism, he wrote, required a high level of economic development, which in turn strengthened the proletariat and democracy. The war, however, had set back the economies of the belligerent powers, and temporarily strengthened the forces of militarism and rightwing reaction. Socialists should therefore seek to restore the preconditions of socialism by helping to revive capitalist economies, and align themselves with more democratic capitalist forces to achieve this end.

We have already seen how, even when arguing against Bernstein in 1909, Kautsky revered bourgeois parliaments, and, even before 1914, abandoned his belief that imperialism was endemic to capitalism. Now, with this endorsement of coalition politics, the last remnant of his earlier, more radical thinking - his assertion, in *The road to power*, that the working class and its party alone could begin the transition to socialism - had gone by the board. In a 1932 obituary for Bernstein, Kautsky admitted that, since 1914, he and his erstwhile revisionist adversary "have always adopted the same point of view".<sup>7</sup>

Kautsky's theoretical mending of fences with Bernstein was accompanied by a political rapprochement with German social democracy. The centrist party to which Kautsky adhered since 1917,

the USPD, represented an alliance of all those tendencies in German socialism - some revolutionary and others decidedly reformist - that criticised the SPD from the left. Such a combination, however, could not withstand the polarisation that took place in the aftermath of the war and the October revolution.

The *Spartakusbund*, which had joined the USPD for want of a better alternative, split off to form the Communist Party in 1918. In 1920, a majority of the USPD voted at its Halle Congress to join the Communist International. Kautsky was one of the leaders of the rightwing faction that voted against the merger and advocated re-entering the SPD. The latter party's role in saving the day for the ruling class and decapitating the incipient revolution did not deter him in the least.

According to Kautsky, the major threat facing the working class was not the rearméd German bourgeois state, but Bolshevism, which divided the working class and threatened to interrupt its peaceful parliamentary ascent by damaging the economy and provoking civil war. His denunciations of the left matched those of any reactionary in terms of vehemence and class abuse: he wrote that Bolshevism represented the "rule of the unorganised over the organised, of the ignorant over the educated, of the selfish over the disinterested".<sup>8</sup>

Kautsky's opposition toward the Russian Bolshevik regime at this time was also more implacable than that of many a Menshevik and right social democrat. He wrote that Bolshevism aimed to impose a dictatorship of a militant working class minority over the rest of the proletariat and other classes. The threat it posed to parliamentary democracy, which Kautsky regarded as the main institutional vehicle for worker advance - combined with the danger it presented of civil war, which would undermine the economic progress he viewed as a prerequisite for socialism - made Bolshevism the most deadly enemy of the working class: even more so than Benito Mussolini or the Hungarian fascist dictator, Miklós Horthy.

There was, according to Kautsky, nothing defensible in the Soviet regime. Unlike western capitalist states, it could not be reformed, but could only be overthrown. Against the Menshevik, Fyodor Dan, he argued that state ownership of the means of production was nothing more than the power base of a Bonapartist dictatorship, and was not worth preserving by the working class; he even favoured a partial restoration of private property. In a polemic with the Austrian centrist, Friedrich Adler, Kautsky categorically rejected the idea of any united-front effort with the Communists against the National Socialists.

As for the Nazis themselves, Kautsky initially maintained that they were impotent against the steady democratic advance of the working class; they would prove to be nothing more than a passing episode. When, contrary to his predictions, the Nazis came to power in 1933, Kautsky blamed the Communists for having created the brown scourge by inflaming the class struggle to begin with. Thus did the "pope of Marxism" end his days, in Amsterdam in 1938, with a political analysis which in certain respects anticipates the arguments of the 1980s German historians, Ernst Nolte and Joachim Fest, to the effect that the rise of Nazism can be traced to the original "totalitarian" sin of the October revolution.

## Kautsky as guide?

If Marxists in the western countries during the 1950s and 60s faced the dilemma of maintaining a revolutionary outlook amidst relative

peace and prosperity, Kautsky's thinking suffered from the opposite incongruity: a deepening commitment to orderly progress and comity among nations during a period in which the imperialists were bent on war, and (in Trotsky's phrase) the voltages of class struggle in many European countries were far too high for parliamentary circuits.

Heightened class struggle and revolution involve the unleashing of explosive social passions and hatreds, and are by their very nature disorderly affairs, for which there was little room in Kautsky's tidy schema for the transition to socialism. As far removed as this writer is from the formulaic thinking of the Chinese revolution's 'Great Helmsman', Mao's famous quotation about revolution not being a tea party or a card game, etc, seems appropriate in this context, if to these instances we add a parliamentary debate.

Some have argued that Kautsky became suddenly transformed from revolutionary to reformist in 1910. However, we have seen that his evolution involved no abrupt turns, but rather an unfolding of tendencies implicit in his thinking from at least as early as 1909. On each occasion when his schema ran up against the realities of class war, Kautsky moved further to the right. The end result was his adherence, despite centrist misgivings, to Social Democracy in its role as mobiliser of workers for imperialist war and saviour of last resort of German capitalism. His aversion to 'anarchy', when all is said and done, amounted to a renunciation of revolution itself. His partiality to 'order' ultimately led to an embrace of the (temporarily) reconsolidated bourgeois order of Germany under the Weimar constitution.

Certain contemporary left currents are rediscovering Kautsky under circumstances very different from those of his time. His role as a centrist - seemingly poised equally between a reformist right and a revolutionary left, but veering ever rightward - may be difficult to grasp today, because there is no revolutionary left of any consequence. In this political void - and in the absence of sustained and militant industrial struggle - growing numbers of people discontented with the manifest inequalities of neoliberal capitalism have nowhere to turn but to the electoral arena and left-reformist politicians.

These left bulges in the Democratic and Labour Parties are highly significant indicators of shifting sentiments, which only hidebound sectarians can dismiss. Some on the left, however, seem determined to make a virtue of a deficiency. They can conceive of no way forward but the electoral path, and regard Kautsky's apotheosis of parliaments and elections as a long-forgotten trove of theoretical support for what they call 'democratic socialism'.

The meaning of the 'democratic socialism' now espoused by major currents of the rebounding left is as ambiguous as this reborn left itself in relation to 'reform versus revolution'. If 'democratic socialism' means a socialism founded upon institutions of popular participation, as opposed to some kind of state-bureaucratic dictatorship, few would disagree. But if it means, following Kautsky, that elections and parliaments are sacrosanct, there is much to argue with.

