

weekly
worker



Humans of one generation have to pass Earth on to succeeding generations in an improved state

- Letters and debate
- Iran and the Donald
- US Kautsky debate
- Stan Keable case

No 1265 September 5 2019

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

£1/€1.10

Parliamentary cretinism

**DEFEND
DEMOCRACY**
**RESIST THE
PARLIAMENT
SHUTDOWN**

LETTERS



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

Leave now!

On September 2 I attended a public meeting organised by the London district committee and North London Communist Party of Britain (before the events of this week in parliament obviously).

The leaflet for the event - entitled 'Brexit for the people. No to EU Austerity! Why Labour should support leave' - promised an action-packed discussion, proving that Brexit - or Lexit, as proposed by the CPB's new front, Leave, Fight, Transform (LeFT) - was needed for "the people". The Marx Memorial Library and Workers School meeting hall was crowded.

International speakers had been invited. Thassod Mangelis from the KKE (Communist Party of Greece) spoke about the situation in Greece, and argued that the European Union cannot be democratised because of its relations with Nato - they are the leading anti-communist organisations that equate fascism with communism - and that the benefits go mainly to Germany. He ended his statement with the cry, "Workers of the world, unite!"

Next spoke Andreas Gregoriou, secretary of the Cypriot Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) in Britain. He stressed the "needs of the people" in Cyprus, with unemployment and poverty rising; the shrinking of the public sector. He said that austerity revealed the real nature of the system - one-third of the population is living on or under a living wage and that the unemployment rate for youth is 30%.

Mick Carty, general secretary of the Connolly Association, changed the tenor by speaking about the situation in Ireland with respect to relations between the north and south, and the EU. He amused the audience by claiming that the EU's free mobility of labour gave Irish workers "a choice of places to emigrate to". He stated that the Connolly Association worked for Irish unity and independence and as such did not take a position on the backstop.

The long-awaited main speaker of the evening, Labour peer Maurice Glasman, spoke next. He argued that the difference between globalisation and internationalism was being eroded in the discussion. The EU, he argued, being a great capitalist enterprise, "makes resistance to capitalism illegal". The EU gives priority to capital over labour.

Internationalism was solidarity with the oppressed. Globalisation was defiance of working class agency, despising working people. It is not the uneducated who are opposed to Brexit (after all, teachers voted against Brexit): even the Labour leadership was abandoning opposition to the EU and so no longer represented working class democracy. He claimed that the progressive left would, in this way, allow the right to win. We must honour, he stated, the political views of those who didn't go to university. The EU was the opposite of democracy.

The last speaker of the evening was Mary Davis, speaking for the CPB. She began her statement by reiterating that the CPB has always taken the position that the EU represents big business and is for the freedom of capital. The class interest of the EU was to call for the ruling class to paper over the cracks in the system. So the need is to leave and get rid of austerity for the majority of workers - who were, in any case, opposed to the EU. No trade union, she stated, has had debates with their own members on the question of EU membership. Social Europe is dead and buried, she averred, and unions have

usually followed the Labour Party line.

Professor Davis asked what the principles, strategy and tactics were in this struggle, and answered her own question in this way:

- Principle: the road to socialism (she did not specify if this was the British road ...).

- Strategy: Brexit was part of the necessary strategy to achieve socialism, because it is impossible to transform the current order within the EU. We (eg, the left) want Brexit because we want that change to socialism.

- Tactics: yes to a general election, yes to no deal, unless there is a good deal. "We" are committed to parliamentary sovereignty, so the need is to oppose the prorogation of parliament. In addition "we" need an international Brexit, so that there is a social transformation leading to socialism.

Questions and statements followed, which included a remark from the KKE speaker that the EU was passing laws leading to "modern slavery". However, one question unanswered by this meeting was how nationalist interest could be transformed into socialism, and another asked at the end (which seemed to sum up the questions not asked or answered by this meeting) was: "How do we win the unity of the working class?"

There will be a fringe meeting of the LeFT group at the TUC conference, at which Arthur Scargill will be coming out of retirement to speak, alongside the general secretary of the CPB, Robert Griffiths.

