

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly **worker**

**Supplement: Fifty years after Neil Armstrong's "giant leap for mankind" a new space race has begun**

- Letters and debate
- Iran war danger
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- Tribunes of the right

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**The constitution:  
it matters**

## LETTERS



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

## Defend Williamson

I read Carla Roberts' article about the smear campaign targeting Chris Williamson MP, which I thought was quite informative ('Witch-hunt's biggest victim', July 11), and also attended the demonstration outside Labour Party headquarters to protest his suspension. From what I understood, Williamson was accused of bringing the party into disrepute, after a video was released of him speaking at a Momentum meeting and saying that Labour's stance had been too "apologetic" on the issue of anti-Semitism. It seems obvious that such a minor charge shouldn't amount to expulsion, so one would have to assume that the knives have been out for Williamson for some time.

The BBC's political coverage could at best be described as irresponsible; at worst a character assassination or hatchet job. However, Novara Media have also repeatedly attacked Williamson over the past few months in their weekly podcasts. They claim to support the Corbyn project and are apparently of the left, with communists in their midst. In their July 4 episode, however, Max Shanly, who plays the resident expert on anything Labour in the podcasts, went into Williamson and the anti-Semitism issue in great detail and I thought it was worth interrogating their arguments: it was in my view littered with contradictions.

In the episode ironically titled 'All the best: solidarity forever', Max is highly critical of Williamson, claiming "he's not of the left" and highlighting that, while he was a leader of Derby council, he ran a coalition with the Tories and "signed up to loads of shady PFI deals", voted to bomb Libya and Iraq, and also abstained on the immigration bill that led to the Windrush scandal. Max also mentioned that Williamson has since "publicly atoned for these sins". I wasn't aware of those criticisms that in my view are damning if true. Max also alleged that he thought Williamson's local members were quite pissed off with him and that the local GMB region "really fucking hate him" and "have been organising against him for a good year.

The best way I could describe Max's nuanced argument on anti-Semitism is that he's trying to have his cake and eat it. He alleges that "no-one is denying that there are ongoing efforts by both the state of Israel and its supporters to delegitimise those who delegitimise Israel - which all countries do, by the way". This to me sounds like Max is minimising what could be viewed as Israeli intervention in UK 'democracy'. And, if no-one's denying these "efforts", well, as far as I'm aware, no-one seems to be shouting out about them either - at least no-one in the Labour Party, because those who have spoken about it have been suspended or expelled!

He also says that anti-Semitism in the party isn't "rife" and admits the issue has been blown way out of proportion by the media and the Labour right wing. Williamson was suspended because of the video footage of him trying to articulate this same thing, Max says. Why does Max think that Chris should be suspended for saying less about the issue of anti-Semitism than Max himself says in this episode?

Well, he clarifies: "People are trying to say it's about Chris Williamson's views on Palestine

and everything like that, which is bollocks. It's not about that at all. Just as it wasn't about Palestine when Marc Wadsworth got expelled or Jackie Walker got expelled ... It's all about their attitudes toward anti-Semitism." But if you're expecting Shanly to provide examples of the said attitude towards anti-Semitism, you will be disappointed.

The closest he came was when he said: "Those 'efforts' around Chris Williamson have had the effect of people denying ... that anti-Semitism exists and this then unwittingly educates sections of the grassroots into anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, thereby setting back those 'efforts' even more. And you see it quite a lot like with the way that Lansman's treated, you know. They call Lansman a puppetmaster, and he owns Momentum, which is bollocks. Let's just clarify this once and for all, Jon Lansman doesn't fucking own Momentum. Momentum is a membership organisation. Jon Lansman is listed as technically the owner of the service company of Momentum. He's the founder of Momentum and the chair of Momentum. It's not odd that he would be listed as the owner of the company that pays all the staff and everything like that."

I can't quite understand Max's point here. Jon Lansman isn't the owner, but for all intents and purposes he is the owner, the chair and the founder? If Max is trying to downplay Lansman's role, he fails, as clearly Lansman will wield considerable power over the organisation if he's the chair and technically the owner.

Almost in an apparent effort to discharge Chris, Max explains: "Admittedly Chris Williamson has been egged on by a section of the old Jewish anti-Zionist left, who were mainly in Trot groups in the 70s." But then he says that there is a difference in the way that the Americans have dealt with these "efforts", compared to the UK: "In America there is a large Jewish left, whereas in Britain there are Jews that happen to be on the left. There isn't a big Jewish left bloc."

I would beg to differ on that last assertion, as Max himself had referred to the "old Jewish anti-Zionist left". They haven't gone anywhere. Maybe there isn't a large Jewish leftwing bloc, but you don't have to be Jewish to be an anti-Zionist. You just have to believe that Palestinians should have equal rights. And there are plenty of people who share that egalitarian ideal.

The main reason I went to protest the suspension of Chris was because his ideals were on display when he defended Venezuela's democratically elected government, while the American-backed Juan Guaidó was attempting a coup. While interviewed in a BBC studio alongside Williamson, fellow Labour MP Rachel Reeves openly supported Guaidó and stated that Nicolás Maduro's government won a "rigged" election. Williamson responded by clarifying the elections were judged by observatories such as the Jimmy Carter Institute as being among some of the safest in the world. He then went on to inform Reeves that, according to a UN rapporteur, the sanctions that the United States had imposed on Venezuela were crippling its economy and could amount to crimes against humanity.

As a subscriber to Novara Media, I would say that they should express some solidarity by standing up for the right to speak freely. What I understood from the podcast is that

Max genuinely believes that, if only Chris went quietly, the machine would stop and we could slip through into the driving seat. But there is simply no way that the media and right wing of the Labour Party would be satisfied until the threat of a real left Labour government is gone. Max said it himself - the media and the Labour right blew this issue out of proportion. And Israel and its supporters will delegitimise anyone who delegitimises them.

The fact that Novara are repeating the lie - that Chris's suspension is due to his attitude towards anti-Semitism and not to his views on Palestine - is so damaging because they allow it to gain traction by giving the illusion that it comes from a leftwing source, when really it comes from a rightwing source: the Israeli state.

**Jagpreet Bhullar**  
Labour supporter  
London

## Totalitarian

The point made by Jennifer Maynard about Jon Lansman's intolerant and totalitarian values in excluding any opinion which does not conform to his own, if true, is the same as saying Lansman is anti-democratic (Letters, July 11).

In my view the anti-democratic element in socialism is facilitated by Marxism, which previously I have argued is a doctrine which contains fundamental flaws. Note that Marxism is based on the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat, rather than the democratic rule of the working class. This is not just a terminological difference - this difference fosters and represents different mindsets. My view is that Marxism leads to an anti-democratic movement within socialism. This was perfectly expressed by Lenin in *State and revolution*, when he defended dictatorship as rule untrammelled by any law. What a perfect recipe for lawless political rule, which existed in the Soviet Union under Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin.

There are two trends within socialism: the democratic and the totalitarian. This is why the socialist revolutions can lead either to the democratic rule of the working class or the anti-democratic rule of a bureaucratic elite - a new ruling caste based on social property. The totalitarian trend mostly conceals itself until after the revolution. But it is always there and is observed and remarked upon by people like Jennifer Maynard.

The Trotskyist narrative on this issue is completely wrong, in that Trotsky associated the rise of a bureaucratic caste in the Soviet Union with social backwardness and socialism in one country. The opposite is actually the case. The more advanced and complex a society is, the greater the danger of a bureaucratic caste coming to power in the aftermath of a socialist revolution. These bureaucrats already exist. All they need to come forward is the demise of the rule of the capitalist class and a socialist movement which lacks democratic values.

What does this have to do with the observations of comrade Jennifer Maynard? Well, the totalitarian values and anti-democratic behaviour of some comrades is what is required for the bureaucratic and totalitarian element to defeat the democratic element within socialism and come to power with a bit of help from Marxism. Comrade Maynard may shudder at the thought of someone like Lansman getting into a position of real power, but what she and the rest of the left need to realise

is that the struggle for socialism has always contained a contradiction between the democratic and the totalitarian elements.

Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and Mao all waged war against bureaucracy - ultimately to no avail, because they did not see clearly that within socialism is a totalitarian element opposed to democratic rule and that this relates to two class forces: the working class and the petty bourgeoisie. The basic question everyone needs to ask is: which side am I on, the totalitarian or the democratic element within socialism? Those who don't want Orwell's prophecy to come true, those who don't want 1984, must support the democratic element within socialism and oppose the forces of totalitarianism.

**Tony Clark**  
Labour supporter

## Blindsided

I wanted you to be aware of a discussion going on in the States. My few friends that read the *Weekly Worker*, as well as myself, would never use 'shekel', as your author did ('Taaffe counts his shekels', July 18).

This actually has nothing to do with political correctness, and I'm not offended. Rather - as in my case - almost 50 years of being called anti-Semitic makes me judicious in how I express myself (on this matter, anyway), even with so significant a minority of Jewish comrades sharing my views, often vocally.

This shit in the Labour Party isn't going away soon: you're just getting started over there, and if you think you've seen ugly so far, think again. To 'veterans' on the left like me, who have been on the receiving end of these accusations since the Vietnam war, you in the UK look like you got blindsided. Too bad you didn't have any friendly US expats over there, who could have warned you.

**Lee Gloster**  
email

## Who? Me?

I only mentioned Steve Freeman in passing in a recent letter (July 11) and I now realise my gross mistake in referring to someone so obviously desperate for attention. I now feel a bit like the bloke who's had the misfortune to make accidental eye contact with a pissed tramp on a train station.

I wrote a letter with a mild-mannered critique of the *Weekly Worker* publishing policy and, suddenly, on Freeman's fantasy island this means I am somehow in league with Tom Watson (!) on Brexit or whatever. Freeman says: "Brian is an ultra-remainer and is irritated by the case made for Corbyn's 'remain'-democrat stance" (Letters, July 18). Certainly news to me. I don't have strong feelings either way on Brexit. Both sides bore me and don't interest me remotely. As for Corbyn's "'remain'-democrat stance", first, I didn't know Corbyn had one; second, I don't know what it is; and, third, I don't care.

I am accused of having a "Stalinist method". It's very interesting that hostility to Rex Dunn is somehow a working definition of Stalinism. I can only say that it's been a while since I thought about it, but I always classed myself as a Trot. As for being an "ultra-left", given that this is worked out by Freeman on the basis of me having a novel standpoint that I didn't know I actually had, we should maybe file that one under the heading 'improbable'.

Freeman says he was "amused" by my little crack at him. Well, you don't sound very amused, brother.

**Brian Kugelmann**  
email

## 'Cranks'?

Brian Kugelmann complains that the *Weekly Worker's* editorial policy is preoccupied with filling up space and not with the quality of articles and letters submitted to it (Letters, July 11). He imagines the paper's editorial team "becoming excited over vast quantities of words arriving in their inbox". He admonishes the editor for publishing writings that "wouldn't be indulged by any serious journal".

This is an unreasonable criticism. The *Weekly Worker* is not an academic journal. It is a paper of a small leftwing group that encourages free expression over various aspects of socialist theory and practice. It is directed to class-conscious workers and Marxist intellectuals, not all of whom are employed as teachers or researchers in institutions of higher education. Its editor faces a difficult task: this is to negotiate a path between, on the one hand, the anti-intellectual prejudices of a Stalinised left and, on the other, a scholastic snobbery directed towards self-educated Marxists. In other words, the editor has to be constantly aware of the need to publish writings that help educate workers in Marxist theory and help create a mass awareness of the need for a socialist society in the here and now.

Kugelmann must know that Stalinism almost completely destroyed Marxism and the movement for socialism. As a result there is presently no substantial leftwing mass movement worldwide. The *Weekly Worker* exists as part of the process of renewing and rebuilding this movement. It is therefore bound to reproduce some of the contradictions of the post-Stalinist period we are living through. These include the recognition that the objective material conditions for socialism are in place, but do not yet include a mass subjective awareness of this fact. On the contrary, most people are desperate and hopeless when they think about the future. Writers such as Rex Dunn face this contradiction honestly and squarely. I do not agree with his position of "rational pessimism", but I recognise that his writings reflect ideas that many Marxists influenced by the Frankfurt school have adopted.

Kugelmann isolates the distinctive voices of Dunn and Steve Freeman for opprobrium. These voices may be eclectic in derivation and clumsy in expression. They may irritate, annoy or offend, but they deserve some form of critical engagement. On the contrary, Kugelmann's splenetic dismissal condemns them as rubbish. Of course, when prejudice occludes reason, the same could be said of other "cranks" who write regularly for the paper, such as Mike Macnair and Jack Conrad.

**Paul B Smith**  
Ormskirk

## Youth and unions

Inspired by the letter about turning to the youth, I share here something I wrote for a trade union paper.

We know that young people are much less active in the trade unions than they have been ever before. This means great losses for the workers' movement in general, the coming generations become more and more atomised, while they aren't developing any experience of organising. Without organisation the employers will be able to trample on the young working class without any resistance.

It is, of course, no coincidence

that the current situation is the way it is: it is a structural problem. Young people only get temporary or unstable employment at a much higher rate. They go from workplace to workplace: they do not get the time to become part of the 'community' between workmates and they would never have the time to try and start any sort of workplace organising. The repressive discipline is getting harsher and harsher, the fear of getting let go if they raise their voice is very real. This is a structural problem that can only be solved on a political level, but that is no reason to give up on the local work that can be done.

Even if the youths have to go from workplace to workplace, they are workers nonetheless, wherever they go. They will always stand under their employer alongside their workmates. For this reason trade union activists need to interact with summer workers, those hired in through a staffing agency and so on. We have to make them feel like they are part of the workers' collective, even if they can't be part of the trade union club in the same way. We must make them feel we are on their side, no matter what, and this has to happen in a methodical way.

If we forget about the youth that is struggling with new conditions, then we are throwing the trade union promise into the dustbin of history.