Parliamentary democracy is the western bourgeoisie's major source of ideological legitimacy. For this reason, the capitalist class is willing to put up with this form of government, even though parliaments may pass legislation it dislikes, and there is always the risk that legislative bodies may pass out of the control of carefully vetted politicians and political parties. When this happens

despite the multiple levers for influencing politics that enormous capital sums place in their hands, the ruling classes resort to economic sabotage and/or deploying the non-elected components of the state - bureaucracy, police and military - to overthrow governments and reassert their domination.

This is not to say that socialists should not fight for the broadest electoral democracy, and use elections and parliaments to disseminate ideas and win beneficial reforms. But they must also be aware of democracy's limits, and attempt to combat widespread popular illusions about its possibilities. Left politicians who fail to do this - from Salvador Allende to François Mitterrand, to Alexis Tsipras - and lead their followers to believe that fundamental changes can be achieved simply by electing leftwing parties and heads of government - find themselves and their supporters defenceless when the final reckoning comes: they are either overthrown (Allende) or succumb to pressures to betray their electoral promises and do the bidding of the bourgeoisie (Mitterrand and Tsipras). Nothing in the experience of the past hundred years supports the conclusion that socialism can be attained by voting.

The above points to the conclusion that, simultaneously with electoral efforts, socialists should seek to build organisations of working class power, and encourage extra-parliamentary mobilisations able to confront the capitalist state. These alone can constitute the core of the dual-power institutions capable of mobilising subaltern classes for combat, when even the most successful electoral efforts prove unequal to the task.

Electoral and extra-parliamentary efforts can complement one another. But they can also come into conflict. Bureaucrats and elected officials typically shudder at any hint of confrontation; they counsel moderation to avoid damaging electoral prospects. Bourgeois politicians portray extra-parliamentary positions of power as a danger to democracy, and demand their dissolution. This is what happened in the Prussian suffrage crisis of 1910, and again in Germany in 1918-19 - Luxemburg and Liebknecht chose one course, Kautsky another. Such situations will arise again if the current leftward momentum continues. Thinking in exclusively electoral terms leads inevitably to defeat, and socialists must - like Luxemburg and unlike Kautsky - place their emphasis on initiating and advancing struggles that take place outside the electoral frame.

Whatever the political forms of extra-parliamentary power that may arise today, they will no doubt be quite different from those of a century ago. The masses of industrial workers, soldiers and sailors who made up soviets no longer exist in western countries. Developing new forms of popular democracy is a major challenge for socialists today. In meeting it, while the writings of Karl Kautsky may have insights to offer, the overall curve of his political career can only serve as a negative example ●

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## Notes

1. J Creegan 'Steady rightward trajectory' *Weekly Worker* May 2 2019.
2. K Kautsky, 'Die neue Taktik' - quoted in M Salvadori *Karl Kautsky and the socialist revolution* London 1990, p163.
3. *Ibid* - quoted in Salvadori, p162.
4. Quoted in Salvadori, p171.
5. K Kautsky *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitag der SPD*, quoted in Salvadori, p123.
6. [www.jacobinmag.com/2019/01/karl-kautsky-german-revolution-democracy-socialism](http://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/01/karl-kautsky-german-revolution-democracy-socialism).
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8. Quoted in Salvadori, p241.

**MEDIA**

# Lying about the elections

The Tories suffered a historic drubbing in the local elections, writes **Paul Demarty**. So how come Labour's performance was portrayed as equally bad?



**Theresa May: from one defeat to yet another**

There are two remarkable features of the May 2 local elections.

The first is the sheer scale of the drubbing suffered by the Conservative Party. It made a net loss of 1,330 seats - more than a third of the total it gained the last time these councils were contested - and also lost control of 44 councils. Even given the dire state of the Tories at the national level, where they are tearing each other to pieces over Brexit, this is a quite staggering result. And staggering, also, is a good description of the party itself, as a particularly unappetising ballot to select members of the European parliament looms. Though it is early days in that campaign, the Tories surely could not have had a worse start; and its activists could be forgiven for thinking there was little else to do than brace themselves prior to impact.

The second feature is the way that the mainstream media has presented the overall result - the overwhelmingly predominant narrative is of an electoral rebuke to the main parties, such that you could almost believe that Labour had suffered an equivalent disaster. Yet nothing of the sort transpired. Defending about half the number of seats the Tories were, Labour lost 84, plus control of six councils. The disappointment is that the Tories' losses were not Labour's gain - the Liberal Democrats being the main beneficiaries, along with Greens and 'independents'; but Labour has never had a sniff in most of the councils lost by the Tories, so the result for Labour is best described as tepid. Only by extreme violence to the truth can an equivalence be drawn between Labour's bruises and the Tories' maiming.

Yet this is what we observe: a representative headline in *The Guardian* reads: "May and Corbyn boxed in after ballot battering".<sup>1</sup> "Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn face backlash over dire local election results," said *The Times* on May 3, going on to offer its readers one of the most laughable bits of false equivalence in the whole history of

journalistic mendacity:

The prime minister was told to stand down by former cabinet colleagues and council leaders after losing ground in the Tories' southern heartlands, while Labour lost one of its celebrity supporters, when Sir Tony Robinson, the *Blackadder* star, quit the party.<sup>2</sup>

Somehow we feel that Corbyn will find Baldrick's departure easier to cope with than May will the ever-increasing number of Tory grandees urging her, for the love of god, to go. If the results of the European parliament elections are as they look to be for the Tories so far, even the psychologically stubborn May will find it hard to resist demands for her to fall on her sword. Nothing like the same is true for Corbyn. Far from reeling, his position is secure, and we all know it.

## Who profits?

The question posed by an omnipresent lie is, after a fashion, always the same: who profits if it is widely believed? There are two main categories here. The first is the British establishment, trying to pick its way through Scylla and Charybdis: on the one hand, the disaster of Brexit; and, on the other, the far worse prospect of an electoral victory for Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party. The second category, in a peculiar coincidence of opposed interests, is the Labour leadership itself, which is, of course, trying to bring about such an outcome.

So far as the establishment is concerned, things are looking pretty grim at the moment. Its natural party of government - the Tories - is in a state of utter disarray. Having fed its voters and activists a steady diet of idiotic lies about the European Union over decades, it has rendered itself uniquely unable to act 'responsibly' when it comes to the EU at all. The still greater disaster of Corbyn's capture of the Labour leadership, however, is that it has wounded the apparent impregnability of neoliberal

capitalism: though Corbyn has yet to commit himself to anything more than the most anaemic sub-reformist gloop, the impact he has had on the Labour Party by standing for and then winning the leadership - not in spite of, but because of, his 'loony left' past - is a far more serious threat to the bourgeoisie.