Gaby Rubin
London

State capitalism

Despite what Jack Conrad writes, I have never claimed that Lenin innovated when he called post-capitalist society 'socialism' ('The two phases of communism', August 15). This was standard practice amongst first-generation Marxists and, in fact, shows that for them the words 'socialism' and 'communism' were interchangeable.

Lenin's 'innovation' was to see 'socialism' starting at the beginning of the period Marx envisaged when the working class would be using its control of political power to transform capitalist society into 'communist society' (or, the same thing, 'socialist society'): ie, a period during which socialism (or communism) had yet to be established.

Lenin further 'innovated' by extending this period into what Marx had called the "first phase of communist society". As a result he has the state and the wages system continuing to survive into socialism/communism. As he put it in *State and revolution*, in this phase "all citizens are transformed into hired employees of the state" (chapter 5, section 3). In other articles from the same period Lenin frequently confused state capitalism and socialism in this way, as all Leninists have done ever since.

I see that Jack and the CPGB follow Lenin here, defining socialism as "the rule of the working class", whereas socialism means the *disappearance* of all classes, including the working class. For you, as for him, 'socialism' starts when the working class win political power, not when the means of production have become the common property of society under democratic control - by which time the state, money, wages, profits, banks, etc will have disappeared.

Jack also talks of a "transitional society", whereas Marx had written only of a "political transition period", not a new form of society. For more on this, see the article I wrote decades ago on 'The myth of the transitional society' (<https://bataillesocialiste.wordpress.com/english-pages/1975-the-myth-of-the-transitional-society-buick>).

It only remains to add that, given

the tremendous development of the forces of production since Marx's day, capitalism can now be transformed into socialism/communism fairly quickly - and that exchanging quotes from Marx settles only the academic, historical question of what Marx thought, not what should be done today.

Adam Buick
Socialist Party of Great Britain

China programme

Paul Demarty's article on the continuing crisis in Hong Kong undoubtedly raised the key problem of the protest movement there - the lack of a programme for China ('We need a game plan', August 15). However, the article didn't put forward any such programme, so we are left wondering if Paul has it in mind to write a second article, in which he might suggest the outlines of such a programme.

If he does plan to do so, he may well need to start with a clearer analysis of the class nature of China. Throwaway phrases such as "the capitalist elite" or "the Stalinist-capitalist dictatorship of China as a whole" just create more confusion than clarity. And an unclear analysis of the situation in China will inevitably have a limiting effect on any programme.

Actually, the Chinese regime's own definition of their system as "market socialism" is a reasonably accurate assessment of the current system in China. It is as if Lenin's New Economic Programme of 1921 has been taken to the ultimate level.

Given that the public sector is still dominant in China (80%, including state ownership of the banks), the central demand needs to be for the democratisation of the state, society and the economy. But not along the competitive lines of capitalist democracy: rather in a collectivist form, based on participatory democracy. That is something we also need in the west.

Pat Byrne
Labour International (personal capacity)

New world

Banks are closing down local branches and removing cash services. Customers wishing to withdraw money as cash are directed to cash machines, but the number of ATMs is declining. Mobile payments - either for bill paying or person-to-person transactions - will be the last nail in the coffin for cash.

In countries that lead this transition to a digital economy - Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark - nearly all transactions, both in volume and number, are digital. Today, less than three percent of consumer payments in Norway are in cash. And what has happened in Scandinavia is now happening in the UK too.

We must support the move to a cash-free society. But it should mean that all people, including the unbanked and the homeless, should be given access to a basic bank account, debit card and smartphone, as happens in Scandinavia. A cash-free society will lead to a big reduction in the black economy, including organised and petty crime. Just like the call for the legalisation of all drugs and of prostitution, this must be brought to the fore.

As the UK becomes more and more a cash-free society, a change in how leftwing papers are sold will need to take place. Paper-sellers will have to carry on them card readers, such as iZettle or Square. The Socialist Workers Party has already tried out card readers on its stalls in Bristol. Similarly, sellers of the *Weekly Worker* will have to acquire card readers for use on stalls, meetings, etc.

We must prepare for a new world where cash is no longer king.

John Smithee
Cambridgeshire

Summer Offensive

Over the finishing line



I think that from many comrades' point of view, this year's Summer Offensive - the CPGB's annual fundraising drive - was very encouraging. Not vintage, but a definite move forward from recent years. There are several reasons for this.