**Emma Silva**  
email

## Johnson

The election of Boris Johnson as prime minister marks a time to reflect on the dangers the working class movement now faces. Johnson can win as long as he avoids imposing a no-deal Brexit and avoids a general election before the UK leaves the European Union on October 31. After the deal is ratified by the Commons, Johnson will use this patriotic kudos to call and win a general election.

Labour has recently made a big tactical blunder that will help Johnson secure a Tory Brexit. Labour had won a series of victories over May's Tory Brexit, which led to her sacking. After 2016 Labour became a 'remain-democrat' party signalled by Corbyn agreeing to trigger article 50. This policy was then set out in the 2017 Labour manifesto and at the 2018 Labour conference.

In 2016 the democratic centre ground shifted, as millions of people voted to leave the EU in England and Wales and to remain in Northern Ireland and Scotland. Nobody voted to leave the single market and the customs union. Of course, any deal negotiated with the EU must be referred back to the people for ratification. Labour's policy was very close to occupying this centre ground. It enabled the Parliamentary Labour Party to remain sufficiently united to defeat May's deal three times in the Commons.

Now Labour has abandoned the centre ground and swung to the left to become a 'remain and reform' party to fight it out with the Liberal Democrats. It is a crackpot idea pushed onto Corbyn by Blair, Campbell and Wes Streeting, and fronted by arch witch-finder Tom Watson. Corbyn could have fended them off until Thornberry, McDonnell, Abbott and other left MPs like Clive Lewis backed a 'remain' referendum.

This has created a Labour shambles, not least because 'remaining' is in contradiction to calling a general election, so that a Labour government can go back to Brussels for another deal. But, more than this, it has released around 29 Labour MP's who had been shackled by the promise to respect the referendum result. This enabled a Tory Brexit to be blocked by Labour MPs who supported both 'leave' and

'remain'.

Now the new PM is a man with a plan. He is going to get a Tory Brexit through the Commons and then fight a general election. How can he pull it off? He is threatening no deal as a negotiating tactic, but in practice he will seek to come back with a disguised version of the May deal. The Tories will see through this disguise, but pretend not to notice.

Fear stalks the Tory Party. Vote for the Johnson deal or hand the keys to number 10 to the extreme 'Marxist', Jeremy Corbyn. At the same time 29 Labour MPs - released from their obligations by Labour's switch to an ultra-'remain' party - will back the Johnson deal and get it over the line. Peter Mandelson and his mouthpiece, Tom Watson, will have delivered a win-double - helping the Tories to secure a majority in the Commons and win a victory over Corbyn in the general election.

We can only guess how Johnson will get his revised May deal. The most straightforward is to draw the economic border with the EU down the Irish Sea and do the checks in Liverpool, etc. There is then no need for an Irish backstop. Of course, for that Johnson will have to throw the Democratic Unionist Party under the bus. Yet the Tory rank and file have already said they would happily lose Ireland, if only they could get Brexit and defeat Corbyn.

This is not to say that Johnson is brave enough to sacrifice Irish unionism, which is so essential for Tory politics. Perhaps they will come up with something more complex to save the Tories from a terminal crisis. The main point is that Watson's ultra-'remain' victory was a setback for Labour and may be the point when Corbyn was finally scuppered by a fatal combination of his enemies and his allies.

**Steve Freeman**  
London

## Iran not afraid

The US had already decided to send troops (and the Patriot missile system) to its base in Saudi Arabia before Iran seized the British tanker, Stena Impero, in the Strait of Hormuz on July 19. Since the UK stopped the Iranian-flagged Grace 1 in Gibraltar on July 4 - and the US claims to have downed an Iranian drone on July 18 - Iran is defending itself. Even the British media tend to accept this.

It is the US administration that broke the Iran nuclear deal. And it is Iran that proposed to France and Germany - and even the UK - that they keep the deal alive. The latter are gradually taking the side of the US, of course, through their common class interests. The Trump government wants to keep Iran in awe of its imperialist plans in the Middle East, but Iran is not afraid and it fights back instead. Like Venezuela, Syria and Libya, it is a revolutionary state.

As in the cases of Venezuela and Syria, the imperialists find themselves confronted with Russia and China. Regime change 'in slices' becomes difficult for the imperialists - if not impossible. As for Russia and China, beyond their very great internal shortcomings, they act on the world's stage in a way that helps ex-colonial countries defy, resist and unite against any return to colonial subjugation and pillage.

Through their incapacity to plan, their repeated failures and their procrastinations, Trump and the imperialists show that they are afraid. It is not for lack of military strength that they fail in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Iran, Ukraine: there is just no capitalist development to be had for them in the world.

It is the Soviet workers' state that defeated Nazism and not 'the allies'. It was the triumph of the Soviet Union that created the conditions for most of the colonies to become independent. For imperialism to return to the pillaging of the world, it must now defeat Russia and China.

By its behaviour, Iran shows that it is not afraid. It is imperialism that is afraid. It wants world war against Russia and China, but it keeps putting it off, putting it off. It is afraid of what it is, and of what it does, as a system.

Wracked by internal competition and the hatred of the world's masses, world capitalism keeps stoking the fires of war instead of taking bold, planned and confident control of an all-out war. And, when it finally decides to do so, it will be another fiasco, like all its wars, and for the same reasons.

The left in the Labour Party needs to assimilate the fact that, when the workers' state of the Soviet Union smashed the Nazis, it drew a historic line under the colonial ambition of world capitalism. In this action carried out by its Red Army, its entirely mobilised masses and its 27 million dead, the Soviet workers' state broke the foundations of colonisation - hence of capital accumulation.

**Marie Lynam**  
email

## Youth influx

John Smithee hits it right on the button by saying an influx of young people offers the best hope for Labour Party Marxists/CPGB, along with "communism in 2019" (Letters, July 18). In other words, the best hope for a reversal of 21st-century Marxism's extensive, fundamental and thus profound difficulties. However, it's far easier said than done to attract that next and effective generation to our cause. For its part, modern-day capitalism is highly adept at making a society based upon a blend of ignorance, instant gratification and self-interest appear to be something wonderful.

In reality, of course, any variation of social structure on offer from capitalism will be one predominantly based upon toxic individualism and, in turn, upon multi-modal exploitation. Seemingly satisfying and fulfilling, but, in fact, entirely dead-end; certainly if compared to what could be achievable for humankind if life were to be imbued with ideas, ideals and aspirations rooted within mutual benefit and the common good.

The vacuousness, inanity and nihilism of so-called choices in lifestyle under capitalism; the sheer and beyond tragic waste of youthful enterprise and energy would be brought to an end. Marxism would replace them instead with genuinely satisfying rewards - indeed, an ability to appreciate true 'freedom of expression'. That in stark distinction to lifestyles under capitalism - those churned out by Hollywood/Netflix and other forms of corporate media as are intertwined with calculated distraction and disinformation. For the non-affluent or worse educated - for disadvantaged and consequently even more disoriented working class youth - that conditions their mind, limiting their ambition to include such nonsense as 'postcode' gangland stabbings or shootings, for the most part in pursuit of establishing a feeling of worth, an identity.

In contrast, communism/Marxism would provide the fertile soil not only for higher-form aesthetics, but also for *real fun*, *true success*, for *genuine* fulfilment; they would provide the 'happiness' that is either elusive or totally absent under capitalism.

**Bruno Kretschmar**  
email

# ACTION

## London Communist Forum

**Sunday July 28, 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: 'Conclusion: an overview of the evidence and four arguments'. 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).

## Popular resistance in Palestine

Hear Palestinian environmental and political activist Mazin Qumsiyeh.  
**Friday July 26, 7pm:** Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, 16-18 Queen Square, Bath BA1. Tickets £5 (£3). Organised by Bath Friends of Palestine: [www.facebook.com/events/2407442582649976](http://www.facebook.com/events/2407442582649976).  
**Monday August 12, 7.30pm:** St Nicolas Church Hall, Bury Street, Guildford GU2. Organised by West Surrey Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.westsurreypsc.org.uk](http://www.westsurreypsc.org.uk).

## Protectionism and nationalism

**Saturday July 27, 6pm:** Public meeting, Gatsby Room, Wolfson College, Barton Road, Cambridge CB3. Speaker Yassamine Mather will explain the after-effects of the 2008 crisis: Trump, Brexit, and the European right. What alternative does the left have to offer? Organised by Cambridge University Persian Society: [www.facebook.com/events/481269715776571](http://www.facebook.com/events/481269715776571).

## Marx at the arcade

**Wednesday July 31, 7pm:** Book launch, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. *Marx at the arcade: consoles, controllers and class struggle* - a study of the video games industry with author Jamie Woodcock. Tickets £3.94. Organised by Housmans: [www.facebook.com/events/334579524139114](http://www.facebook.com/events/334579524139114).

## BDS campaigning and activism

**Wednesday August 7, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, William Morris meeting rooms, 267 The Broadway, Wimbledon, London SW19. Learn how to get involved in the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign. Organised by Merton Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.palestinecampaign.org/events](http://www.palestinecampaign.org/events).

## Oppose Middle East intervention

**Thursday August 8, 7pm:** Public meeting, Drawing Room, The Old Print Works, 498-506 Moseley Road, Birmingham B12. Don't attack Iran, stop supporting the brutal Sisi dictatorship in Egypt. Organised by Birmingham Stop the War: [www.facebook.com/BStWC](http://www.facebook.com/BStWC).

## Don't attack Iran

Public meetings organised by Stop the War Coalition. Oppose British government support for Trump's military brinkmanship.  
**Thursday August 15, 7pm:** Friends Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool L1. Speakers include Lindsey German, STWC convenor. [www.facebook.com/events/615383922282701](http://www.facebook.com/events/615383922282701).

**Friday August 16, 7.30pm:** East Oxford Community Centre, 44 Princes Street, Oxford OX4. Speaker: Billy Hayes (ex-general secretary CWU, now STWC national officer.) Organised by Oxford Momentum: [www.facebook.com/events/916415475375935](http://www.facebook.com/events/916415475375935).

**Saturday August 17, 11am:** Bold Street Methodist Church, Palmyra Square North, Warrington WA1. Speakers include Billy Hayes. [www.facebook.com/events/377086566274616](http://www.facebook.com/events/377086566274616).

## Human rights as focus of struggles

**Thursday August 15, 6pm:** Study session, Jack Jones House, 2 Churchill Way, Liverpool L3. Organised by Merseyside Socialist Theory Study Group: [study4socialism@outlook.com](mailto:study4socialism@outlook.com).

## Peterloo march for democracy

**Sunday August 18, 11.30am:** March from 10 locations near central Manchester to rally in Albert Square at 1pm. Commemorate the Peterloo massacre of 1819, when 70,000 peaceful protestors were attacked, leaving 18 dead and hundreds seriously injured. Organised by Peterloo march for democracy: [www.peterloodemocracy.com](http://www.peterloodemocracy.com).

## Remember the Burston Strike School

**Sunday September 1, 10.30am to 3.30pm:** Commemoration rally, Diss Road, Burston, Norfolk IP22. Speakers include Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary. Entrance free. Organised by Unite the Union and TUC: [www.facebook.com/events/2346318492257759](http://www.facebook.com/events/2346318492257759).

## Stop arming Israel

**Monday September 2, 9.30am to 8pm:** Day of action at the Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) arms fair, east end of ExCel Centre, Royal Victoria Dock, London E16 (Prince Regent DLR). Demand a two-way arms embargo between the UK and Israel. Bring creativity, energy, banners, flags and drums. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Stop The Arms Fair: [www.facebook.com/events/852120258506233](http://www.facebook.com/events/852120258506233).

## Resisting war in the 21st century

**Saturday September 7, 9.30am to 5pm:** Stop the War Coalition AGM, Bloomsbury Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2. Decide the next actions for the campaign. Entrance £11.37 (£5.98). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

## Rally at TUC Congress

**Sunday September 8, 1pm:** Rally, Holiday Inn, Kings Road, Brighton BN1. Defend jobs, fight for a pay rise and stop the cuts. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: <http://shopstewards.net>.

## 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.

## TORIES

# Brexit do or die

Eddie Ford asks if Boris Johnson can deliver where Theresa May failed

As was always going to be the case, Boris Johnson this week became Britain's 77th prime minister - and the fifth to have been educated at Eton since World War II (all Tories, of course). He won the contest to become Conservative leader by 92,153 votes (66%) to 46,656 on an 87.4% turnout among the 159,320 party members. Maybe not quite the crushing landslide many expected, seeing that David Cameron in the 2005 leadership contest won 68% of the vote, but still a convincing victory nevertheless.

Hence on July 24 Johnson enjoyed an "audience" with the queen, as constitutionally required, and then announced a clutch of senior cabinet posts. This cabinet, we are told, is about "showcasing all the talents within the party that truly reflect modern Britain". On the same day, meanwhile, Theresa May formally resigned and the ex-mayor of London addressed the nation for the first time outside Downing Street after accepting the monarch's invitation to form a government.

In his victory speech, the new prime minister said his government would "energise" the country and "get Brexit done" on October 31. This would involve taking advantage of "all the opportunities" it will bring with a "new spirit of can-do". He had already compared Brexit to landing on the moon in the pages of *The Sunday Telegraph*: "... if they could use a hand-knitted computer code to make a frictionless re-entry to Earth's atmosphere in 1969, we can solve the problem of frictionless trade at the Northern Irish border" (July 21). Anyway, looking into the sunlit uplands, Johnson promised the British people that "we are once again going to believe in ourselves" and "like some slumbering giant we are going to rise and ping off the guy ropes of self-doubt and negativity". Naturally, he was going to "defeat" Jeremy Corbyn and "unite" the country.

Theresa May congratulated her successor, promising him her "full support from the back benches" - we shall see. It goes without saying that Donald Trump was delighted by the result, telling an event in Washington that "a really good man is going to be the prime minister of the UK now" and would deliver Brexit. He was unable to resist adding: "They call him Britain Trump. That's a good thing". On the other hand, Italy's far-right interior minister, Matteo Salvini, congratulated Boris Johnson for being called "more dangerous than the Lega" by Tony Blair in a recent interview - something that makes Johnson "even more likable", it seems.