So one obvious way out of the Brexit mess - responsible Tories 'taking one for the team' and delivering either a Brexit in name only or no Brexit at all - is unavailable, since it lays the way open for Labour to win a majority in an election. It is still possible under those circumstances to circumvent Corbyn's entry into number 10; but that is a much more costly action than preventing him from winning at all. So, instead, the bourgeois establishment has adopted the strategy of trying to bounce Labour into taking a clear 'remain' position: that way, Labour can be made to carry the can for overriding the 'people's will'. The 'sensible' Tories and their friends in the press will then flip violently into a narrative of 'national betrayal', which will wreck Labour's electoral chances.

Thus the widespread talking up of the significance of the Lib Dem revival in relation to Labour's prospects, and also the Greens, who picked up a couple of hundred councillors. Indeed, we have been forced again to listen to that most nauseating, pompous cliché of modern bourgeois society, that people are tired of the "old politics" of the main parties and so on - this time coming from Green Party spokespersons. (Is there anything older than this guff?) All are designed to scare Labour into tacking in that direction.

Corbyn is not biting, however. He is happy to agree that the electorate has given his party a rebuke - bizarre as that is; but for him the meaning is the exact opposite:

I think it means there's a huge impetus on every MP, and they've all got that message, whether they themselves are 'leave' or 'remain' - or the people across the country -

that an arrangement has to be made, a deal has to be done, parliament has to resolve this issue. I think that is very, very clear.

What game is he playing here? In the end, the clue is in the phrase, "every MP": Corbyn is currently involved in talks with the Tories about getting a Brexit deal through parliament. Given the precariousness of May's position and her total lack of control over her party, Corbyn is at a distinct advantage. He loses little from walking away from the talks, while May loses a lot. If they strike a deal to Labour's liking - perhaps with a customs union or some other 'Brexit in name only' shibboleth - he condemns May to sell it to her own party. Either she does - in which case he can still blame the government for everything that goes wrong with it - or, far more likely, she does not, and he can avoid all responsibility for it, washing his hands of the failure to - in John McDonnell's terse phrase - "sort it".

## Lexiteers

So, with his statement, he fires a warning shot against remainers in his own ranks, but also dares the Tory right to sabotage the deal. It is not a cost-free exercise, however - after all, one of the many people to have used our aforementioned 'new politics/old politics' cliché is Corbyn himself. Conducting political combat on what is a scandalously unprincipled basis will surely disillusion some of his more simple-hearted acolytes, but, if the most important thing is to get his party into government, Corbyn is dependent on the common ground he has with his own parliamentary colleagues. Realistically this adds up to no more than the need to manoeuvre Theresa May into a position where a knife can be slipped between her ribs. This is a complicated game of cynical political tactics, and the *last* thing Corbyn needs is an ambush from establishment remainer types.

However, if Labour's remainers can be divided into the credulous and

well-meaning, on the one hand, and establishment cuckoos in the nest, on the other, the same is true of the Lexiteers. We turn to Charlie Kimber, Socialist Workers Party national secretary, in the latest *Socialist Worker*. He correctly notes that "it is ridiculous for the media to claim that [Labour's losses are] a setback on anything like the scale of the Tories' disaster"<sup>3</sup>. Nonetheless, the result really was not good enough:

Labour would have hoped to make gains, not losses, facing a government in shambles. On the eve of the poll shadow chancellor John McDonnell had said he hoped for 400 wins. Labour's position on Brexit has satisfied neither its right wing, who want a second referendum to overturn Brexit, or those who want to push ahead with leaving the EU ... Detailed analysis shows Labour lost most votes in 'leave'-voting areas.

John Burn-Murdoch writes in the *Financial Times* newspaper: "The vote for the party held up well in majority-'remain' areas, but in areas where 60% or more had voted to leave Labour lost 6% of its councillors. In areas that were 70% or more 'leave', Labour losses more than doubled to 19%."

So the solution is obvious for comrade Kimber - the Labour Party must adopt a clearer pro-Brexit line, as well as hitting some traditional SWP high notes like organising lots of mass demonstrations, etc.

The trouble with that line - and also the line of its Lexiteer comrades in the Socialist Party in England and Wales and (to a lesser extent) the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain - is precisely the absence of any reckoning of how their perspectives stack up in relation to the balance of forces in the Labour Party. None of these groups - in spite of their own confusion on the matter of work in the Labour Party - demur from the objective of a Corbyn-led Labour government in the short term. If that is to come about, however, he must win more or less with the parliamentary party he has. It cannot be done on the basis of a fantasy socialist Brexit - along with satisfying the SWP's demand for radical action on the streets, plus satisfying SPEW's demands that he oblige local councils to set illegal no-cuts budgets.

He could do all these latter things - or some other set of talismanic commitments to far-left politics. But to do so would be to declare open war on the Labour right, and thus radically reduce the chance of a Corbyn government. Thus - quite apart from the defects of Lexitism on its own account - the SWP and SPEW take lines that are radically unrealistic in relation to Labour Party high politics. Either Corbyn declares war on the right, or basically he continues with what he is doing. Needless to say, it would be far better for the British working class that he did the former ●

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## Notes

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VENEZUELA

# Coup attempt fizzles out

Eddie Ford reports on the failure of the opposition and its imperialist masters to split the armed forces

In what must be a blow for Donald Trump and his advisors, the Venezuelan 'national uprising' against the Chávista regime of Nicolás Maduro appears to have abysmally failed. Now opposition leader, Juan Guaidó, says he is considering asking for US military intervention. Guaidó is, of course, the darling of western imperialism and president of the national assembly, which in January declared Maduro's 2018 re-election to be "invalid" and instead proclaimed Guaidó as acting president of the country.

Naturally, the United States, Canada, UK, France, Germany, the European parliament, etc rushed in to recognise their client, Guaidó, as the "legitimate" president of Venezuela - whilst, equally predictably, Russia, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Iran, Syria, North Korea, and so on, continued to support the Maduro regime. Guaidó, it needs to be noted, is a leading member of the Popular Will party, which was admitted into the Socialist International in 2014 and founded by a former municipal mayor of Caracas, Leopoldo López - who is currently holed up in the Spanish diplomatic compound after the supreme court put out a warrant for his arrest. This tells you everything about the Socialist International. Today most of its affiliates are committed to neo-liberal capitalism. To all intents and purposes it is an instrument of US foreign policy (not that Trump gives a fig for it). It also tells you everything you need to know about the class nature of the Spanish government of Pedro Sánchez, leader of the Socialist Workers Party, which significantly strengthened its parliamentary fraction in last month's election (despite its name, the PSOE is in fact a mainstream bourgeois party). Not that this has stopped a much-reduced Podemos from entering negotiations with Sánchez with a view to forming a parliamentary alliance.