First, there was the simple fact that we hit and went beyond our target of £30,000 over the two-month period of the campaign. When all the last-minute shrapnel and notes had been totted up, we had powered through to an impressive £31,257 (well over £6,000 more than the SO of 2018).

Second, this successful campaign was noticeable for a rather more rigorous approach to contacting comrades in our immediate periphery, plus the more distant friends our organisation has. One recurrent weakness of our culture that this year's SO has reminded us of is our amateurism, when it comes to keeping active links with the relatively large numbers of comrades who have sympathy with the programmatic and political project championed by the CPGB. So it was a step forward for us that the SO 2019 had nearly seven times more non-members contributing than our actual membership (although the relative *size* of what was raised is tilted heavily in favour of our members, of course).

The biggest amount raised this year - through political activity, selling badges, working extra hours as well as digging deep into bank accounts - was comrade SK who collected a magnificent £7,385 and the runner-up, YM, came up with a sturdy £3,580. Seven other members come up with over a £1,000 each. Of course, these comrades are mostly seasoned

hands of many SOs, so it was extremely encouraging that the young comrade, OP, managed £590. Ditto our cohort of comrades from the Netherlands (who attended the CPGB's Communist University and took a lively and engaged part both in the formal sessions and in the informal, boisterous discussions that - occasionally fuelled by a small sherry or two - stretched on into the night). Our Dutch comrades contributed £1,200 to the SO and - reflecting the affection the comrades were held in by CPGBers - were given a boisterous round of applause at our celebration meal to mark the ending of the fundraising campaign.

A small flurry of donations from supporters and sympathisers was also very useful in getting us over the finishing line and beyond - many thanks for the last-minute donations by TDB and JC (£200 each) and the others who rushed cash to us, as the finishing line loomed.

Most Summer Offensives tell us something about where our organisation is, politically and organisationally. It is clear that this year's shows that - perhaps because of the highly volatile and unpredictable nature of this period - the CPGB continues to grow its audience in the workers' movement in this country and beyond. Moreover, there are some small, but encouraging, signs that our programmatic project is gaining traction in other parts of the world - as was illustrated by the hundreds of comrades internationally (eg, the United States, Iran, India, etc) who watched sessions via livestream.

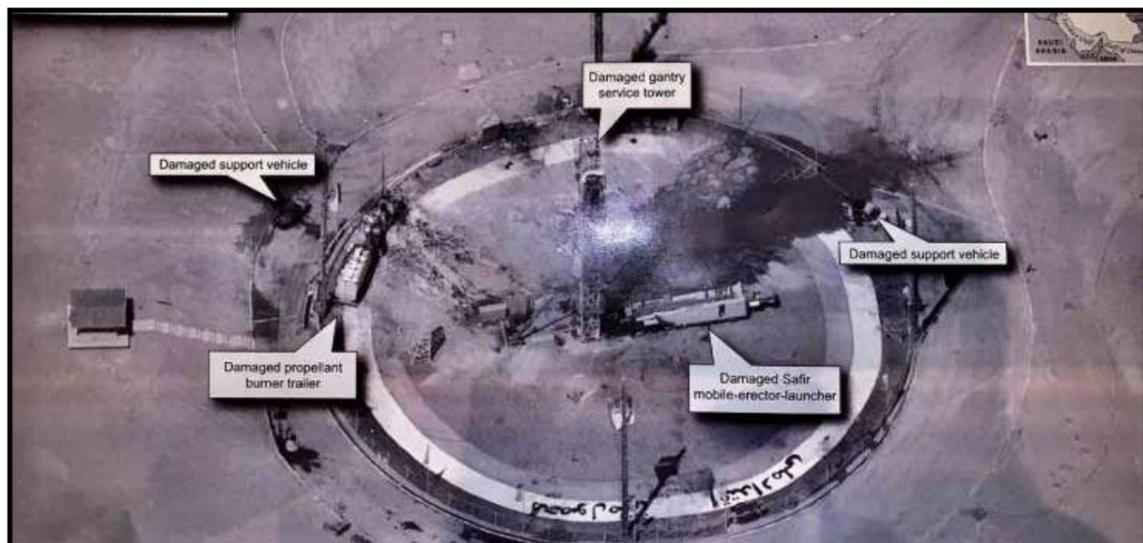
We send our congratulations to all participants in this year's Summer Offensive ●