### Confidence

There had been a lot of excitable chatter about Philip Hammond, David Gauke and other liberal Tories voting down Johnson on his very first day in office. But it always seemed highly unlikely that they would risk deselection and a Jeremy Corbyn government, at least in theory, on such a flaky throw of the dice - which would only act to cohere the majority of Tory MPs around the new prime minister, not undermine him.

In the words of one Johnson critic on the Conservative back benches, the party "would take a very, very dim view of getting rid of him before he has done anything yet". For this very reason, it does not make much sense for Labour to bring forward a no-



Part Benny Hill, part Donald Trump

confidence motion, as it is bound to be defeated. Having said that, Barry Gardiner, the shadow international trade secretary, said on the BBC's *Today* programme that Labour is "talking" to Tory MPs opposed to a no-deal Brexit, so as to gauge whether they would support such a motion and Jeremy Corbyn has cryptically remarked that he might have "an interesting surprise for all of you".

True, there was a ham-fisted putsch attempt by Sir Alan Duncan, a Johnsonophobic foreign office minister who resigned in order to propose an emergency Commons debate on support for the prime minister, saying he had "very grave concerns that Johnson flies by the seat of his pants" and described his former boss as "haphazard and ramshackle". Duncan insisted he was not trying to depose Johnson, but rather trying to be "helpful" by ending the speculation about whether MPs supported the new incumbent in No10. His motion stated: "That this House has considered the merits of the newly chosen leader of the Conservative Party, and supports his wish to form a government". In the end, however, his motion was turned down by the speaker, John Bercow - who in the imagination of the European Research Group of Tory pro-Brexit MPs is hell-bent on sabotaging Brexit by any means possible.

The Tory discontents are prepared, it appears, to give Johnson until the end of the summer to see if he can make headway towards coming to a fresh agreement with the European Union that avoids no deal - but could become more rebellious if he "tries to act like he has a majority of 150" and goes full tilt for an October 31 crash-out - or goes down the path of "Trumpian rhetoric" that forgets the country is rplit down the middle on Brexit. Needless to say, Tory liberals will be watching closely the cabinet appointments, worried by Johnson's talk of "turbo-charging" no-deal preparations. By the same measure, ERGers have stated that they were perfectly prepared to "take him out ourselves" if Johnson failed on his "do or die" promise to deliver Brexit by October 31.

Optimistically or not, Gauke believes there are "parliamentary mechanisms" which could prevent a no-deal Brexit. These would "not necessarily" involve bringing down a Johnson administration in a no-

confidence vote - though he has yet to say what they are exactly. It will become clear in the autumn, thinks Gauke, that there is a "clear majority" in the Commons that does not want to leave the EU without a deal - but expect a "period of huge uncertainty" in Westminster and beyond, as the October 31 deadline approaches.

In a different spin, one former minister and 'Gaukeward Squad' member reckons that Johnson could be the "SAS stun grenade" to "blind" the likes of the ERG into supporting a deal that will look very much like Theresa May's. Johnson will quickly realise, according to the former minister, that May's withdrawal agreement - is not dead and buried after all and may be able to come back to life with a "tweak" that allows him to rebrand it as "Boris's deal". The real question then, in this scenario, is whether hard-line Brexiteers are "stupid" enough to continue opposing it when "at least half a dozen" Tories are prepared to block no deal - "he's got to shaft somebody", explains the former minister, and "most of us" are hoping it will be Stephen Baker of the ERG "because he's perhaps the only person who can".

But, scheming and duplicity aside, the numbers at the present time do not add up for a hard Brexit deal of any sort - the government having a technical working majority of only four. We would expect that number to shrink through "natural wastage". There is a very good chance that the government will lose the August 1 by-election in Brecon and Radnorshire to the Liberal Democrats, though there is always the possibility of a 'Boris bounce' saving the day for the Tories. Then we have Charlie Elphicke, MP for Dover, who has had the whip withdrawn after being charged with three counts of sexual assault. If he is convicted and there is a recall, the odds are that the Tories will lose that one as well - maybe bringing the government majority down to a mere two, making things really hairy.

What is going to happen? Everything indicates a general election in September, October or November. If it is November, Brexit should have already occurred. Otherwise, obviously, the Tories would get a hammering from Nigel Farage and the Brexit Party. The Tories have to go to the country either on the basis that they are going to deliver Brexit and thus need a parliamentary majority to

do so, or after they have already done it. Anything else would be a disaster for them.

Yes, as many people have pointed out, Boris Johnson is a supreme cynic and opportunist - for example, he penned three articles for *The Daily Telegraph* not long before the referendum, which covered every base. All this is absolutely true, but sometimes when politicians commit themselves to something they become identified with that policy - its *personification*. Frankly, the idea that that Johnson could turn around on October 31 and say he had only been kidding the party rank and file in order to become prime minister is totally fantastic. He would be toast - condemned as a charlatan by history. He has to come out fighting for Brexit with all guns blazing and the result will seal his political fate - do or die. In other words, it is time to start taking Brexit seriously - it is not an impossible outcome any more, particularly given Trump's enthusiasm for the project.

### What next?

David Cameron did not call the referendum because he wanted to 'consult' the people in a noble democratic exercise. Thanks to the natural arrogance of a former Bullingdon Club member, he assumed 'remain' would win - after all, the referendum was all about neutralising the UK Independence Party and dealing with his own troublesome right wing, plus dividing the Labour Party. But things did not quite work out as planned. Not for nothing did John Major call Cameron the worst prime minister in history: he nearly lost Scotland and then gave us the complete mess that is Brexit - which still has a *long* way to run.

Last week we had the Northern Ireland Bill, when anti-no dealers craftily slipped into it a requirement for a fortnightly report to parliament - an amendment that won by 41 votes. This has never been tested before, but the idea is that parliament cannot be prorogued, because it has to keep monitoring the ongoing Stormont negotiations. I am thoroughly unconvinced that the prime minister will be trapped by this mechanism - there does not seem to be any realistic way of stopping the clock from ticking.

There have been stories or fantasies about an 'alternative parliament' sitting across the road

from Westminster - so what, even if it happened? Speaker Bercow might get all hot under the collar about Johnson engaging in constitutional vandalism, but ultimately proroguing parliament would not be unconstitutional, let alone illegal - even if John Major and Gina Miller are huffing and puffing about a judicial review, and so on. Yes, a move of this nature would take you into some politically awkward constitutional areas, it need hardly be said. But the monarch, following the advice of her prime minister, has the power to close parliament. She could refuse, of course, but then we would get into some very odd territory - *not* suspending parliament would probably cause more of a crisis than actually closing it. We are certainly not on the edge of civil-war territory, with Bercow about to pit his New Model Army against the Boris Johnson's Cavaliers. But we are definitely moving into very dangerous political territory *for those above* - as shown by the fact that bastions of the establishment like John Bercow, John Major, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, not to mention the *Financial Times*, *Telegraph*, BBC, etc, are routinely talking about a pending constitutional crisis.

As things stand at the moment, the only viable way forward for Johnson is either to call a general election earlier rather than later (with a totally unpredictable outcome) or run down to the clock - then call for a general election as a sort of 'confirmatory vote' or 'final say'. After all, would a new elected Labour government *really* cancel a Brexit that has already taken place or immediately agitate to rejoin the EU? Clearly, events could go in all manner of different directions. It is, for example, far from impossible that the monarch, seeing Johnson loose in parliament, might be advised to choose someone to head a national government.

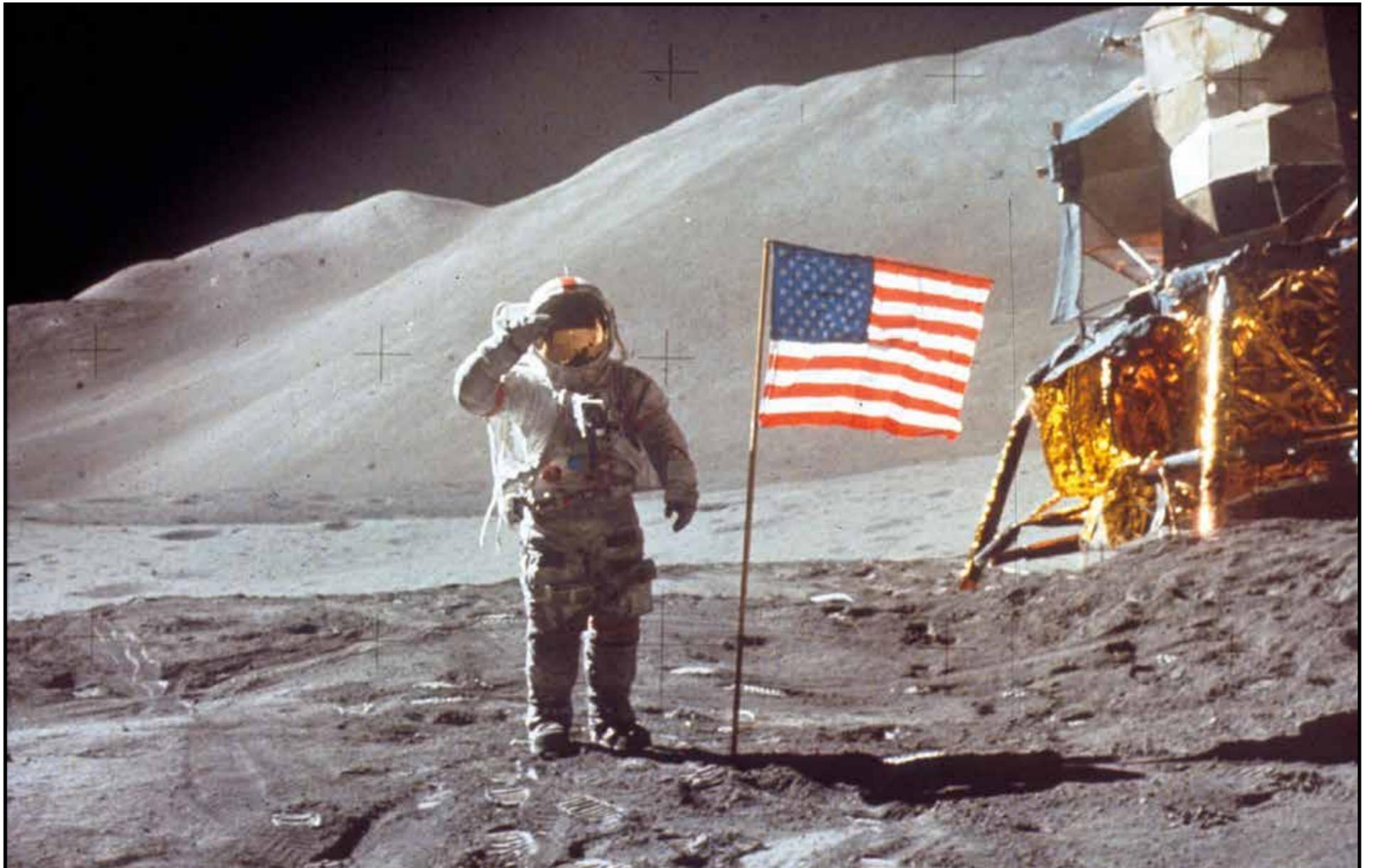
Under these volatile conditions, it is absolutely essential for communists to remind the left that the constitution matters. Working class politics is not just about strikes and demonstrations, however militant, but about making political demands for far-going democratic reform: getting rid of the monarchy, House of Lords, the presidential prime minister, established church, standing army and all the rest of that crap ●

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**SUPPLEMENT**

# Fifty years on

A new space race has begun. Rival powers aim to get to the moon and then perhaps go all the way to Mars. **Jack Conrad** says this is all about national prestige, not adding to humanity's body of scientific knowledge



**H**alf a century after Neil Armstrong's "giant leap for mankind" there are many plans afoot to return to the moon ... but with a crucial difference. The aim nowadays is to establish a sustainable presence and maybe then use the moon as a springboard for Mars.

At the moment Nasa is way out in front. Its Artemis programme has a goal of landing two astronauts near the moon's south pole by 2024. One of them is going to be a woman. Twelve have already been lined up.<sup>1</sup> The intention is to put in place a small moon-orbited space station, Lunar Gateway, which Nasa plans to "start building in 2022".<sup>2</sup> Lunar Gateway will serve as the staging-post for robotic and human landings on the moon's surface.

Many of these missions will touch down near the moon's south pole - chosen because of the significant amounts of water ice located on the floors of "permanently shadowed craters".<sup>3</sup> Nasa views this ice as a vital resource. Not only will water ice keep astronauts alive: it will provide the chief components of the rocket fuel needed for "deep space travel" (water can, of course, easily be split into its hydrogen and oxygen elements).<sup>4</sup>

But there are the other players:

Russia, China, Europe, Japan, India, even Israel. Each country/bloc now has "fully independent capabilities".<sup>5</sup> However, a due sense of proportion is needed. US expenditure on space more than equals that of the rest of the world put together.<sup>6</sup>

Russia continues within the Soviet-era paradigm of regular manned flights, rocket launchers, satellites, etc. Despite that, Dmitry Rogozin, director general of Roscosmos, Russia's space agency, has outlined plans for a crewed moon landing by 2030. Once there, the cosmonauts would live in an inflatable module. Towards this ambitious goal Russia would build a new 'Super Heavy' booster with the capacity to lift 27 metric tons into lunar orbit. Yet, given the parlous state of the Russian economy, informed observers have expressed strong doubts.<sup>7</sup>

Over the last few years, officials from the European Space Agency have expressed vague intentions of establishing a permanent human settlement on the moon. This 'moon village' would, of course, take decades to put together and, once again, would in all likelihood be located near the south pole.<sup>8</sup> It would be made available to European powers and others, the claim being that this will

**All that the Apollo astronauts did on the moon was plant the Stars and Stripes, leave footprints and carry back a few bags of rocks. Apollo was neither about economic returns nor scientific advance. It was an engineering triumph over the Soviet Union - a second-rate superpower. What the moon missions of China, Russia, Europe, Japan and India announce is that they too possess engineering prowess, that they too have the surplus wealth needed, that they too should command global respect**

allow human exploration of the moon and provide a staging post for Mars.