Anyhow, on April 30 Guaidó livestreamed a pre-dawn video of himself near an airforce base alongside López - his political "mentor" sprung from house arrest - and a small group of rag-tag-looking members

of the armed forces from the lower ranks. Grandly - and deludedly, as we now know - Guaidó announced the "final phase" of Operation Freedom to finish off Maduro's government: "it is necessary that we go out together to the street" in order to "support the democratic forces and to recover our freedom". Ending with a theatrical flourish, Guaidó declared he would now "mobilise the main military units". In other words, he was openly calling for *civil war* - for soldiers to turn their guns on each other.

Rather pathetically, Guaidó, having issued his dramatic 'order', was banking on the army splitting. This only proves that he is unaware of the first law of coup-making: make sure you *actually have the army on your side* before making a bid for power. Happily for Maduro, who must have been momentarily alarmed, Guaidó had not done his homework - he half-conceded a few days later that he and the US-sponsored opposition had badly mistaken their level of support from the military, not least the officer caste.

So far the only senior figure to swap sides has been general Manuel Figuera, head of the secret police, who castigated in a public letter the "rascals and rogues" looting Venezuela, while his people starved. Admittedly, his defection is not nothing. But on its own it is obviously nowhere near enough to pull off a coup and anyway Figuera is now enjoying life in Puerto Rica - he sensibly got out quick when he saw that the game was up. Only a few privates, captains and national guardsmen joined the 'revolution'.

Desperately, Guaidó stated that people will be out on the streets "every day" until Maduro steps down from power. According to the latest reports, five people have been killed and at least 200 injured in the protests and counter-protests - not a huge figure, it has to be said. There have also been 205 arrests, with the supreme court (Supreme Tribunal) asking the constituent assembly - the pro-government legislative super-body dominated by the United Socialist Party of Venezuela - to determine whether to open criminal proceedings against seven opposition politicians, including Henry Ramos Allup, a former national assembly president.

Sounding confident, Maduro has claimed victory over the "deranged"

coup attempt - thanking the military for resisting a treacherous "imperial" plot to topple him and the entire Chávista revolution. He showed his appreciation by organising an early-morning parade to "reaffirm the absolute loyalty of the armed forces", which was broadcast live on state television (most of the media is in private hands and hostile to the regime). Denouncing Guaidó and those around him as "useful idiots" of the US empire - a pretty accurate assessment - Maduro then asked what would have happened if not for the role of the military: "How much physical destruction would there be and how many years of war would we face?" On May 5, Russia urged the US to abandon its "irresponsible" plan to depose Nicolás Maduro during a visit to Moscow by Venezuela's foreign minister - warning that any attempt to overthrow the Caracas regime would have "grave consequences". A few days later, CNN reported that the Trump administration is seeking ways to give Guaidó control of more Venezuelan assets in the US to help fund his opposition movement.

## Misinformation

Now, as always in a situation like this, there is a fog of misinformation - nobody really knows what is going on, including those doing the disseminating. For instance, there is a widely spread rumour that Maduro had a plane waiting on the tarmac to take him to Cuba, but Russia convinced him to stay - an allegation repeated by US secretary of state Mike Pompeo.

There have been a number of plausible-sounding stories about how the US was "caught off guard" by Guaidó's decision to launch the "final phase" a day earlier than expected - he went over the top too soon, following reports that Maduro had got wind of the plan and was going to arrest him. Operation Freedom was supposed to reach a climax, with mass protests set for the next day (May 1), but its premature start meant the momentum quickly evaporated. After addressing crowds in the Plaza Altamira in the affluent municipality of Chacao in eastern Caracas (Leopoldo López's political territory as mayor), Guaidó and his team just melted away - whilst the

crowd, which had expected to march on the Miraflores presidential palace, were left milling aimlessly around in the square before eventually going home. Disastrously for the plotters, senior members of the regime one by one, tweeted out vows of allegiance to Maduro - no-one wants to be hung from the nearest lamppost.

Meanwhile, by all accounts, in the Colombian border town of Cúcuta, a group of junior army defectors at the Simón Bolívar International Bridge that separates the two countries had gathered in expectation of an ad hoc invasion to assist the uprising - they seemed ready to take San Antonio, the small town on the Venezuelan side of the bridge. But the order to cross never came and instead they received a message from Guaidó instructing them to return to their hotels.

Needless to say, the Trump administration watched in consternation, as the moment of liberation from the forces of 'tyrannical socialism' never happened - what had gone wrong? It is not entirely clear if Washington communicated *directly* with Maduro's inner circle in the run-up to Operation Failure (sorry, Freedom). López, from the safety of the Spanish embassy - but watch this pace - told journalists that the key negotiations had taken place at his house over the past few weeks, the plan being that Maduro would be allowed to leave and replaced by Guaidó in a "peaceful transition". But many have treated the claim as grandstanding by a vain and chronically ambitious aspiring president.

Stunned, almost as if they had been personally betrayed, the Whitehouse hawks took the unusual step of going public with their version of events - cue John Bolton, the national security advisor and harbinger of the apocalypse. He named three top Venezuelan officials he claimed had been negotiating Maduro's departure: the defence minister and head of the armed forces, Vladimir Padrino López; the chief justice of the supreme court, Maikel Moreno; and Iván Hernández, the head of the presidential guard and military intelligence. In an odd ritual, Bolton called out the men three times outside the White House. He did the same in a slightly surreal video that presumably was meant to appeal to patriotic Venezuelans, but which was entirely in English apart from the single word, "*libertad*".

Inevitably, Donald Trump took to Twitter to rail against Cuban support for Maduro, while the US envoy for Venezuela, Elliott Abrams - a veteran of Reagan-era US covert operations in Latin America - appeared on a private Venezuelan television channel giving a detailed account of the

document the defectors were supposed to have signed. Far from a spontaneous uprising of the oppressed Venezuelan masses, Operation Freedom was made in Washington.

In another twist though, there have been suggestions that some of the so-called defectors have been considering feeding the US false misinformation in a game of bluff and double bluff - leading to interesting speculation that the opposition may have been tricked by Padrino López into thinking they had a deal in order to expose their seditious intentions - and then take them out. If that was the plan, then it essentially succeeded, even if opposition leaders have not yet been shot or imprisoned. If anything, by any objective measure, the Maduro regime has been incredibly lenient - perhaps foolishly so - when it comes to the bourgeois opposition *openly* conspiring with the US to overthrow his government by one means or another.