William Sarsfield

IRAN

Looking for foreign success

Yassamine Mather asks what effect the presidential campaign will have on US relations with the Islamic Republic



The picture Trump tweeted

When it comes to US-Iran relations, we are truly in volatile, unpredictable times - a bit like Brexit. In late spring and early summer everyone was talking about an imminent attack against Iran's military bases. The question was not whether such an attack would take place, but when.

Of course, the threat of war is still there. However, we have seen many flip-flops by the Trump administration and time seems to be running out for a military attack, perhaps in the form of air raids. The 2020 US presidential election campaign has already started and there are clear signs that Donald Trump is eager for negotiations and a deal he can sell as his foreign policy success. After all, if you can do a deal with the Taliban, why not with Iran?

The reasons for wanting a war have not changed - the US administration is losing close allies, Trump's poll ratings are falling, some Republicans are distancing themselves from the president, the economy is doing worse than expected ... It is assumed that US gross domestic product will slow down to near 2% in 2019, as opposed to 3% in 2018, and will drop further by 2021. Meanwhile, the real unemployment rate is around 7% (as defined by bourgeois economists, who include in their statistics the 'marginally attached' or the 'discouraged' - those who have given up looking for work altogether). Everyone is now talking about recession.

All of this adds up to uncertainty in the United States and in these circumstances - as we know from history - conflict abroad is a good diversionary tactic. However, election time brings its own challenges. Yes, Trump needs some clear-cut foreign policy success and the much heralded nuclear deal with North Korea does not really fit the bill. Rather he needs a face-saving 'peace deal' - or at least a photo opportunity - with Iranian leaders, so he can say to the electorate, 'I didn't accept Obama's "very bad deal with Iran", but I achieved my own agreement'. In this context we have seen French president Emmanuel Macron's 'relentless' efforts to mediate between Iran and the United States, and Iranian foreign minister Javad Zarif's visit to the G7 leaders summit in Biarritz. The current semi-secret negotiations in Europe are part of these efforts.

After five hours of talks between Macron and Iran's president, Hassan Rouhani, it is widely believed that the French leader is trying to launch a \$15 billion credit line to purchase Iranian oil, while seeking US approval for this plan. Iran has given a deadline of September 6 to the Europeans, threatening to resume its nuclear enrichment programme if a

deal is not reached by then.

The Macron proposal, which is supported by Germany and maybe the United Kingdom, involves a three-stage process with commitments by both sides that ends with an extended nuclear deal (something Trump can sell as his 'improved' version of the nuclear agreement), as well new pledges regarding Iran's ballistic missile programme and the country's involvement in regional conflicts.

No doubt the US is considering some of these measures because various regional alliances against Iran are faltering. Qatar was the first country to refuse to join the Saudi-led 'alliance' against the Islamic Republic, then the United Arab Emirates pulled out, and now Kuwait is calculating the economic consequences of confrontation with Iran, as it becomes clear that severe US sanctions are affecting the economy of all Persian Gulf countries. The International Monetary Fund has cut its growth forecast for the Middle East to just 1% (down from April's 1.5%). According to *Forbes*,

Concerns about geopolitical instability and the impact of the recently-agreed extension to the Opec+ agreement to cap crude production are weighing on sentiment. The latter issue is a particular concern for one of the region's most important economies: Saudi Arabia. Riyadh-based bank Jadwa Investment recently cut its growth forecast for the kingdom's economy for 2019 from 2% to 1.6%, due to weakness in the oil sector. It is expecting the oil sector to expand by just 0.3% this year.¹

More significantly, the Kushner 'peace plan' for Israel-Palestine - labelled the "deal of the century" - which was to mark Trump's presidency, has turned out to be a total flop. And, of course, US confrontational policies against Iran never had the support of the major European states or the European Union.