China ought to be taken rather more seriously. Through spending just \$6.1 billion annually, China has though attempted to lift itself into the big league. In October 2003 the Shenzhou 5 spacecraft orbited Earth 21 times. Yang Liwei became the country's first taikonaut. In September 2011 China established its first space laboratory (abandoned in 2013). It also has plans for further space stations - Tianhe, the Large Modular Space Station, is due for launch in 2020.

And, under the overarching name of Chang'e - after the Chinese moon goddess - there has been an ambitious series of robotic lunar missions. The programme has seen China successfully put in place moon orbiters in 2007 and 2010. Next came landers and rovers - first in 2013, then another this year. On January 3 2019 Chang'e 4 touched down on the moon's far side - a first. A few days later its rover, Yutu 2, began exploring the giant Von Kármán crater.

Throughout the 2020s, China plans to return lunar samples to Earth and build a small, robotic outpost near the moon's south pole. This will pave the way for human landings, maybe in the early 2030s. Chinese space officials

have talked of building a crewed "lunar palace", but this is yet to be included amongst the country's stated aims.<sup>9</sup>

China's Mars timeframe lies somewhat further into the future - maybe between 2040 and 2060. Nonetheless, it is determined to catch up with and eventually overtake the United States. The Hong Kong-based space consultant, Blaine Curcio, says China's space programme is "perhaps now only 10 to 15 years behind the US's in terms of technology".<sup>10</sup>

However, Donald Trump is determined that America should retain its lead both in near and deep space. In December 2017 the 45th president signed into law the Space Policy Directive 1. It boldly called for human expansion across the entire solar system, one of its first steps being the Commercial Lunar Payload Services initiative. Elon Musk's SpaceX thereby got a considerable boost. Its reusable Falcon Heavy Rocket was successfully launched from Kennedy Space Center in February 2018. And plans are well advanced for the launch of SpaceX's Big Falcon Rocket - otherwise known as the Big Fucking Rocket. The first flight is due in 2020 and a moon orbit is scheduled for 2023. BFR has the

# SUPPLEMENT

capability to take crewed missions to the moon and Mars. And Mars is Trump's declared objective - towards that end, he authorised a Nasa budget of \$19.5 billion (note, not the total US space budget).

Trump loves display. He has no time for the long-term considerations. He therefore cancelled the Asteroid Redirect Programme - designed to bring an asteroid into the moon's orbit not only with a view to studying it, but developing the technology necessary to head off an asteroid that threatens to hit the Earth (65 million years ago an asteroid smashed into what is now the Gulf of Mexico, sent a huge plume of ash and debris into the high atmosphere and led to the extinction of roughly three-quarters of all animal species, including the dinosaurs<sup>11</sup>). No less myopically, Trump ordered a \$100 million cut in the already modest Earth science programme. The DSCOVR, OCO-3, PACE and CLARREO Pathfinder missions were axed - all devoted to monitoring global warming.<sup>12</sup>

But, when it came to the militarisation of space, Trump ordered a 10% spending hike. And, in June 2018, he announced that the US would set up a sixth branch of the military - a Space Force: "It is not enough to merely have an American presence in space", he declared. "We must have American dominance in space."<sup>13</sup> Not without reason, Trump and his advisors see American command over space as the way to ensure American command over the Earth.

## Economics

Private capital has already established a lucrative space industry and Trump is keen on promoting joint ventures. Space Policy Directive-2, signed in May 2018, commits his administration to ensuring that the federal government "gets out of the way and unleashes private enterprise to support the economic success of the United States".<sup>14</sup> Not only will Space X benefit from state largesse, but there are other space companies ready, willing and able to get in on the act too: Sierra Nevada Corporation, NewSpaceGlobal, Catapult Satellite Provider, Deep Space Industries, Boeing, Blue Origin, Excalibur Alanz, etc. They have developed reusable launchers, "big data" transmission satellites and small, cheap, "disposable" satellites.<sup>15</sup>

Space tourism is still being mooted as the next big business opportunity - that despite Richard Branson's VSS Enterprise crashing in 2014 and killing the co-pilot. A cash-strapped Russia has, meanwhile, been selling rides to the International Space Station to the super-rich. Each ticket costs \$40-45 million.<sup>16</sup> The 2007-12 great recession notwithstanding, there is a huge pool of surplus capital available, and hence ever more obscene examples of 'how to spend it' - *conspicuous* consumption.

There are other - vaulting - commercial plans. Planetary Resources has a bevy of well connected billionaire investors and proposes to land highly sophisticated vehicles on mineral-rich asteroids, where, using 3D printing techniques, machines will "create tools, construction equipment and self-replication activities in space".<sup>17</sup> Such ventures will undoubtedly be considerably helped, given that in 2018 the US congress passed the Space Commerce Free Enterprise Act.<sup>18</sup> It allows US companies to circumvent parts of the Outer Space Treaty agreed between the US and the USSR in 1967.<sup>19</sup> Under its terms not only are nuclear weapons banned from space: so are territorial claims.

Mining asteroids could conceivably work technologically. However, there are inherent problems in getting minerals back to Earth, not at least in terms of commercial sense.

Costs would be huge. There are dangers too. Consider the dreadful air, water and soil pollution caused by normal mining operations here on Earth. A capitalist free-for-all in space certainly risks creating a "hazardous debris environment".<sup>20</sup> The more transplanted asteroid material that ends up in Earth's orbit, the greater the probability of "cascades of collisions".<sup>21</sup> Vital communications satellites could conceivably be knocked out because of high-speed dust strikes.

Japan's Obayashi Corporation makes the case for a space elevator (an idea that has been around since 1895, when the celebrated Russian scientist, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, wrote in his collection of essays, *Dreams of Earth and sky*, about constructing a "celestial castle" atop a 22,000-mile-high version of the Eiffel Tower - from there humans could escape the Earth's gravity<sup>22</sup>).

The Obayashi space elevator would be anchored to a port located somewhere on the Earth's equator and have a 60,000-mile tether, made from something like graphene, secured by a 12,500-ton geostationary counterweight located in near space. Mechanical climbers weighing up to 100 tons would journey upwards and after a 7.5 day journey release their 20-ton payload into orbit. The space elevator would "give a 95% cost advantage" over competitors who still depend on rocket launchers. In addition it would provide a gateway to Mars and the exploration of the rest of the solar system. The whole project would take roughly 20 years to complete: 2050 has been touted.<sup>23</sup> The money needed for the space elevator remains something of a mystery. Nevertheless, it is not a frivolous suggestion.

The same cannot be said for private plans for colonising Mars. Eg, the Dutch-based company, Mars One. It proposes to begin *one-way* trips to the red planet commencing in 2025. Many thousands applied, its website gave an almost immediate figure of 200,000 ... and there is an associated list of (cynical) sponsors. The proposition being that the first Mars colonists will finance their impossible existence by constituting themselves as the human fodder for a TV reality show to be broadcast back on Earth.<sup>24</sup>

Elon Musk's plans are marginally less insane. His SpaceX's BFR *could* - he has optimistically announced - make its first trip to Mars in 2022. The aim would be to deliver cargo. But eventually he wants a million-strong self-governing colony. Decisions will be made through "direct democracy": an endless series of referendums ... and a recipe for total chaos. The whole project will apparently take 40-100 years before full completion. Well before that, of course, Mars needs glass domes, a power station and an assortment of basic living fundamentals put in place. After that infrastructure is completed, Musk envisages an "explosion of entrepreneurial opportunity". Mars will need "everything from iron foundries to pizza joints", he quips.<sup>25</sup> Musk fears that unless humanity becomes interplanetary it faces extinction. He cites the likelihood of a World War III. Nonetheless, Musk has the honesty to admit that, to begin with, life on Mars will be "difficult, dangerous - a good chance you'll die".<sup>26</sup>

At least in terms of the next one or two decades, it is the US alone which really has a chance of using a moon base as the launch pad for Mars missions. With the successful test flight of the Orion space capsule on December 5 2014, launched by a Delta IV rocket, the US put in place the most important initial element needed for a Mars mission. Orion superficially looks like the Apollo

capsule used for the 1961-72 moon programme. But Orion is designed for long-duration, deep-space missions. A habitat module will be attached, along with a laboratory, water storage units, etc, for the 16-month round trip to Mars.<sup>27</sup> Much of the add-on hardware is derived from the International Space Station. There will, therefore, be ample room for living, eating, washing, sleeping and exercise.

Before undertaking any return to the moon, let alone a Mars journey, Nasa has marked out a series of intermediary stages. Artemis 1 sees the launch an uncrewed Orion atop of the new Space Launch System - the successor to Saturn V - for a looping test flight around the moon. Artemis 2 has crewed flights, while Artemis 3 will finally return Americans to the surface of the moon.

Amazon boss Jeff Bezos plans to link up with Nasa and the European Space Agency to found a moon colony "for human settlers and heavy industry".<sup>28</sup> Others - eg, Newt Gingrich - have imperiously talked of a 13,000-strong colony and the moon becoming the 51st American state.<sup>29</sup> Either way, with such an outpost up and running, the engineering, endurance, survival techniques and equipment needed for Mars can be tested and perfected.

Needless to say, Trump is impatient. He wants Americans back on the moon during his presidency. If he serves the maximum two full terms, that means getting there before 2025.

Clearly, Donald J Trump, like John F Kennedy before him, longs to put an indelible mark on history. It almost comes off the pages of Niccolò Machiavelli: "Nothing brings a prince more prestige than great campaigns and striking demonstrations."<sup>30</sup> Telstar, Alan Shepard, the 1969 Apollo landing, Space Shuttle, Orion, a return to the moon, mission Mars - all resonate with American national mythology.

## Frontiers

When captain James T Kirk of the USS Enterprise spoke of space being the "final frontier", he not only referred to his 23rd-century present, but America's post-colonial past. After 1783, and the Peace of Paris, Americans "shifted" from being a seaward-orientated people, with European preoccupations and a reliance on Atlantic supplies. Instead of being a European outpost, they increasingly looked west and to taking hold of the interior: "that vast, tempting, unexplored wilderness".<sup>31</sup> From then on the US welcomed successive generations of poor and downtrodden Europeans to its shores ... and ever-expanding frontier lands.

While many migrants settled in the great cities of the east and northeast as proletarians, others headed west: "To the west, to the west, to the land of the free" (from a 19th century English folk song). The native population was either exterminated or driven from the best lands by wave after wave of these incomers - trappers, traders, adventurers, prospectors, loggers ... but above all small farmers. Alike Jeffersonian populism, Abraham Lincoln's Yankeedom and Hollywood epics turned this class into a national icon: hence Daniel Boone, Davie Crockett, Bill Cody and the films of John Huston and Clint Eastwood. Dominant American ideology still lauds individualism, movement, expansion and internal colonisation ... and the final frontier is now projected into the vastness of space.

On May 25 1961 JF Kennedy made his celebrated speech before congress: "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before the

decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth."<sup>32</sup> Kennedy spoke in the immediate aftermath of his Bay of Pigs humiliation in Cuba and in the midst of the cold war with the Soviet Union.

In that febrile atmosphere every success for the Mercury, Gemini and finally the Apollo programme (annual cost around 1% of US GDP) generated rapturous popular enthusiasm. Of course, the US always possessed a huge technological and material advantage over the Soviet Union. Indeed, arguably, from the 1960s onwards, the Soviet Union economically fell "under American hegemony".<sup>33</sup>

Kennedy was not around when Apollo's Eagle module touched down on the Sea of Tranquility. He died in Dallas, Texas, on November 22 1963, shot down by an assassin's bullet. So it was Richard Nixon, the 37th president, who, on July 20 1969, made "the most historic telephone call ever made from the White House". He addressed Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on the moon ... and an estimated 600 million TV viewers.<sup>34</sup>

Of course, getting to Mars is undoubtedly going to be hugely expensive. Mainstream estimates vary from \$100 billion to \$250 billion over the timespan of the whole project (though I have come across figures as high as \$1 trillion<sup>35</sup> and as low as \$50 billion - the latter coming from the free marketer, Robert Zubrin, co-founder of the Mars Society<sup>36</sup>). Expect, if it happens, the topmost estimate, and some considerable additions. Either way, despite the inevitable criticisms of increasing costs, Nasa is banking on the popularity of all things space. Generations of science-fiction writers - from HG Wells to Kim Stanley Robinson - and long-running TV and film series - from *Star trek* to *Star wars* - have created a ready audience for America's version of bread and circuses. No wonder Donald Trump's commitment to Artemis and the proposed Orion missions to Mars has generated widespread political approval.

Not least due to sci-fi, space is still commonly thought of as ripe for human colonisation. The new America. Supposedly space is humanity's manifest destiny, but one for which the US claims a special responsibility. It is, after all, the quintessential frontier nation. Moreover, without moving into space there is the supposed inevitability that problems here on Earth will continue to multiply to the point of civilisational collapse.

According to Rick Tumlinson, co-founder of the US-based Space Frontier Foundation, unless we humans make the leap into space colonisation, we will "begin to slide into a new dark age".<sup>37</sup> He is far from alone. Because of "climate change, overdue asteroid strikes, epidemics and population growth, our own planet is increasingly precarious". So humans must leave Earth, reckoned Stephen Hawking, and "colonise a new planet soon".<sup>38</sup> Elon Musk too - his Mars colony would provide a refuge for humanity, as Earth descends into a new "dark age".<sup>39</sup> An idea probably originated by the sci-fi writer, Ray Bradbury. His *Martian chronicles* (1950) depict the colonisation of Mars because we humans have had to flee a troubled, broken and atomically devastated Earth.