## Invasion?

There is the scenario being touted by Guaidó of direct US military intervention - an invasion of some sort. Pompeo has repeatedly hinted at the possibility. He told ABC's *This week* on May 7 that he did not rule out "ultimately" using military action on top of diplomatic, political and other pressure points, so that, when the situation arises, "we're not flat-footed". We also discover in the same interview that the US did not suffer an "intelligence failure" - no, "these things sometimes take time".

Up to now, the hawks seem to have been restrained by more sensible voices within the Pentagon - the *Washington Post* reported a confrontation in the White House between Bolton's aides and the vice-chairman of the chiefs of staff, Paul Selva. Whereas Selva is making the case against any risky US escalation, Bolton's people are demanding the military option. As for Bolton himself, he seems determined to goad military leaders - and maybe the president too - into taking an aggressive stance. He quoted general Craig Stephen Faller, head of Southern Command, as saying, "We're on the balls of our feet, ready to go" - to which Bolton added: "And that's the kind of attitude we need". He also remarked that he does not believe that Donald Trump is prepared to see "foreign governments" - a reference, of course, to Russia and Cuba - effectively "take over" Venezuela, which "possesses the largest reserves of petroleum in the world". Yet it might be the case that the US generals will not indefinitely frustrate the calls for military action.

However, if there was a US invasion, it would not be plain sailing, as the population is heavily armed. It goes without saying that the American military could wipe out the Venezuelan airforce and tank force within hours and occupy any part of the country - but what about keeping control and holding it? Under such circumstances, we should expect a repetition of the kind of resistance we saw following the Iraq invasion - but on a far larger scale.

You would assume that this is what Trump's military advisors have told him, but will he listen? ●



Juan Guaidó: found only a handful of troops coming over to his side

15 p o i n t

**MIDDLE EAST**

# Threat of war is real

With Iran partially withdrawing from the nuclear deal and the US imposing yet more sanctions, tensions are rising fast. This is an edited version of an opening given by **Yassamine Mather** on the political situation in the Middle East



**John Bolton, Mike Pompeo with the president: Trump has rid himself of any official who does not want war with Iran**

A common question journalists ask these days - if they are not asking about Brexit - is 'Will there be a war against Iran?' and, if so, when? They seem to be thinking about a conflict within the next few weeks or months. In fact, a better question to ask would be: 'Will there be a war in the Middle East?'

In the United States, this is the question that is being posed in mainstream commentary and journalistic speculation and I believe there are a number of reasons why one should consider such a scenario, however improbable it might seem. Let us start by looking at the situation in the US.

The Mueller report might in the long run become more damaging to Donald Trump, partly because of the way attorney general William Barr intervened to minimise the damage and the way this tactic has backfired. Barr, who was appointed by Trump, did all he could to give a good spin on the Mueller report, yet this might have actually damaged the president's case. He presented such a whitewash, suggesting that Trump had nothing to answer for, that the negative impact, once the redacted report reached the House and the Senate, was significant. People recognised that there was a case to answer. In addition Mueller has been clear that Barr did not accurately reflect the actual content of the report.

This is not about impeachment - the whole issue is about Trump's insecurity at home and the fact that he is clearly worried about what is happening. His unease increases the chances of him becoming more unhinged and taking precipitative action. If you had monitored the instances of factually

incorrect nonsense spoken by the president over the last three or four weeks, as some journalists have done, you would have seen that the number has gone up considerably! This, along with the increasingly flaky nature of his tweets over this period, is perhaps indicative of an unravelling mind.

The other issue that has attracted attention in the last few weeks is the world economy. Stagnation has been a subject of unease for some time, but this question has become more pressing. While opinions vary, most commentators talk of uncertainty and the effect of raised tariffs - which has greatly exacerbated the problems for a world economy that was already running out of momentum. The latest forecast from the International Monetary Fund is negative for just about every economy in the world and the expectation is that the figures for the next three quarters in the United States itself will be pretty poor. Trump predicted that his tax cuts would win him a certain level of support amongst Republicans in the Senate, and claimed that this would boost the economy. But the dark clouds of recession are gathering.

All of this adds up to uncertainty in the United States and in these circumstances - as we know from history - conflict abroad is a good diversionary tactic.

We have also had the Israeli elections. It is not simply that Netanyahu was re-elected - that in itself was not a huge surprise - but it has also demonstrated a further rightward shift in Zionism. This has given new life to the scheme devised by Trump advisor and son-in-law Jared Kushner for a new 'peace' initiative in

the Middle East, which apparently will be unveiled in June.

## Chaos

In the Middle East itself, Islamic State is supposedly defeated - Trump has announced this 'victory' four or five times, giving a variety of different, inaccurate dates for when it supposedly happened. However, the refugee camps in Syria and Iraq are full of IS fighters, while recent events in Sri Lanka indicate that they are scattered around the world and are ready to create mayhem. We do not know whether or not Saudi and United Arab Emirates support for them - from the state or via individual backers - continues and, if so, to what extent.

The Saudis have emerged relatively unscathed from the hostile reaction to the Jamal Khashoggi murder, plus the execution of other opponents, in recent months. While many expected them to be punished for this - or least given a diminished role in Middle East politics - this has not happened. We have seen, however, the formation of two new alliances - Egypt and Israel, on the one hand, and Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, on the other. (The first of these alliances is particularly important, as it is meant to provide the political backbone for the Kushner plan.)

In addition, over the last two weeks we have seen what the Middle Eastern press calls the "threat of war" - not conflict, sharp exchanges or small incursions, but *war* - between Israel and Lebanon. This development has gathered momentum - far more than anyone expected. And, of course, a war between Israel and Lebanon would also involve Iran - it is an accepted fact

that if Israel and Lebanon go to war, then Hezbollah will be the main target for the Israeli state. Once that dynamic is in play, Iran would have to become involved.

At the same time, we have the continuing chaos in Afghanistan. The Afghan parliament was elected four years ago, but it sat for the first time during the week beginning April 22 of this year! This is because there is no real sense of what the government should be for. *De facto* the country is run by war lords, although the Taliban are gaining support - it is worth remembering that the Taliban previously came to power as a result of the chaos in the post-Soviet era and they are now viewed as the 'cleaner' (less corrupt) option amongst a bad bunch. This time they also have the Pakistani premier, Imran Khan, on their side.

In terms of the Yemen war, the US Congress voted to end military support for Saudi Arabia. However, within four hours Trump had vetoed it. In a way, the Yemen war is the red line for Trump. Via this conflict, he is showing his affiliation with Saudi. The repeated claims that Iran is the source of the conflict are just incorrect. Certainly, Iran is benefiting from it, but it is not "Iran's baby" as secretary of state Mike Pompeo keeps saying.