All this explains Trump's U-turn. However, we are still in the early stages of the talks and, as always, the two sides are pursuing conflicting aims. As I have said, Trump will be happy with a photo-opportunity, followed by vague promises of lifting sanctions. But for Iran's leaders oil and secondary sanctions must be lifted - otherwise the temporary measures they have adopted to rescue the economy will not suffice.

As expected, Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu is outraged by the Biarritz negotiations and a possible reduction of tension between Tehran and

Washington. His frustration manifested itself in Israel's recent attacks against so-called Iranian proxy forces in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq.

Launchpad

It is in the midst of all this that on August 30 Donald Trump tweeted a photo of a crashed rocket and the damaged launchpad at the Imam Khomeini Space Centre, where, for the third time in a year, Iran's satellite programme had come to grief. The launch of Payam and Doosti satellites in January and February failed.

The photo was clearly taken by a US satellite and initial reports suggested the secret services were none too happy with the president sharing 'classified images'. David Schmerler - a researcher at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies stated: "A president tweeting out national intelligence assets is a whole new level."²

Trump's words were also bizarre: "The United States of America was not involved in the catastrophic accident during final launch preparations for the Safir SLV launch ... I wish Iran best wishes and good luck in determining what happened at Site One." Some interpreted this as a gesture of good will, while others claimed that it was a sarcastic comment.

On September 2, Iran finally acknowledged that an explosion had occurred and blamed a technical malfunction. So far there is no reason to blame any foreign power for the blast. However, the US alleges that Iran's satellite launches are related to the country's ballistic missile programme and the Trump administration has placed new sanctions on Iran's space agency, claiming that such missiles were being developed "under the guise of a programme purported to launch satellites".

As always, war and negotiations are part and parcel of the same process. Most Iranians still fear the launch of military air raids by US or Israel. Sanctions are taking their toll and, although the Iranian currency has not dropped any further since 2018, utility bills have risen by 30% in 24 months, rents are spiralling out of control, and prices for food, clothing and medicine make life extremely difficult for most Iranians.

Unlike the leaders of the Islamic Republic, the last thing on their mind is the country's satellite launch capabilities ●

Notes

1. www.forbes.com/sites/dominicdudley/2019/07/23/iran-oil-concerns-middle-east-economies/#4419084c4cda.
2. www.wired.com/story/trump-tweeted-a-sensitive-photo-internet-sleuths-decoded-it.

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday September 8, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimitz's *Lenin's electoral strategy from 1907 to the October revolution of 1917*. This meeting: 'Conclusion: So what? Or today's reality: Lenin versus Leninism'. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

Resisting war in the 21st century

Saturday September 7, 9.30am to 3pm: 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.

Don't attack Iran

Saturday September 7, 3pm: Rally, Bloomsbury Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2. Oppose British government support for Trump's military brinkmanship. Speakers include Andrew Murray (Unite) and rapper activist Lowkey. Entrance £3 (£0). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/events/872601313126969.

Wigan Diggers Festival

Saturday September 7, 11am to 9.30pm: Open-air free festival, The Wiend, Wigan WN1. Commemorating Gerrard Winstanley and the 17th Century Diggers movement with music and political stalls. Organised by Wigan Diggers Festival: www.facebook.com/events/460033934737521.

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. Speakers include Len McCluskey (Unite), Dave Ward (CWU), Ronnie Draper (BFAWU) and Mick Cash (RMT). Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/events/421637865360379.

Rescue Suffolk fire service

Thursday September 12, 1pm: Demonstration, Endeavour House, Russell Road, Ipswich IP1. Restore the cuts to the fire service. Speakers include Matt Wrack (FBU). Organised by Fire Brigades Union Suffolk: www.facebook.com/events/2258666601110925.

Labour and surplus value

Thursday September 19, 6pm: Study session, Jack Jones House, 2 Churchill Way, Liverpool L3. Organised by Merseyside Socialist Theory Study Group: study4socialism@outlook.com.

Earth Strike UK

Friday September 20, all-day events: Venues all over the UK. Call for trade unionists to join with students and school students in taking direct action on the climate crisis and ecological catastrophe - system change, not climate change! Organised by Earth Strike UK: www.facebook.com/events/743860869302537.

Marx Memorial Library

Saturday September 21, 10am to 3pm: Open day, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Explore the historic building. Also stalls and feature tours. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.facebook.com/events/2341040216218645.