## Germs and labour

In my opinion all this is bunk. The suggestion that space is the modern equivalent of crossing the Atlantic Ocean and 'discovering' the New World in 1492 is altogether unconvincing. The Americas, perhaps

even before the end of the last ice age, supported abundant human life. Estimates of first habitation vary widely - "from 11,500 to 50,000 years ago".<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, whenever *homo sapiens* first arrived, they flourished and settled everywhere, from Alaska in the far north to Tierra del Fuego in the far south. They also produced their own high civilisations: eg, the Aztec and Inca empires.

Christopher Columbus, and the European conquistadors who followed him over the next 30 years, claimed vast swathes of territory and within next to no time allowed the Spanish monarchy to get its hands on unprecedented riches. The native people were enslaved *en masse* and gold and silver flooded into Madrid's bulging coffers. "America", confirms the distinguished French historian, Fernand Braudel, represented the "treasure of treasures".<sup>41</sup>

But there was a fundamental problem: labour. Everything comes back to labour, Marx stresses in *Capital*. Because of Eurasia's much greater population densities the Spanish had developed a certain immunity to a wide range of diseases: measles, typhus, tuberculosis, smallpox, influenza, etc. But not the native Americans. European conquistadors came with their writing, reading, flintlocks, horses, steel swords, armour ... and germs.

Hernán Cortés beat the fiercely militaristic Aztec empire not just because his forces possessed immense technological advantages. In 1520 half the Aztec population, including the emperor, Cuitláhuac, died from a raging infection, which miraculously spared the Spanish. "By 1618," writes Jared Diamond, "Mexico's initial population of about 20 million had sunk to about 1.6 million."<sup>42</sup> The same happened when Francisco Pizarro and his raggle-taggle army of 168 men took on the millions of the Inca empire in Peru. Smallpox arrived just ahead of them and decimated the native population, killing both the emperor, Huayna Capac, and his designated successor. Throughout the Americas it is estimated that around 95% of the native population died from European diseases.

Germs not only facilitated European conquest, but destroyed virtually the entire potential workforce. And without labour the Americas were as good as useless (what remained of the native slaves would annoyingly take flight into what was for them the familiar surrounding hills and forests). Labour therefore had to be recruited from the outside if the Americas were to be transformed from an ever diminishing object of plunder into a self-expanding source of profit. After indentured European labour was tried and largely failed, the richest classes amongst the colonialists - and their Old World investors and state backers - turned to *systematically* buying black slaves. They were typically purchased from the most *advanced* areas in west Africa (peasants made the best slaves; hunter-gatherers tended to go native and become Maroons).

And, though you might not have thought it, given British establishment nonsense about the "very influential" role played by William Wilberforce, an evangelical Christian, in the abolition of the slave trade, it should never be forgotten that slaves resisted, escaped, fought back and, with Toussaint Louverture's revolution, established their St Dominique/Haiti free state. Only after that seismic event - a Caribbean October 1917 - did the UK parliament vote for abolition of the slave trade (not slavery). Till then, of course, highly respectable British merchants continued to play the lead role.<sup>43</sup>

Some 12 million Africans were transported across the Atlantic (an estimated one and a half million died during the 'middle passage': and an unknown, but surely much greater, number died prior to embarkation). These poor wretches partially substituted for the ghosts of the native Americans.

African slaves were central to the hugely profitable plantation system - sugar, tobacco, coffee, etc - which made numerous aristocratic fortunes. Overwork, pitiless exploitation and malnutrition took a terrible toll. Costly undoubtedly - horribly so. As much as a fifth of the slaves died within the first year. No problem: the labour force "could be replenished by further slave purchases".<sup>44</sup>

Only after two or three centuries of superhuman efforts - half driven by base greed, half by desperate yearnings for freedom - were the Americas reinvented and transformed into Europe's outer skin. Europe and the US fused into a single system.

But, inexorably, the centre of gravity shifted from east to west. By the dawn of the 20th century the precocious 'child' had already surpassed its aged 'parent'. The defeat of the Germany-Italy-Japan axis in 1945 certainly saw the transfer of world domination away from the exhausted British empire and the beginning of the so-called 'American century'. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 left the US as the sole superpower.

## Ecosystem

Neither the moon nor Mars are in any way modern equivalents of the Americas. Leave aside the lack of atmosphere and the absence of flora, fauna and running water - there is no native labour. Nor is there a realistic chance of substantial population transfers. Zubrin writes of taking people on a one-way trip to Mars at a rate similar to visits to the International Space Station. Permanently crewed since November 2000 to date, the facility has been visited by 236 individuals.<sup>45</sup> However, some have made repeated trips, so we might put the total number of visits at 400. That would mean roughly 20 new Mars colonists arriving per annum.

But who would *seriously* volunteer to spend the rest of their lives in a precarious "tuna can" habitat, with the prospect of endless toil ahead of them? Zubrin's colony is expected to obtain its water from the underground permafrost, practise CO<sub>2</sub> agriculture in flimsy greenhouses and produce all their basic industrial needs.

However, the Biosphere 2 experiment in Arizona, built between 1987 and 1991 - which covers 3.14 acres of varied biomass, all under huge glass roofs - was "neither able to produce enough food nor enough oxygen".<sup>46</sup> Suffice to say, Biosphere 2 was originally designed to demonstrate the viability of "closed ecological systems to support and maintain human life in outer space".<sup>47</sup> Moreover, a recent report by Massachusetts Institute of Technology researchers warns that Mars colonists would soon be dying: from suffocation, starvation, dehydration or incineration. In short, the colonisation of Mars will make for some seriously morbid reality TV. The MIT report also calculated that 15 heavy rocket launchers - costing around \$4.5 billion - would be needed to support just the first four Mars colonists.<sup>48</sup>

Hence the fancy projections of fabulous economic returns are quite frankly risible. There is no chance of plunder, let alone profit. The chatter about mining "gold, silver, uranium, platinum, palladium and other precious metals" is just that - chatter.<sup>49</sup> Talk of Martian towns acting as humanity's technological driver, etc, owes everything to quackery



**If we want to survive as a species, our prime mission ought to be taking care of planet Earth**

and nothing to rational investment of labour time. The relative unit costs of doing virtually anything on Mars would be a thousand - a million - times greater than on Earth. Ferrying things back here is technologically feasible, of course, but it would be prohibitively expensive. Getting a Mars colony to produce anything on a scale for export to planet Earth makes no commercial sense whatsoever - except for techno-utopian fantasists.

Nor do Nasa's space missions stand in the noble tradition of Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein - a ridiculous suggestion made by Dr James Williams of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.<sup>50</sup> All that the astronauts did on the moon was plant the Stars and Stripes, leave footprints and carry back a few bags of rocks. Apollo was about neither economic returns nor scientific advance. It was an *engineering* triumph over the Soviet Union - a second-rate superpower.

What the moon missions of China, Russia, Europe, Japan and India announce is that they too possess engineering prowess, they too have the surplus wealth needed and they too should command global respect. Such missions are certainly designed to generate a giddy popular enthusiasm. But, even with the additional bonus of eventually going on to Mars, once the first crews arrive on the moon, enthusiasm could easily cool. After the first two Apollo missions the American public tended to lose interest. Subsequent moon landings did not command the same rapt attention, that is for sure. Conceivably the same phenomenon might see a future US administration concluding that Mars projects are simply a waste of public money.

Crewed Mars missions have no immediate economic or scientific worth - that is the agreed consensus. Let me cite three trusted members of the US space establishment:

- Doug Osheroff - a Nobel prize-winning physicist, who sat on the committee which investigated the 2003 Columbia accident. He is perfectly frank: "Right now there is no economic value in going to Mars."<sup>51</sup>
- Ed Weiler - assistant advisor of Nasa's office of space science - is equally candid: "These missions will not be driven by science."<sup>52</sup>
- Neil deGrasse Tyson - astrophysicist and member of George W Bush's Mars commission - admits that, if "pure science" was the purpose, "it's obvious that you would send robots".<sup>53</sup> Compared with astronauts, robots are 50 or 100 times less expensive.

Mars is the most Earth-like of all of the other planets and moons in the solar system. But that is not saying much. Barren, pitted with craters, prone to gigantic dust storms, it is virtually airless - the mainly (95%) carbon dioxide atmosphere is 100 times less dense than ours on Earth. That counts as a laboratory vacuum. The thin atmosphere also means that Mars has no ozone layer to shield the planet's surface from the sun's deadly ultraviolet radiation. To make matters worse, Mars is hellishly cold. On average the equatorial zone is 60°C below zero. Sometimes the temperature falls to -100°C. At its warmest, temperatures can nudge up to just over 0°C. Antarctica is far more hospitable than Mars. The only reason the planet is not covered in ice is lack of water and lack of atmosphere. True, there is plenty of iron and a little magnesium, titanium and aluminium.<sup>54</sup> But, as far as we know, nothing exists there that cannot be made or obtained infinitely more cheaply here on Earth.

No-one with a modicum of scientific knowledge ever doubted the water ice in the Martian poles. We do not need astronauts to tell us that. There is also frozen water beneath the planet's rocky surface. But why travel in a tiny metal capsule - six months

there and six months back - across 60 million miles of deep space for that?

Quack scientists confidently speak of terraforming. The Martian atmosphere could conceivably be artificially oxygenated, the density dramatically upped and thereby significantly warmed. Water might then flow once again along its wide valleys and fill ancient lake and ocean beds. However, creating a self-sustaining ecosystem - one capable of supporting simple plant life - would not only require the restoration of Martian magnetic poles or an artificial magnetosphere. The whole operation would take quite a few years - around 100,000.<sup>55</sup>

There are quick-fix schemes. If 100 nuclear-powered terraforming factories were established on Mars - discussed in a joint paper by Margarita Marinova and Chris McKay - specifically in order to pump out perfluorocarbons (super greenhouse gases), the time span for terraforming is less awesome.<sup>56</sup> At a Nasa-sponsored conference held in October 2000, it was estimated that it would take 100 years to raise the Martian temperature by six to eight degrees. To get to the point where there is free running water would need another 700 years. A greatly thickened carbon-dioxide atmosphere would retain sufficient heat, but Mars would remain cold, alien and thoroughly inhospitable to life as we know it on Earth - except for micro-organisms.

So, once again, there are dangers. Each one of us hosts 100 trillion micro-organisms. They constitute our "extended genome".<sup>57</sup> While Mars rovers are sterilised, that is impossible with us humans. Micro-organisms are vital for our digestive system, etc. Hence we are bound to contaminate Mars. And micro-organisms are in turn bound to evolve on Mars - terraformed or not - maybe into forms against which we, neither on Mars nor on Earth, possess immunological defences.

Worshippers of bad science doggedly insist that going into space is the one sure way to overcome the seemingly intractable problems and contradictions mounting up here on Earth: eg, war, overpopulation, hunger, growing inequality, global warming, resource depletion. For them technology holds the solution for everything. By the same measure the huge exertions required for space colonisation would encourage humanity to leave behind parochial concerns.

Isaac Asimov, the celebrated 20th century sci-fi writer, touchingly hoped that "cooperation in something large enough to fire the hearts and mind" - like a Mars mission - would make people "forget the petty quarrels that have engaged them for thousands of years in wars over insignificant scraps of earthly territory".<sup>58</sup>

*Spiked* - the morphed Revolutionary Communist Party, which, bizarrely, nowadays supports Nigel Farage and his Brexit Party - echoes this scientism. Writing on their website, Stuart Atkinson impatiently urged the US on to Mars in the name of an ahistorical human nature: "We are a curious species." Scraping the bottom of the barrel, he pleads on behalf of the dead crew of space shuttle Columbia, which disintegrated in February 2003, when attempting to return to Earth. They "would not have wanted" space exploration stopped. A "big idea" like Mars would inspire and show what could be done here on Earth.<sup>59</sup> In the same breathless spirit, James Woudhuysen says: "Let's go back to the moon - and beyond."<sup>60</sup> Ray Bradbury proved no less embarrassing: "The moment we land on Mars all the people of the world will weep with joy."<sup>61</sup> Nor did China Miéville - a member of the Socialist Workers Party till a few years ago -

# SUPPLEMENT

want to be left out: “We socialist sci-fi fans can’t bring ourselves to oppose space programmes ... I think it says something exciting about humans that we want to explore space. I think there’s something wonderful about rocket ships.”<sup>62</sup>

Marxism does not question the existence of human nature. But attributes such as curiosity and an eagerness to explore must be examined historically and contextualised socially; not treated in a manner which universalises Nasa-man and the restless pursuit of the American dream.

Scattered around the Indian Ocean coast, in India and Pakistan, the Philippines, and Malaysia - marking the southern route out of Africa and the “beachcombing” trail to Australia - there are genetically distinct “remnants” of the original homo sapiens.<sup>63</sup> Having arrived between 80,000 and 75,000 years ago, they often liked what they found. With the subsequent expansion in population numbers and pressure on natural resources, some immediate descendants would trek off to the next suitable location along the coast. But enough were perfectly happy to stay firmly put.

Nor should it be forgotten that until recent times many groups of hunter-gatherers contentedly enjoyed what some would describe as a primitive existence. Others might be tempted to call it idyllic. Such was their mastery of the local environment - yes, through curiosity and exploration - that necessary labour could be reduced to a couple of hours. The rest of their day was spent eating, story-telling, playing with the children, dancing, etc. Why move under such benign circumstances?