The Saudi-Bahrain-UAE alliance came together because of the alleged fear of Iran. Its Arab neighbours claim Tehran has become too powerful: it does have allies in Syria, it does have the Iraqi government on its side and it does have supporters in the Lebanese government.

But there is an additional problem, which to a certain extent has been

overlooked: we have all become so immune to the disasters created by the Trump administration that we are almost desensitised. The president has rid himself of any official who does not want a war with Iran, a country of 80 million people - some of whom are keen to martyr themselves in the name of the 12th Shia Imam! Worryingly, people like former secretary of state Rex Tillerson, who were opposed to US withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran, have been replaced by the warmonger Pompeo. Trump's former defence secretary, James Mattis, was dismissed for expressing doubts about military interventions in the Middle East and in particular in Iran.

Pompeo comes across as a buffoon who sounds off without thinking about the consequences. The secretary of state is promoting idiotic groups and cults that oppose the Tehran regime and he seems to have accepted the lies they feed him about having massive support inside Iran. Both the royalists and the Mujahedeen are giving the US administration assurances about how easy it will be to overthrow the Islamic Republic. Some US senators are comparing such groups to Ahmed Chalabi, the Iraqi opposition leader promoted by the United States, who claimed before the US invasion of Iraq that his supporters would ensure a smooth transfer of power to pro-US 'democratic' forces in Iraq (a fantasy eagerly repeated by Bush and Blair).

## Iran

Considering all of this, I would say that we are in a far more serious position than 2007-10, when we worked under the banner of Hands Off the People of Iran. This is partly because the political

scenario has changed so dramatically, but also because of the uncertainty in the US. This is explained by a combination of the unpredictability of the US president, along with the anti-Iran warmongers he has chosen to have around him.

The *Washington Post* reflected this uncertainty and the volatile nature of the current political discourse when it recently ran with the headline, 'Has war with Iran started?' *Bloomberg* has a different title: 'What if Trump wants war with Iran and no-one trusts him?'<sup>1</sup> This is undoubtedly a major factor. He does not have Congress on his side for a war on Iran and he has lost his secretaries of defence and homeland security.

Nor does he have the support of the major European states or the European Union itself. Angela Merkel does not want this war and, while Macron is prepared to talk about it, war is actually the last thing he wants. As for Theresa May, she is slightly distracted at the minute and is not exactly keen on getting embroiled in military action in addition to her other woes. This is a change from the past, of course.

In late April the US media paid a lot of attention to what the Iranian foreign secretary Mohammad Javad Zarif had been saying, during a visit to the United States - from this the media presented a scenario akin to the last days of Saddam. Zarif suggested that Trump does not necessarily want war, but the people around him could create conditions where a conflict starts accidentally - they are truly that stupid. I believe this is a more realistic scenario. Concretely, he identified the 'four Bs' as the main threat to peace - John Bolton (who wanted a war with Iran before 2003!), Binyamin Netanyahu, Mohammad bin Salman of Saudi Arabia and Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan of the UAE.

Also in April, US senator Paul Rand questioned Pompeo. This related to the law passed more than a decade ago which basically implies that if you can prove that Iran has any connection with Al Qa'eda, you are entitled to go to war with that country without further ado. Rand is anti-war, despite being a rightwinger, and he asked Pompeo if he was thinking of using that route to launch a war. Pompeo basically refused to give an answer - he dodged the question altogether. However, the mere fact that a senator of Rand's political leaning is asking that - and not getting an answer - tells us how dangerous the situation is.

Now Iran is suspending some commitments made under the 2015 nuclear deal and Trump has responded with imposing sanctions on Iran's export trade in iron, steel, aluminium and copper. The warmongers are delighted. However, the main danger of war is still the Israel-Palestine crisis. As I have stated, Kushner's plan for the Middle East is expected to be unveiled in June so as to avoid a clash with Ramadan. From what we can gather, he will say that any two-state solution cannot work and should be taken off the table.

He will advance the idea of diminished autonomy within a smaller area for several Palestinian Bantustans. Apparently, they will be presented as 'autonomous regions', alongside a much-expanded Israel, which will, of course, include the Golan Heights and all of Jerusalem. According to some, Kushner basically wants to accept the 1967 borders as permanent. The incentive for the Palestinians will be that Saudi Arabia will apparently make substantial investments in Palestinian areas.

This is a recipe for disaster that will not be accepted by the Palestinians - it would surely result in a new war. Even the king of Jordan - an imperialist stooge - will not be able to sit safely in his palace if he accepts such a deal. The Qataris would not survive either, although perhaps Saudi Arabia would

be able to keep its population in check, but this is the kind of 'peace deal' that would create huge turbulence.

To divert attention from all this - if this plan is actually announced in June, and I expect it will be - a useful ploy would be to trigger a conflict between Israel and Lebanon, and between the United States and Iran. We witnessed the rumblings of Israeli-Lebanese conflict in April. Hassan Nasrallah - the leader of the Lebanese Hezbollah, who heads a party that is an exponent of neoliberal politics in the Middle East - is important in terms of political strategy. He is saying that the Israel army is not ready to attack Lebanon. Remember, the only time Israel has suffered defeat in its entire existence came with an incursion into southern Lebanon. We can assume that Israel will make sure that it is not repeated - so what will happen?

We have seen a number of different opening moves connected to the Kushner plan. Most importantly, Iran's Revolutionary Guard has been declared a terrorist organisation. In effect a declaration of war. Imagine if the British government declared that the entire French army was a terrorist organisation - that would signal an immediate prelude to war. We are still, after all, in the era of the 'war on terror'.

## Starvation

The US has imposed sanctions on the Revolutionary Guard and ended the waiver on countries buying oil from Iran: 85% of its income coming from oil. But this will now be squeezed to the point of strangulation. This is no longer just sanctions - it is a policy of imposing starvation. No doubt there will be ways around the siege, but Iran would be then selling oil without insurance - a bizarre arrangement under modern capitalism. And in order to attract customers in the first place, Iran is already having to sell its oil well below the market price.

China has said it is ready to step in and buy Iranian oil and claims it will deal with subsequent American sanctions - there is already a conflict between US and China regarding tariffs and it could be that China believes it is not losing much in terms of its relationship with the US. Presumably, this will be one of its bargaining chips in the next round of negotiations with Washington.

The US has been quite explicit about the purpose of its sanctions on Iran. They are imposed to put pressure on working people of Iran, to make life as hard for them as possible. This has been openly admitted by the ultra-hawkish John Bolton, for example. They are trying to foment a rebellion from below against the state - in other words, they are regime-change sanctions.