Let's talk about Palestine

Sunday September 22, 6.30 pm: Labour Party conference fringe meeting, Renaissance Suite, Jurys Inn, King's Road, Brighton BN1. Speaker Haneen Zoabi - 10 years a Palestinian member of the knesset. Organised by Jewish Voice for Labour: www.facebook.com/events/965248610508259.

What kind of Labour left do we need?

Monday September 23, 6.30 pm: Labour Party conference fringe meeting, Friends House, Ship Street, Brighton BN1. Speakers include Chris Williamson MP. Organised by Labour Representation Committee: <https://labourrep.com>.

Trump, Iran and the threat of war

Tuesday September 24, 12.30pm: Labour Party conference fringe meeting, Charlotte Room, Grand Hotel, Brighton BN1. Speakers include MPs Diane Abbott and Richard Burgon. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Labour Against the Witchhunt

Tuesday September 24, 7pm: Labour Party conference fringe meeting, venue to be announced. Fight the continuing witch-hunt against the left in Labour. Speakers include Ken Livingstone and Asa Winstanley (electronicIntifada.net). Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt: www.facebook.com/events/363551141179855.

Fully automated luxury communism

Wednesday September 25, 7pm: Book launch, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1. A manifesto by Aaron Bastani: society beyond work, scarcity and capitalism. Entrance £3 (£1). Organised by Housmans Bookshop: <https://housmans.com/events>.

Is the 'age of austerity' neoliberal?

Thursday September 26, 7pm: Lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Periodising UK capitalism. Speaker: professor Simon Mohun. Entrance £5 (£3). Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/230.

CPGB wills

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

BREXIT

Heads I win, tails you lose

Stay focused, urges Eddie Ford. Prorogation was not a 'coup' and the central question still remains transforming the Labour Party - not a general election

Franksly, it is getting hard to keep up with events. First, Boris Johnson declared on August 28 that he had asked the queen to prorogue parliament from September 10 until the opening of a new parliamentary session on October 14 - with the monarch approving his request, of course.

Then, after MPs returned to parliament on September 3, as expected, they inflicted what looks like serious harm upon the government - voting by 328 votes to 301 (a majority of 27) for the motion tabled by Sir Oliver Letwin to seize control of the Commons order paper in order to push through a bill to effectively delay Brexit yet further. The bill states that, unless a deal is reached with the European Union or parliament approves a no-deal Brexit by October 19, the government would be required to write to the EU seeking an extension to article 50 until January 31 next year.

Twenty-one Tory MPs defied the whip and voted for the Letwin motion - it would have been 22, but Phillip Lee dramatically crossed the floor to the Liberal Democrats earlier in the afternoon. Either way the 21 had the whip withdrawn meaning that Boris Johnson now definitely leads a minority government. Meanwhile two Labour MPs (Kate Hoey and John Mann) voted with the government - will they also lose the whip, I wonder?

The next day, the bill itself was passed by an almost identical margin - 327 votes to 299. But now it must go to the Lords for approval and Tory peers have put down over 100 amendments in an attempt to block it. In other words, Conservative peers are having a go at US-style filibustering to sabotage the bill. They will almost certainly fail.

Finally, after his first defeat on September 3, the prime minister announced that, as it was clear MPs would now be able to block any no-deal Brexit, he had no alternative but to call an early general election, so as to gain a working majority to force through an EU withdrawal by his October 31 deadline. A slight problem, however: the 2011 Fixed-Term Parliament Act lays down that a two-thirds majority is required to dissolve parliament and call an election before its five-year term has ended. Well, not only did Johnson fall far short of that on September 4: he only won the support of 298 MPs - not even a majority of the 650 in the Commons. True, the votes against amounted to only 56, but that was because Labour (and many others) abstained - Jeremy Corbyn stating that the party would only vote for a fresh election *after* the bill to prevent a no-deal Brexit had become law.

Anyway, the intended prorogation - one of the longest in recent history - gives the government a certain level of plausible deniability, even if nobody believes a word of it: 'What's all the fuss about? It's perfectly normal for a new government to prorogue parliament and have a queen's speech. There was going to be a three-week recess for the party conference season anyway and you *still* have time to debate Brexit.' But at the end of the day we all know the prorogation was about restricting parliament's ability to prevent Brexit

happening on October 31 - it is almost embarrassing at this stage to pretend otherwise.