Nor should technological progress be viewed as linear. After 1450 China scuppered its ocean-going fleet of big treasure ships and dismantled its shipyards (mechanical clocks and water-driven spinning machines were also abandoned). Between 1600 and 1853 Japan virtually eliminated what had up till then been a lucrative line in the production of guns. In the 1880s legislation put a stop to the introduction of public electric street lighting in London. Jared Diamond provides other examples of technological “reversals”, which occurred during prehistory. Aboriginal Tasmanians abandoned bone tools and fishing, aboriginal Australians may have abandoned the bow and arrow, Torres Islanders abandoned canoes, Polynesians abandoned pottery and Polar Eskimos lost the bow and arrow, while Dorset Eskimos put aside the bow and arrow, bow drills and dogs.<sup>64</sup>

There are materialist explanations for all such seemingly aberrant behaviour; but clearly teleological notions of an inevitable progression from flint axes to landing humans on Mars are quite erroneous.

Of course, Marxists have always had a positive attitude towards science and technology. But we do not *privilege* science and technology or take an uncritical view. Motivation, application and consequences must be thoroughly interrogated. Neither science nor technology is neutral. So it is wrong to conflate scientific and technological progress with *social* progress (a mistake which joins Eduard Bernstein, ‘official communism’, the accelerationist reformist left with libertarian Silicon Valley billionaires). The main locomotive of history is class struggle and the constant striving for human freedom: eg, the Athenian citizen-peasant revolution of 508-507 BCE, the 73-71 BCE Spartacus uprising, the 1381 peasant revolt, the Hussites of 14th century Bohemia, the 1789 French Revolution, Chartism, the First International, the 1871 Paris Commune, the 19th century

democratic breakthrough in Europe, the 1917 Russian Revolution.

Development of the productive forces and the rational application of science create the objective basis for generalised human freedom and the rounded development of each individual. But capitalism does not do that. Capitalism skews progress - performing technological miracles, while simultaneously leaving millions in poverty. Capitalism perverts science - not only by bending it to the lopsided, narrow and demeaning dictates of profit, but by turning it against humanity to the extent of threatening our very survival. The insights, ingenuity and resources of science have been channelled into ways of killing and destroying on an almost unimaginable scale: carpet-bombing, gas chambers, nuclear warheads, chemical and biological weapons. Walter Benjamin damningly writes somewhere that the task of revolution is to apply the “emergency brake” on a system which relentlessly progresses not so much through perfecting the means of production, but the means of destruction.

## Military

And the fact of the matter is that Nasa and the whole US space business is a branch, or extension, of the military-industrial complex. What is true for the US is true for Russia, China, the EU, Japan and India too. Satellites, launch rockets, tracking stations, etc owe far more to military requirements for spying, pinpoint targeting, the delivery of WMDs, real-time command and battle communications than so-called pure science. Loring Wirbel, a peace activist and expert in space technology, shows that even back in the 1950s, the US “civilian satellite programme served as a cover for a wide-ranging spy satellite programme”.<sup>65</sup>

Nowadays, the US military relies on space technology, including commercial systems, which by their very nature have a dual use. Take the Global Positioning System (GPS) of satellites, which allows motorists, seafarers, airline crews and even hill walkers to locate themselves to within a few feet. But, however welcome, this is merely a by-product. It should never be forgotten that GPS has *overriding* military functions. When a vehicle suspected of carrying Hamas members is blasted to pieces by an Israeli missile strike in Gaza, that was GPS at work. When ‘precision’ bombs slammed into Baghdad in 2003, that was also GPS at work. Indeed the US military boasts that during the invasion of Iraq 60% of all aerial bombardment was accounted for by GPS bombs. The US deployed not so much airpower, but spacepower. As former US airforce secretary James Roche triumphantly announced, concluding an April 2003 speech, “The war in space has already begun.”<sup>66</sup>

Behind mission Mars, and the highfalutin language of discovery, human adventure and manifest destiny, lurks a sinister agenda for ensuring total US domination of space. The US military-industrial complex has developed unmanned space-planes - most notably Boeing’s hypersonic X-51 Waverider, which in May 2013 reached a speed of Mach 5 (3,300 mph) and an altitude of 70,000 feet. Such a plane could make a sudden dive from near space into the atmosphere and deliver a nuclear payload.<sup>67</sup>

Meanwhile, the Pentagon has set its sights on testing a space-based particle beam by 2023. Such a device works by accelerating particles - particularly neutrons - close to the speed of light and directing them against the intended target. The neutrons knock protons out of the nuclei of other particles they

encounter. Incoming missiles are destroyed by “heat rays” soon after they launch.<sup>68</sup>

And, despite fears of triggering an arms race, Trump recently announced a “huge expansion” of the US missile defence programme. The intention is a major upgrade in land-based and sea-based missile interceptor systems, as well as the development of a layer of satellite sensors in low orbit that would help track new types of cruise missiles and hypersonic glide vehicles (HGVs) that Russia and China are developing. Any threat from ‘rogue states’ such as Iran or North Korea would also be countered. “Our goal is simple: to ensure that we can detect and destroy any missile launched against the United States - anywhere, any time, any place,” Trump declared. “We are committed to establishing a missile defence programme that can shield every city in the United States. And we will never negotiate away our right to do this.”<sup>69</sup>

Such a move by the Trump administration clearly represents the continuation of Ronald Reagan’s Strategic Defence Initiative, which aimed to put in place an anti-missile system in space “capable of shooting down nuclear missiles” - therefore giving the US first-strike capability.<sup>70</sup>

There is another aspect to mission Mars which cannot be ignored. The US Mars project, like the rest of the military-industrial complex, constitutes a so-called third department of production (the other two being the production of the means of production and the production of the means of consumption). Department three allows capitalism to guarantee “maximum” self-expansion from the firm basis of the “minimum” consumption of the *relatively* impoverished masses.<sup>71</sup> Their limited ability to purchase the means of consumption no longer constitutes a barrier.

Turning the production of the means of destruction into a system of profit and self-expansion through state purchase effectively obliterates the distinction between consumption and destruction. This is feasible precisely because for capital the purpose of production, the end aim, is not human consumption of use-values according to need: rather it is self-expansion for its own sake. Problems of real use, and therefore *real* consumption, are overcome (though not eliminated) through the unlimited ability of the state to generate *artificial demand* and purchase waste - ie, the means of destruction - through credit and taxation. This innovative response to capitalist overproduction - initially tried before World War I and then after the 1929-33 world economic crisis - was made into a model of normality after 1945. Under Trump the *peacetime* US arms budget is set to increase to \$603 billion (well over twice as much as China and Russia combined).<sup>72</sup>

The Trump administration justifies this perverse and obscene squandering of human and material resources through peddling a fiercely nativist patriotism (and generating jobs). Of course, this approach has a long history: eg, kaiser Germany, Bolshevism, European fascism, post-World War II USSR, Saddam Hussein, bin Laden, the Taliban, Islamic State - all have been ‘existential enemies’ of America. Voting in favour of the endless production of waste thereby becomes a national duty and imposes a welcome internal discipline over the working class.

Spending on Nasa and the space programme is essentially no different. Except that, besides patriotism, it is able to harness another misplaced idealism - the Quixotic belief that space represents humanity’s manifest destiny and promises solutions to

every problem.

## Social problems

Meanwhile, the United Nations estimates that over a billion people have no access to clean drinking water, some 840 million have to survive on significantly less than the daily recommended intake of calories and around 30 million are infected with HIV/Aids. There is nothing inevitable or natural about any of this.

Neoliberal International Monetary Fund and World Bank programmes of market ‘reform’ and subordination to capitalist globalisation over the last 40 years have greatly exacerbated the unevenness characteristic of the system. Today the richest 1% “hold nearly half the global wealth”.<sup>73</sup> Leave aside the so-called third world: in Britain some 900,000 people have registered with food banks.<sup>74</sup>

Yet, with organisation and political will, humanity has within its reach the ability to easily meet all basic needs. The wealth exists in abundance. Simply diverting the US arms budget to *real* human needs would do away with global poverty - almost at a stroke. But such a turnaround can never happen through the sanctimonious platitudes and essentially diversionary calls of NGOs, religious notables and various leftwing reformers for rich governments to do their moral duty. The modern state palpably exists to defend, serve and promote the self-expansion of capital - the two are inextricably interwoven and interdependent.

Social problems demand social solutions. Humanity - which can only be led viably by the *revolutionary* working class - faces an epochal challenge of putting humanity’s wealth under the control of the associated producers. Capitalism long ago outlived any usefulness it once possessed. Now this most alienated of social relationships threatens our very existence - through economic crisis, social dislocation and ecological destruction.

Once humanity has superseded capitalism and become properly human, who knows what we might choose to do? Mars, along with other planets and moons in the solar system, could be explored by self-replicating robots or terraformed in an attempt to make them habitable. Perhaps one day in the far future our descendants might reach Earth-like planets orbiting nearby stars. Now, however, the main subject of humanity must be humanity - as we find it, here on this planet. A planet which gave our species birth and which has everything we need in terms of our evolved physiognomy and psychology.

If we want to survive as a species, our prime mission ought to be taking care of planet Earth - only possible by finally winning the battle for democracy and transforming all existing social relationships ●

**This article is an updated and extended version of ‘Mission Mars, or mission Earth?’ published in the Weekly Worker on March 23 2017.**

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# IRAN

# On the brink of military action

The war of words between America and Iran is becoming more and more dangerous, warns **Yassamine Mather**

**T**he conflict between Iran and the United States is in its early stages, yet we are already witnessing war propaganda, and the presentation of outright lies as facts. Before we start on the various fictions, let me summarise the events that have led to the current escalation.

Most of these events are direct consequences of Donald Trump's decision last May to withdraw from the Iran nuclear agreement - because he did not want such a major reminder of Obama's legacy, not because he had an alternative deal in mind. After months of verbal accusations and counter-accusations, on June 13 two US oil tankers were attacked near the Strait of Hormuz. Trump told the world that Iran was to blame. While this is possible, many broadcasters and news agencies, including those hostile to Iran, pointed the finger at Iran's regional enemies - countries keen to escalate tensions between the Islamic Republic and the west.

Then on June 20 a US drone was brought down by the Iranian military over the Persian Gulf. Trump told us the next day that he decided against air strikes against Iran, just 10 minutes before the warplanes had reached their destination, because he had just been told that 150 Iranians would be killed. An unlikely story. Most people believe Trump was advised against military action - or else he was informed, as I have previously stated, that the drone's coordinates proved it was above Iranian waters.

On July 4, 30 UK Royal Marines helped to seize an Iranian tanker off the coast of Gibraltar. The British government said at the time that the ship, Grace 1, was impounded because of its suspected destination - a port in Syria. After all, according to officials, "European Union sanctions against the regime of Bashar al-Assad were there to be enforced and international law upheld". As far as I know, Iran is not a member of EU and had no obligation to abide by EU decisions regarding sale or (as some have alleged) donation of fuel to Syria.

As Carl Bildt, co-chair of the European council on foreign relations, commented,

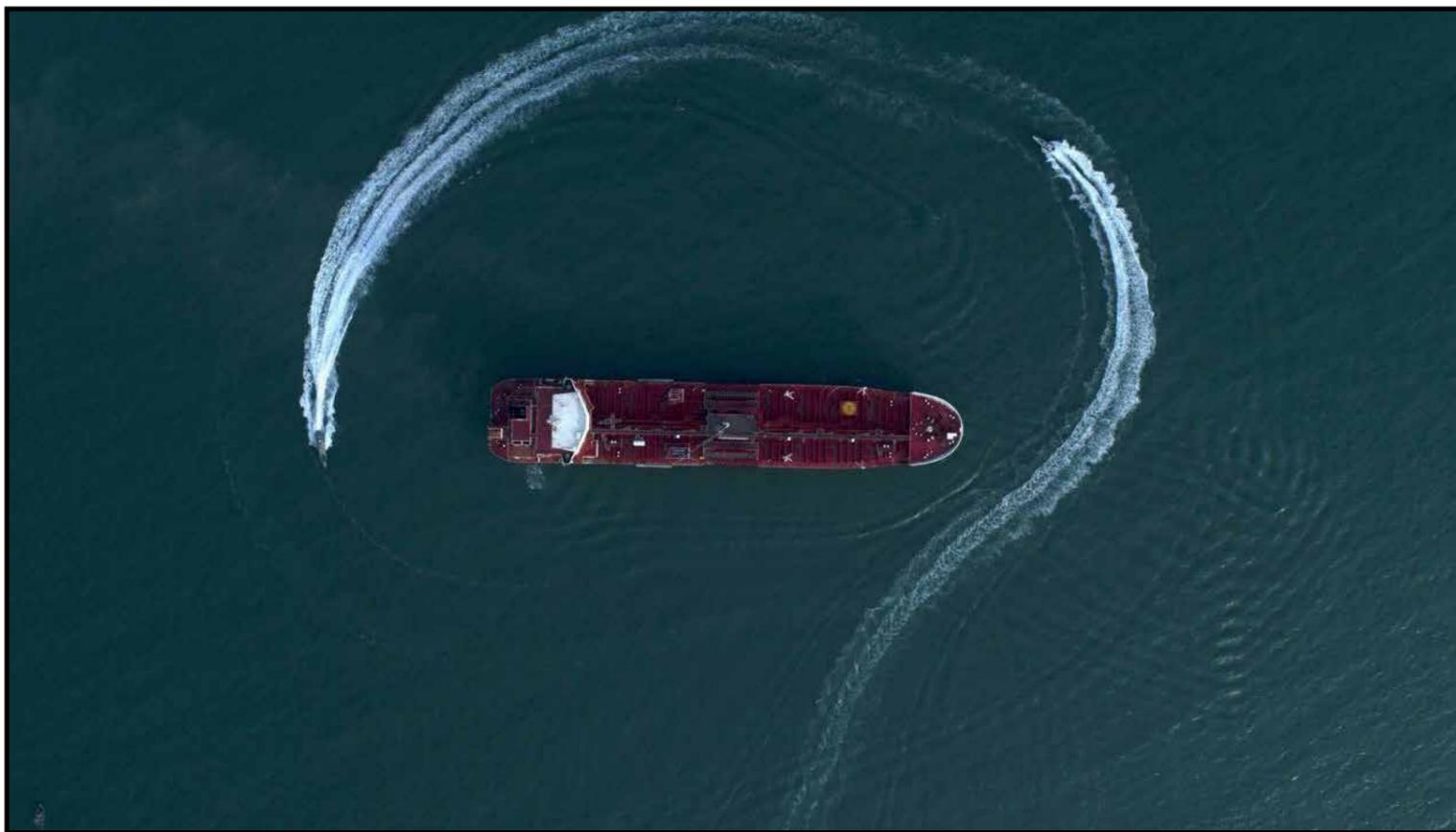
The legality of the UK seizure of a tanker heading for Syria with oil from Iran intrigues me ... the EU as a principle doesn't impose its sanctions on others. That's what the US does.