The other motivation behind the sanctions is that they might prompt Tehran to do something really stupid, such as mount an attack on the US naval forces in the Gulf or provoke flare-ups in Syria, where Iran, Turkey and Russia are basically an occupying force. Israel is bombing Iranian positions in Syria on a regular basis and Tehran is not saying much about it. It can retaliate via Hezbollah, of course - Israel is claiming that Hezbollah now has land-to-land missiles, which can hit Israeli cities.

Bolton, Pompeo and attorney Rudy Giuliani are hoping to provoke the Iranians into mounting an attack, which would legitimise an Israeli response. Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah is probably correct to claim that the Israelis are not yet ready to deploy land forces, but they do have an airforce far superior to that of any other state in the region - it would easily be able to target Iran's nuclear facilities. It would not be necessary for the US to become embroiled in such a conflict from the beginning, but Washington would

surely intervene on the side of its primary ally in the region at some convenient stage.

There is also the possibility that things settle down and the prospect of war recedes. After all, Iran-US negotiations - open and secret - have taken place throughout the last 40 years. In 2017, when both president Donald Trump and president Hassan Rouhani were attending the United Nations general assembly, there was a 'chance meeting' in a corridor and a handshake.

Apparently Macron was the intermediary - the French president called Rouhani and asked him if he would be interested in a meeting. But the day before Trump had delivered a blistering speech to world leaders, in which he denounced the Iranian leadership as dictators who have turned a wealthy country into an "economically depleted rogue state, whose chief exports are bloodshed and chaos". So, understandably, Rouhani said 'no thanks' to a chat, citing his talks with Barack Obama, which had caused him lots of problems back home - and Obama had not launched a tirade like Trump!

On the other hand, it is important to remember here that, as I have already pointed out, over the last 40 years there have been many examples of cooperation between Iran and the US - including military cooperation.<sup>2</sup> So we must be aware of the possibility of tensions receding and a relative calm being established.

That said, US senators are comparing the current period to the one that prevailed before the Iraq invasion. The constant attempt to equate Iran with terrorism and Al Qa'eda come from the same template as the one used against Iraq - it was false then and it is false today.

A number of senior US figures - not least Hillary Clinton - have admitted that the US knew about Islamic State and its predecessor being financed by the Saudis. However, the US turned a blind eye because the activities of this organisation weakened Iran. But, incredibly, IS was destroyed as a state with help provided by Iran. Alliances are made, alliances dissolve, and yesterday's allies become today's 'terrorists' - the cynicism of the ruling classes is beyond a joke.

## Lessons

We must draw some lessons. If there is an escalation and the threat of war becomes palpable, there will be many people on the left who will automatically defend the Islamic Republic. No doubt they will point to the superficial improvement in

Iranian rights - some women now go unveiled, for example. We will be inundated with the 'anti-imperialism of fools' - the enemy of my enemy must be a friend, so we must support the Iranian government. That is something we have rightly rejected in the past.

We will also see a major challenge for the Labour leadership and - given the trends at the top of the party that we have noted and commented on before - the possibility that John McDonnell will strike a 'statesman' like pose and Jeremy Corbyn's opposition will be muted because of the need to avoid charges of anti-Semitism.

Since Corbyn's election as leader, Labour has said very little about Iran. In 2017 Corbyn was challenged by Jon Snow about his appearances on Iran-sponsored Press TV. The Labour leader responded weakly and came across as very apologetic. Of course, we also have that bizarre Emily Thornberry statement at the height of the protests in early 2018 when she told the BBC's *Political thinking* podcast:

Our approach now is one of extreme caution when it comes to Iran and a recognition that the society in Iran is an immensely complex one, and seemingly contradictory. For example, with these current riots, sometimes they are calling to reinstate the monarchy, sometimes they're calling out against [Ayatollah Ali] Khamenei, sometimes they're calling for Khamenei, sometimes they're calling for the price of eggs.<sup>3</sup>

But that is about it. Even on Yemen, Corbyn has been pretty tight-lipped. McDonnell's last parliamentary intervention on Iran dates back to 2013, when he submitted a motion on Iranian trade unionists, presumably prompted by Hopi.

I realise there are other pressing issues in British political life at present. However, the question of the Middle East is hardly unimportant. If the conflict escalates, we should not expect any strong opposition from the Labour leadership. The Stop the War Coalition, weakened by contradictory positions on Syria and eager to ensure no damage is done to Corbyn, is unlikely to take any serious initiatives. That does not auger well ●

## Notes

1. [www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-04-26/early-returns-what-if-no-one-trust-trump-in-a-war-with-iran](http://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-04-26/early-returns-what-if-no-one-trust-trump-in-a-war-with-iran).
2. [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0003871](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0003871).
3. [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/iran-protests-deaths-latest-emily-thornberry-boris-johnson-united-nations-a8145371.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/iran-protests-deaths-latest-emily-thornberry-boris-johnson-united-nations-a8145371.html).

## Fighting fund

# Warm feeling

Following the first full week of our May fighting fund, our running total stands at £519 towards the new monthly target of £2,000.

Almost all the donations over the last seven days came in the shape of standing orders. Our thanks go to comrades AC (£50), SW, CG and NH (£30), GD and DV (£25), NR (£18), and SM (£10). Apart from these, two PayPal contributions came our way - thank you, comrades CT and RN, who both chipped in with a tenner.

Finally let me mention the one and only cheque we received - DL's £50 came with an accompanying letter, which read: "I just love your letters page. The *Weekly Worker* is the only left paper I know that features such genuine and interesting debate. Keep up the

good work!"

We do our best, comrade! But, in order to continue with that "good work", we need to build on what we achieved last month, when we broke through that £2,000 barrier. It's a tough call to make, month after month, but it's absolutely necessary.

That's where our appeal for more of those standing orders comes in. While, of course, we're grateful for every one-off donation, it's the regular, guaranteed donations that really give me that warm feeling! Any offers? ●

Robbie Rix

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

# What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# weekly Worker

**A tiny layer  
of blacks  
have done  
well**

## Dashing of a dream

Michael Roberts provides the political and economic background to the general election in South Africa

The May 8 general election came 25 years after the end of apartheid and six years after the death of Nelson Mandela. In those 25 years, the aspirations and hopes of most black South Africans (90% of the population) - and, for that matter, many white South Africans - have been disappointed. In those 25 years, the majority have not seen any startling improvement in their living standards, education, health and public services. Indeed, for many, particularly young blacks, things are even worse. Inequality of incomes, wealth and land is extreme; corruption in government and in the party of the black majority, the African National Congress, is rife.