Furthermore, this was not the first time Iran had shipped oil to Syria and nothing had been done previously, so why now?

Contrary to UK and US claims, Grace 1 was not concealing its route or destination. It is a large tanker, which, according to the *World Oil* website, is why it had to go round Africa rather than the shorter route via the Suez Canal.

According to Spanish government officials speaking to journalists, Madrid was asked by the Trump administration to stop the ship. When it refused, the British then acted under instructions from US national security advisor John Bolton. Spanish foreign minister Josep Borrell has said categorically that Britain moved against the tanker "following a request from the United States to the United Kingdom".

The website *American Conservative* is clear that "the UK had no legal right to enforce those sanctions against that ship, and that it was a blatant violation of the clearly defined global rules that govern the passage of merchant ships through international straits." It added:



**Speed boats of Revolutionary Guards surround Stena Impero**

The evidence also reveals that Bolton was actively involved in targeting the Grace 1 from the time it began its journey in May as part of the broader Trump administration campaign of "maximum pressure" on Iran ... The evidence indicates, moreover, that the UK's actions were part of a broader scheme coordinated with the Trump administration to tighten pressure on Iran's economy by reducing Iran's ability to export goods.

Contrary to the official rationale, the detention of the Iranian tanker was not consistent with the 2012 EU regulation on sanctions against the Assad government in Syria. The EU council regulation in question specifies in article 35 that the sanctions were to apply only within the territory of EU member-states, to a national or business entity or on board an aircraft or vessel "under the jurisdiction of a member-state".

Iran's supreme leader, ayatollah Ali Khamenei, called the incident "piracy", adding that Iran would retaliate. But foreign minister Jeremy Hunt was hoping to gain votes in the Conservative Party leadership election by presenting himself as an ally of the Trump administration. Some British papers say he was fooled by the US, but the reality is that he was using the affair to further his own personal agenda.

## Sinister

By July 10, patience was running out in Tehran. The Revolutionary Guards approached a number of ships, including British Heritage, and we know that the Royal Navy frigate, HMS Montrose, was deployed to drive away three small Iranian vessels trying to stop it. By July 13, however, it was clear that the UK foreign office was concerned about the implications of its actions, as Hunt offered to release the Iranian tanker in exchange for guarantees that it "will not breach sanctions on Syria".

On July 18 Trump claimed the US had shot down an Iranian drone. Iran denied this, and so far we have not seen credible proof either way. However, neither the US military nor the state

department has repeated this claim. In the region there are rumours that the drone actually belonged to the United Arab Emirates.

Then on July 19 the British-flagged tanker, Stena Impero, was seized by Iran's Revolutionary Guards in the Persian Gulf. Iran claimed it had acted according to international maritime law. Tehran newspapers quoted unnamed military sources saying the tanker had been "crossing a route other than the shipping lane in the Strait of Hormuz, had switched off its transponders and did not pay any attention to Iran's warnings when it was seized by the [Revolutionary Guards] forces".

The story had become more sinister after the Panama-registered oil tanker, MT Riah, was spotted in Iranian territorial waters, following its disappearance from ship tracking maps in the Strait of Hormuz on July 14. Panama's maritime authorities withdrew the tanker's registration after an investigation determined the tanker had "deliberately violated international regulations" by not reporting any unusual situation.

As for the Stena Impero, MI6 'sources' told UK journalists: "A British oil tanker was steered towards Iranian waters by false GPS coordinates sent by Russian spy technology, it is now feared." Others claimed Iranian drones may have tampered with GPS signals. By July 22 the UK was calling on its European allies to lead a new maritime alliance to protect commercial ships sailing through the Strait of Hormuz. Hunt called the detention of the tanker "an act of state piracy", adding that any European-led initiative would complement US plans to exert "maximum pressure" on Iran.

Clearly both accidents and outright lies can provoke military conflict and at present we are witnessing yet another chapter in the saga of deteriorating Iran-US relations.

Inside Iran itself, things are not looking good. The rate of inflation is now at 40% and there is a severe shortage of essential medical supplies, due to US sanctions. Ordinary people are suffering because of job losses and the high cost of living. Under such circumstances the threat of

military conflict is making everyone nervous. While the various factions of Iranian regime are hardly popular, as they continue exposing nepotism and corruption in their rivals, as far as I can tell from the reports of foreign correspondents, social media and individual contacts, most Iranians are now blaming the US for their suffering rather than their own government.

In reality Trump has succeeded in uniting opponents of the government and its supporters. It seems that Bolton and US attorney Rudy Giuliani had convinced Trump that further sanctions would lead to riots and rebellion, and this would pave the way for regime change from above. However, all

the signs are that the threat of war has actually consolidated the Islamic Republic regime.

Well, Jeremy Hunt is no longer foreign secretary, given the new government put together by Boris Johnson. The new prime minister claims to be optimistic over Brexit, but, we are unlikely to see miracles in relation to the European Union. As he encounters problems with EU negotiations, he is likely to lose popularity and there is every reason to fear he would side with his ally and friend, Donald Trump, in escalating the conflict with Iran. What better tactic will there be to divert attention from his own failure? ●

## Fighting fund

# Analytical

I'm pleased to say that, with a week of our July fighting fund still to go, we have already reached the £2,000 monthly target!

Pride of place this week goes to comrade GB, who made two separate £50 bank transfers to the *Weekly Worker* account within a few days. When we asked him if he hadn't done that in error, he said no, it was quite intentional: "We live in dark times," he wrote, "and intelligent, analytical political journalism is very thin on the ground."

In fact "under this seemingly endless period of increasingly cruel capitalism, what little intelligence there is seems to be shrinking". In these circumstances he thought the *Weekly Worker* is doing what the left "should aspire to" and we ought to be aware "how important what you - all of you - are doing really is!"

Well, comrade, we all really appreciate not only your donations, but your words too. It's good to know that readers like you approve

of the role we're attempting to play - arrive at the truth through honest polemic in order to work towards what is necessary in the here and now: construct a united, democratic, Marxist party that can really take forward the working class movement.

Apart from GB's £100, we received four standing orders totalling another £385 - thanks to comrades TB, PM, SK and AM. On top of that, there was a handy tenner from FG, who clicked on the PayPal button on our website.

All in all, our July total went up by £495, taking it to no less than £2,037. So, comrades, let's build up a bit of a surplus in the last week of the month to make up for any shortfall later in the year! ●

**Robbie Rix**

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

**LABOUR**

# Giving legitimacy to Zionism

David Shearer of Labour Party Marxists looks at Corbyn's latest attempt to appease the right

**O**n July 21, in the latest futile attempt to placate the right of the party, the Labour leadership issued what it says is the first in a series of "education materials for our members and supporters to help them confront bigotry, wherever it arises". And, of course, "Our first materials are on anti-Semitism, recognising that anti-Jewish bigotry has reared its head in our movement."

That last phrase actually strengthens the right's hand. What does it mean to say that anti-Semitism has "reared its head" within Labour? Surely, nowadays, the number of Labour members who hold such backward views is vanishingly small. Of course, since Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader membership has increased by some 200,000. Amongst them, not doubt, there will be a tiny proportion who hold all manner of strange ideas.

The national executive committee has just released figures revealing that in the first six months of the year Labour received complaints about 625 members relating to anti-Semitism - and, demonstrating the extent to which this whole business has been weaponised, no fewer than 658 other complaints about people who it turned out were not even in the party!

However, in almost half of the cases against actual members it was found that there was no case to answer: no evidence was uncovered of any breach of party rules. In 90 of the remaining cases, members were given either a warning about *possible* misconduct (eg, relating to comments that *might* be interpreted - or misinterpreted - as anti-Semitic) or - much the same thing - a "reminder of misconduct". During that six-month period just eight people were expelled, three were given extended suspensions and another four were issued with warnings. The investigations are still ongoing in the remainder of cases, but we can expect the findings to be similarly proportioned - as they were back in February, when general secretary Jennie Formby issued figures for the previous period.

In other words, anti-Semitism has *not* "reared its head" in the Labour Party, according to the normal understanding of that phrase. However, the July 21 statement bends over backwards to give ground to the right by talking about the "unsettling truth" in relation to the claims. It begins by stating that "other political parties and some of the media exaggerate and distort the scale of the problem in our party", but goes on to say that, despite such exaggerations and distortions, "we must face up to the unsettling truth that a small number of Labour members hold anti-Semitic views and a larger number don't recognise anti-Semitic stereotypes and conspiracy theories".<sup>1</sup>

Note, by the way, that it is only members of "other political parties" and "some of the media" who are accused of exaggeration and distortion. In reality virtually the entire establishment, backed up by the Labour right, including the vast majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party, is engaged in an ongoing campaign aimed at removing Jeremy Corbyn as leader - and, of course, charges of 'anti-Semitism' have been used specifically for that purpose.

The truth is, given Corbyn's past record of pro-working class and anti-imperialist statements, he just cannot be trusted with the premiership. Yes, he continues to give ground to the right, but he is still totally



**Neither the right nor the Zionists will ever be satisfied**

unreliable from the point of view of the ruling class. Imagine if he was prime minister and Donald Trump was about to launch a military attack on, say, Iran. Despite the extent of the 'taming' Corbyn has undergone, it remains very likely that he would instinctively oppose such a move - which is why the establishment, together with Labour's pro-capitalist right wing, will continue mobilising against him, not least through making false accusations of anti-Semitism.

## Anti-Zionism

But there are many other examples of the leadership giving ground in the latest document. Take this, for example:

Today, some conspiracy theories substitute Israel or Zionists for Jews, presenting Israel as controlling the world's media and finances. Others contain further anti-Semitic claims, such as Israeli responsibility for 9/11 or control of Isis.

While we are obviously opposed to the idiotic "conspiracy theories" referred to, note the seamless transition from "anti-Semitic" to 'anti-Israel'. Most of the tiny handful of people coming out with such crazy nonsense are probably anti-Semites, but that does not mean that claims of "Israeli responsibility for 9/11" or of "control" of Islamic State, are *necessarily* anti-Semitic. Equally to the point, how many such people are in the Labour Party? And the danger is that any criticism of Israel is branded as anti-Semitic. For example, we know that is the past Israel supported Hamas in order to undermine Fatah and the Palestine Liberation Organisation - is this historical truth or an "anti-Semitic" "conspiracy theory"?

Then there is this passage:

In response to 19th century European anti-Semitism, some

Jews became advocates for Zionism: Jewish national self-determination in a Jewish state. Since the state of Israel was founded in 1948, following the horrors of the holocaust, Zionism means maintaining that state. Jewish people have the same right to self-determination as any other people.

This is totally confused. Yes, Zionism was a response to 19th-century anti-Semitism across Europe - according to the Zionist narrative, Jews will always be oppressed, wherever they settle, so the only solution is for them to found their own state. However, while that response was perhaps understandable, it was nevertheless reactionary, in that it was divisive and separatist - as opposed to a united fightback against oppression, headed by the working class.

In this connection the phrase, "some Jews", is rather vague. In reality only a tiny proportion succumbed to this separatist 'solution' to oppression - most working class Jews viewed themselves as part of the workers' movement, alongside those of other religions and none.

However, the worst part of the above quote is the 'definition' of Zionism: apparently it means "Jewish national self-determination in a Jewish state". It should be obvious to everyone that "national self-determination" applies only to ... nations! True, Zionists today - not least the Israeli establishment - declare that there exists a common "Jewish nation" scattered around the globe, which must now be 'reunited'.

But nations are defined, first and foremost, by their occupation of a common territory, in which they speak a common language and have developed a common culture. The overwhelming majority of, say, British Jews consider themselves to be part of the British nation - which, of course, they are. It is true that, in the

decades following the establishment of Israel, there has now come into being an Israeli-Jewish (or Hebrew) nation, which, under any sort of future democratic settlement, should have the right to self-determination (but not the right to oppress Palestinians or take their land).

The Labour document at one point claims to be neither for nor against Zionism, when it states:

Arguing for one state with rights for all Israelis and Palestinians is not anti-Semitic ... Anti-Zionism is not in itself anti-Semitic and some Jews are not Zionists. Labour is a political home for Zionists and anti-Zionists. Neither Zionism nor anti-Zionism is in itself racism.

However, there is no mistaking which side it is on when it says that, since the establishment of the state of Israel, "Zionism means maintaining that state". That is inadequate and therefore incorrect. Zionism is a form of colonialism which has meant expanding that state and ridding it of millions of Palestinians in order to ensure a permanent majority for the "Jewish nation", most of whom are content to remain elsewhere.

Thankfully, the document at least makes an effort to balance its overall pro-Zionism when it states:

That does not mean limiting legitimate criticism of the Israeli state or its policies or diluting support for the Palestinian people's struggle for justice, their own state, and the rights of refugees and their descendants. The impact that the creation of Israel had and still has on the Palestinian people means the struggle for justice for them and an end to their dispossession is a noble one; Labour supports Palestinian statehood and a two-state solution to the conflict.