The death of Mandela in 2013 was a reminder of the great victory that the black masses of South Africa achieved over the vicious, cruel and regressive apartheid system - first encouraged by British imperialism and then adopted by a reactionary and racist white South African ruling class to preserve the privileges of a tiny minority. Mandela spent 27 years as a political prisoner, and the people he represented fought a long, hard battle to overthrow a grotesque regime that was backed for decades by the major imperialist powers, including the United States and Britain.

But the end of apartheid in the 1990s was also attributable to a change of attitude by the white ruling class in South Africa and the ruling classes of the major capitalist states. There was a hard-headed decision by them to no longer consider Mandela a terrorist and recognise that a black president was inevitable and even necessary.

At the time, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, South Africa's capitalist economy was on its knees. This was not just because of global boycotting of its exports, but because the productivity of black labour in the mines and factories had dropped away. The quality of investment in industry and availability of investment from abroad had fallen sharply. This was expressed in the profitability of capital reaching a post-war low in the global recession of the early 1980s. Unlike other capitalist economies, apartheid South Africa could find no way of turning that around through the further exploitation of the black labour force.

The ruling class had to change strategy. The white leadership under FW de Klerk reversed decades of previous policy, opted to release Mandela and go for black majority government that could restore labour discipline and revive profitability. For his efforts, de Klerk shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Mandela, who was elected president at the age of 76! And profitability did rise dramatically under the first Mandela administration, as foreign investment poured in and the rate of exploitation of the workforce rocketed.

As one of the so-called Brics, South Africa's economy was traditionally rooted in the primary sectors - the result of a wealth of mineral



Many parties to choose from

resources and favourable agricultural conditions. Under Mandela and then later Thabo Mbeki, the black majority saw some improvements in their truly awful living situation, in sanitation, housing, electricity, education, health, and so on, ending the cruel and arbitrary control of movement and the inequality of the apartheid regime.

But, despite their professed socialist ideology, written into its constitution, the ANC leaders quickly ditched any radical change to the economy and social structure. ANC governments opted for capitalism and never even considered any state takeover of the mines, resource industries and land owned by the whites. Instead the ANC leaders took a slice of the action themselves.

Thus the tiny, wealthy white minority has remained pretty much unaffected by the ending of apartheid. Now the rich whites have been joined by a few rich blacks - together they dominate business and exert overwhelming influence over the ruling ANC. The party now expresses the sharp divisions between the majority of working class blacks and the small black section of the ruling class that has developed. These fissures erupt every so often, as yet without a decisive break.

By the early 2000s, the relative recovery of the economy began to peter out and then the great recession globally dealt a technical knock-out to South African capitalism, from which it has not recovered. Profitability of capital dropped away and growth in investment, productivity and output began to crawl, making it impossible for the black majority to make any progress. South African industry is now in difficulty; unemployment and crime remain at global highs, and economic growth is foundering.

Gross domestic product grew by 2.9% on average between 1994 and 2000 under Mandela after apartheid had wrecked the economy. And, under his successors, growth accelerated to an average of 4.2% a year until the 2008 financial crisis. But the economy has stalled in the decade since, recording average growth of just 1.6%. Indeed, once the increase in population is taken into account, real GDP per person has been stagnant in the long depression of the last 10 years.

### Inequality

The World Bank calls South Africa "the most unequal country in the world by any measure". Inequality of consumption has increased under

the ANC government to a huge Gini ratio of 0.63. Inequality in wealth is even higher: the richest 10% of the population held around 71% of net wealth in 2015, while the bottom 60% held just 7%. Furthermore, intergenerational mobility is low, meaning inequalities are passed down from generation to generation with little change over time. Current president Cyril Ramaphosa encapsulates the country's failure to tackle inequality at its root. He is a wealthy tycoon, part of a narrow black business elite that has been forged by ANC policies.

The progress in poverty reduction in the early years of the ANC government in the late 1990s has also stopped. Even on the dubious World Bank figures of a poverty rate of \$1.90 a day, 19% of South Africans are below this level compared with 17% in 2011. According to figures provided by Moeletsi Mbeki, brother of former president Thabo, only 37,000 black South Africans earn more than \$4,300 a month. Those earning more than \$820 number just 1.25 million in a country of 58 million people. There are 8.3 million people of working age with no job. Unemployment officially stands at 27.1% in the fourth quarter of 2018. The unemployment rate is even higher among youths, at around 54.7%.

The racial and class divide remains extreme 25 years since apartheid was ended. The divide is entrenched early in people's lives: in the education system. Almost all white pupils pass the final-year secondary school exams that are required to enter university. Only two-thirds of their black counterparts manage the same feat. Black South Africans also face disadvantages accessing healthcare and other services. Rolling electricity blackouts - caused by long-running and ongoing problems, resulting from mismanagement and corruption at the state utility, Eskom - plague the black communities.

Corruption in the higher echelons has increased. Transparency International's index puts South Africa on 42 (where zero is total corruption) and that is down from 57, when apartheid ended.

There exists an official scheme to take South Africa's black millions out of poverty - the National Development Plan, drafted in 2012, is official ANC policy, but it has never been implemented. Moreover, the

plan is really one of compromise with big business and landowners. The rich will pay more tax, the government will then provide better services (and be less corrupt) - but real wages will be reduced, so that employment can rise! This was the strategy that the ANC leadership under Ramaphosa offered in their election campaign.

Ramaphosa says he wants to reduce corruption at the top, but the ANC party apparatus is still controlled by the cronies of former president, Jacob Zuma. Ace Magashule, the ANC's powerful secretary-general, is called 'Mr Ten Per Cent' for looting an entire province as a party supremo under Zuma.

What about the opposition? The Democratic Alliance was formerly the party of liberal white South Africans, but now it has a young black leader, Mmusi Maimane. Maimane is integrated into South African big business, although the DA stands for some limited reforms on land ownership, reducing corruption and crime - all proposals that the ANC upholds too. The DA has attracted the support of middle class blacks disgusted with the corruption of the ANC.

The most radical of the three largest parties is the Economic Freedom Fighters - a split-off from the ANC, led by its former youth leader, Julius Malema. The EFF wants the nationalisation of land without compensation and the state take-over of the mines and the central bank. It has attracted the backing - particularly among radical youth - of large numbers of blacks disillusioned with the ANC.

South African capitalism in the post-apartheid era has not kept pace with other Brics, particularly China, Russia and India, and is now really a member of the 'fragile five' (India, Brazil, Indonesia, Turkey and South Africa). So Ramaphosa must deal with a stagnant capitalist economy, high levels of poverty, inequality, corruption and crime; and with an economy very vulnerable to a global slump that would expose the external trade deficit that has been growing and would lead to capital flight and rising interest rates.

A deep economic crisis is a very real prospect for the ANC government over the next five years ●

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

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