Note, by the way, that, for the most

part the document defines anti-Semitism as "hatred towards Jewish people". This is inadequate. But not as inadequate as the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's "working definition", which was adopted by the party in 2016. This states in its entirety:

Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.<sup>2</sup>

While I have no objection to the second sentence, it can hardly be described as part of a 'definition', in that it does not facilitate the understanding of what anti-Semitism actually is. So that just leaves the first sentence, which tells us what anti-Semitism "may be expressed as": ie, "hatred toward Jews". What about prejudice or discrimination against Jews? Surely it is obvious that they are anti-Semitic too, and you do not have to hate Jews to act in a prejudicial or discriminatory manner against them.

In other words, this is a useless 'definition' and the Corbyn leadership and left majority on the NEC should be ashamed for having been talked into accepting it. But, of course, the reason why the right proposed it was not because of those two sentences, but because of the 11 so-called "examples" of 'anti-Semitism', seven of which relate to criticism of Israel! ●

## Notes

1. This and the following quotations can be found both in the official Labour statement carried on its new "mini-site" (<https://labour.org.uk/no-place-for-antisemitism>) and in an identically worded leaflet (<http://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/No-Place-for-Antisemitism.pdf>).
2. [www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism](http://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism).

# 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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The Tribune group ... a pack of rightwing knaves

# Tribunes of the right

Peter Manson lays bare a blatant case of political theft

There can be no doubt that the Labour right includes the reformed Tribune group of Labour MPs - even though it states on its website: "The Tribune group has a long and proud record as the voice of the centre-left of the Parliamentary Labour Party."<sup>1</sup>

The original Tribune group consisted of left Labour MPs and was formed in the 1960s, but eventually became more rightwing, split and folded in the 1990s. But the new version was set up in 2016 on the initiative of Clive Efford, the MP for the London constituency of Eltham, who many regarded as a centrist - he nominated Corbyn as a leadership contender and opposed the attempts to depose him. But look at who is part of this "centre-left" grouping today - Yvette Cooper, Stephen Kinnock, Owen Smith ...

Immediately before the screening of the BBC's notorious *Panorama* programme, entitled 'Is Labour anti-Semitic?', Tribune issued a statement which read: "We support former employees in speaking out and commend their bravery in doing so." And: "It is totally unacceptable that Jewish members no longer feel welcome or safe in the Labour Party."

Who says they "no longer feel welcome or safe"? Only the likes of *Panorama*, which featured several prominent members of the rightwing, Zionist Jewish Labour Movement, claiming to be distressed at the leadership's "interference" in their 'investigation' into claimed examples of anti-Semitism. This "interference" consisted of the occasional email or phone call suggesting how a particular case might be handled.

The statement produced by the Tribune group - which, by the way, had previously been amongst the first to demand the suspension of Chris Williamson MP for stating that

Labour had been "too apologetic" over (largely false) claims of anti-Semitism - continues:

Given the seriousness of the concerns that have been raised, an internal inquiry would not be adequate or trusted and so we call on the NEC to set up an independent investigation into the allegations of interference into party procedures.<sup>2</sup>

Well, an internal enquiry would not be "trusted" by the rank and file if it was run by the likes of Efford and co, but that applies rather less to the Corbyn leadership and his team.

Of course, the right had been pressing for "a fully independent disciplinary process" in relation to anti-Semitism cases - in other words, reliable, pro-establishment people, who know what the anti-Corbyn smear campaign is all about and how

it should be furthered. Thankfully, however, earlier this week the NEC rejected that call - although it has not ruled out putting proposals for "independent oversight" of its processes before this year's Labour conference.

Corbyn made concessions in the direction of the right's call for the "auto-exclusion" of alleged anti-Semites. If the conference proposals are agreed, the "most serious cases" will be "fast-tracked" before a special panel of the NEC, following which Jennie Formby *et al* will be empowered to expel them. According to Corbyn, however, the new system will be "fair and legally robust".

Symbolising the interest of the entire establishment in removing Corbyn through the weaponisation of anti-Semitism was Theresa May's virtual last act as prime minister before she was replaced by Boris Johnson on July 23: she appointed

the ultra-Zionist, rightwing Labour MP, John Mann, as "government advisor" on anti-Semitism. We know what 'advice' he will give in relation to Labour!

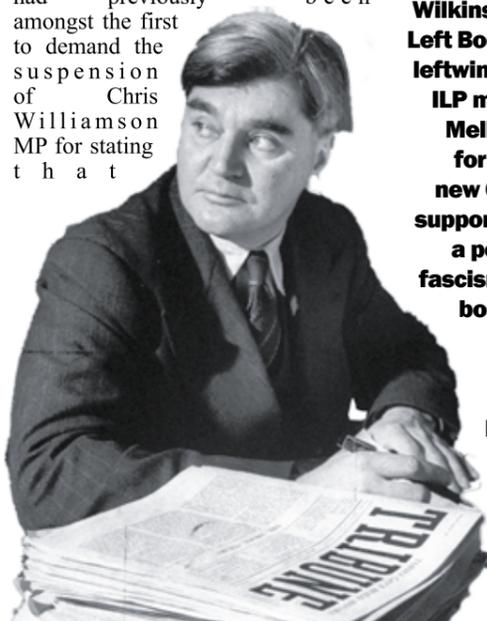
It is clear that the Labour right - including members of the Tribune group, it seems - is preparing itself for a possible split. If the trigger ballot process that facilitates the reselection of sitting Labour MPs is quickly introduced and Johnson does not call a general election in the immediate future, a whole number will want to jump before they are pushed. And, following the 'Change UK' debacle, this time they will want to be better prepared ●

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## Notes

1. [www.labourtribunemps.org](http://www.labourtribunemps.org).
2. [www.labourtribunemps.org/statement\\_antisemitism](http://www.labourtribunemps.org/statement_antisemitism).

**Tribune, the paper, was founded in 1937 by the leftwing Labour MPs, Stafford Cripps and George Strauss. The aim was to promote the idea of an anti-fascist and anti-appeasement united front between the Labour Party, Socialist League, Independent Labour Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain. The paper's first editor was William Mellor. Among its journalists were Michael Foot and Barbara Betts (later Barbara Castle). Its editorial board included Labour MPs Aneurin Bevan (pictured), Ellen Wilkinson, Harold Laski of the Left Book Club and the veteran leftwing journalist and former ILP member HN Brailsford. Mellor was fired in 1938 for refusing to adopt a new CPGB policy - a policy supported by Cripps - backing a popular front against fascism, including, of course, bourgeois parties. Mellor was succeeded by HJ Hartshorn, secretly a CPGB member. However, throughout its entire history Tribune was committed to a tame reformism. The paper finally folded in January 2018**



## New challenges

Over the last seven days £3,490 has been added to the CPGB's annual fundraising drive, the Summer Offensive, taking the running total to £17,372 towards our £30,000 target. In other words, we are now well over halfway there, with exactly a month still to go before this year's campaign ends on August 24, which is the last day of Communist University, our annual summer school.

Amongst the generous contributors this week were comrade SK, who donated a tremendous £230, and AD, who was only just a little behind with her £200. That was the same amount that comrade JC stumped up, while two other comrades - BK and PM - contributed £100 each. Not bad at all!

Comrades, the entire point of the Summer Offensive is to raise the extra cash we need that is essential to continue the work of the CPGB. Our central and ongoing task is to put together some sort of infrastructure for the rearticulation of genuine Marxism, its principled programme and the re forging of a single, united Communist Party as that programme's vehicle.

That party needs to be organised on the basis of genuine democratic centralism, where every comrade is free to publicly express his or her views, whether or not they are in agreement with those of the leadership.

However, once a democratic decision is taken relating to a particular course of action, that must be binding on all comrades, including any who may have opposed it during the discussion leading up to it.

In this way, comrades who are at present members of different revolutionary groups would be able to unite on a principled basis to provide our class with what is urgently needed: a functioning, efficient and most certainly democratic party.

That is the aim, but, in the meantime, we need to carry out the immediate tasks we have set ourselves. We need to give all the support we can to organisations such as Labour Party Marxists and Hands Off the People of Iran, as well as aiding in every way we can Marxist publications such as the *Weekly Worker*.

I am not simply generally optimistic (as every Marxist should be). I am optimistic specifically in terms of this year's SO campaign and the political space we can see opening up before us. We are undoubtedly facing new challenges in these exacting times.

New times, comrades; new challenges ●

William Sarsfield

Pay 'CPGB', sort code 08-92-99, account 65109991. Send cheques to CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX.

# weekly worker

**Easy to  
denounce  
Trump's  
racism**

## Another day, another tirade

Democrat establishment joins Trump in attacking the 'squad' as a 'bunch of communists', reports Peter Moody

This time, it was kicked off a little under two weeks ago with a series of tweets from Donald Trump aimed at "'Progressive' Democrat Congresswomen", exhorting them to "go back and help fix the totally broken and crime-infested places from which they came", rather than involving themselves in US politics.<sup>1</sup>

While they were not named, it was not a far leap to assume that the targets of this screed were the four first-term members of Congress now known as "the Squad" - Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts, and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan - who have made names for themselves both individually and as a group by representing the ostensibly insurgent, progressive wing of the Democratic Party. Indeed, a significant section of reporting on the original tweets and reactions to them ended up focusing on 'the Squad' - after fact-checking Trump's words it was noted that three out of the four were born in the US, and all four are American citizens. While Omar was born in Somalia, she became a US citizen after her family moved here in the early 1990s.

In a somewhat surprising display of backbone, some media outlets and the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives chose to recognise some of the subtext behind the false statements about national origin, and came out to decry Trump's tweets as racist, with the House even passing a (non-binding) resolution which explicitly noted and condemned "Trump's racist comments that have legitimised and increased fear and hatred of new Americans and people of colour".<sup>2</sup> This is rather a minor act in the grand scheme of things, but one which seems at least slightly refreshing, compared to the recent cycle of outrage about potential Russian collusion with the Trump campaign, not to mention the vote to unconditionally fund the detention of newly-arriving immigrants and asylum-seekers.

However, even this mild rebuke saw stonewalling attempts by Republicans, who argued that the resolution was against the rules of decorum for the chamber, because it called into question the motives of the president. Four Republicans in the House did end up voting for it, but by and large the reaction has ranged from blandly defending the president to attacking either the Squad or the Democrats in general even more fiercely.

One interesting response came the day after Trump's original tweets from South Carolina Republican senator Lindsey Graham in an interview on Fox News. Graham, previously thought of as a 'moderate' or 'reasonable' Republican earlier in his political career, who had been very wary of Trump during the 2016 presidential election campaign, has since remade himself as a staunch Trump ally (now much of Graham's criticism seems to be focused on the fact that Trump is less willing to bomb Iran or North Korea than he would like). As such, condemning the tweets was still a step



The squad: Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

too far for this Trump critic-turned-sycophant, but he did say that he would advise the president to "knock it down a notch" on his rhetoric, and focus on the policies that the Squad supposedly professed rather than their citizenship status or national origin.

On this point, Graham did not lay out much in terms of specifics on what he thought those policies were, but he did roll out the now-typical argument that the Squad were in favour of completely open borders, along with free healthcare for "illegal immigrants" (presumably as a consequence of a universal health insurance system which would provide free-at-point-of-use healthcare for all US residents, regardless of citizenship status, although again detail was not given). More generally, though, Graham lambasted the Squad - mentioning Ocasio-Cortez specifically - as "a bunch of communists", who are "anti-Semitic" and "anti-America".<sup>3</sup> The president, for his part, appeared to find this line of attack rather appealing, quoting it approvingly in tweets later in the week, as well as firing off additional rhetoric about how the US will never become a socialist or

communist country.

It would be wrong to argue that the nativist rhetoric is merely a cover for anti-communist politics. Certainly, at least for the time being, more people are being immediately put in danger by the words and actions of the administration around immigration. With the inhumane conditions that detained asylum-seekers have been subject to, the opportunistic attacks against people perceived to not be sufficiently American (read: white), and the fear that immigrant communities in the US are currently experiencing due to the repeated announcements of stepped-up enforcement of deportation orders across the country, the anti-immigrant side of the attack is quite real.

But the anti-communist side is similarly real, and in some sense may be more dangerous in the long term, because it is a line that the Democrats appear to be more than happy to take up too - if perhaps in a slightly more muted way. After all, while House speaker Nancy Pelosi is willing enough to condemn the anti-immigrant rhetoric coming from the president (even though she appears to have no trouble continuing to support the

institutions that perpetuate much of the harm done to migrants), she and other leading Democrats - including current presidential primary front-runner Joe Biden, as well as several of the minor also-rans - are more than eager to point out the supposed marginality of proposals such as Medicare for All or the Green New Deal. These are largely the policies that Trump, together with various Republican lawmakers and conservative commentators, refer to when they bother to give any substance to the label of "communist" they throw on Ocasio-Cortez, Omar and the others.

The Democrats' relationship to their left flank (which historically has included American expressions of working class or social democratic politics, after earlier efforts at forming independent working class parties were either coopted or smashed) is, at its core, largely one of containment. By claiming to speak for the 'left' in US politics, the Democrats can keep enough sections of the organised working class in a position that is at best 'last among equals' with the factions of capital in its coalition, and at the same time decry independent challengers to its left as being splitters and spoilers.

With the left properly subordinated, the Democrats can proceed to ignore them as much as possible - to the benefit of the factions of capital and aspirational classes they much prefer to represent.

It is not a fool-proof strategy, however, as the left wing of the Democratic Party sometimes gets the notion that it should have a bigger seat at the table, or possibly even set the agenda completely. In this way, Democrat leaders are as happy to use similar ammunition against the Squad as Trump. So, while the racism of Trump and the Republicans should not be dismissed as empty rhetoric or a cover for other politics, the Democrat establishment is more than willing to focus on the racism if it means they do not have to address other issues - particularly if it helps them play the 'respectable' role in politics, while at the same time shutting down their left flank ●

### Notes

- <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1150381394234941448>.
- [www.congress.gov/bills/116/house-resolution/489](http://www.congress.gov/bills/116/house-resolution/489).
- <https://twitter.com/atrupar/status/1150748086488240128>.

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