Calculations

For the record, the CPGB is not remotely surprised about the prorogation - it has been obvious for some time that it was in Boris Johnson's toolbox. However, we did not expect the actual timing - assuming that he would just run the clock down until October 31. But instead Team Boris must have calculated that allowing time for parliament to create mischief was to their advantage - creating a 'Heads I win, tails you lose' scenario, even though *they* are the ones calling for a general election that enables them to secure Brexit "do or die" by October 31.

The calculation is, of course, that, while there has never been a clear majority for any sort of Brexit among MPs, that does not reflect public opinion. Johnson believes that his insistence on leaving the EU by October 31 "do or die" has left him well placed to secure a comfortable majority for the Conservative Party in a new election - finally voters will be able to defeat the 'undemocratic elite' and make sure the 2016 referendum result is actually carried through.

However, Jeremy Corbyn is not a fool and refused to play ball - indeed, a special meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party expressed the near-unanimous view that Labour should refuse to support any snap election until *after* October 31. Keir Starmer, shadow Brexit secretary, told the BBC's *Today* programme that Labour wanted a general election, but "on its terms, not Boris Johnson's" - the party did not "trust" the prime minister, suspecting that he might use his prerogative powers to change the election date until November at the earliest. This follows on from Tony Blair's warning that having a general election before Brexit would be an "elephant trap", which seems an accurate prognosis. According to some reports, Labour is now examining the possibility of using parliamentary procedure to *force* the Tories to hold an election on a particular date, rather than leaving it in the hands of Boris Johnson.

Meanwhile, the Court of Session in Edinburgh has ruled that Johnson's prorogation of parliament is lawful - saying the decision was "nonjusticiable", as it was matter of high policy and political judgment. Something else that was not surprising. The group of 75 MPs and peers behind the legal challenge - headed by the Scottish National Party MP, Joanna Cherry, a n d Liberal

Democrat leader Jo Swinson - have said they will immediately appeal against the ruling, but they do not stand a chance. The same goes for the two other impending court challenges - one in the High Court of Justice for an urgent judicial review on the legality of the use of the royal prerogative by Gina Miller and John Major; and the other in the High Court in Northern Ireland, where it is claimed that prorogation is a breach of the Good Friday agreement.

Furthermore, a group of members of the European Parliament, representing all of the mainstream political groups, plan to trigger an inquiry regarding the suspension of parliament, under article 7 of the EU treaty, which requires member-states to act in accordance with "rule-of-law standards and fundamental rights" - another long shot. The real action is in parliament.

Overblown

Perhaps this is an unpopular thing to say, but the prorogation of parliament was not the 'death of democracy' or a 'coup', or even *that much* of a 'constitutional outrage' - such rhetoric is overblown, if not slightly hysterical, and totally unhelpful. If anything, it just makes us into liberalistic defenders of the *existing* constitution, which for communists is neither democratic or defensible - who voted for the queen, for example? Having said that, Johnson's move was obviously motivated by the anti-democratic intention to restrict and curtail parliamentary debate and therefore deserves to be condemned.

Boris Johnson is making out that the latest parliamentary manoeuvres are ruining his chances of getting a deal with the EU - but no-one takes that seriously. Whilst it is not totally impossible for the EU to blink at the 11th hour and make some sort concessions on the backstop, this is extremely unlikely. Dublin is already building customs posts on *its* side of the border, as there is absolutely no way that the EU will allow an open border with an external entity. Of course, the Republic of Ireland will suffer under Brexit - but Northern Ireland will be hit the hardest. The British government might start giving aid to the Six Counties statelet, if only to keep the Democratic Unionist Party happy.

In terms of the Tory Party as it is now, we have a rightwing leadership that is determined to satisfy its rank and file, which is even further to its right - in that way becoming what Ken Clarke called "the

Brexit Party rebadged". There are many stories about the EU council of ministers offering to extend article 50, but that has to be a unanimous decision of all the member-states. Can you really imagine Johnson signing up to an extension? It goes without saying that he will veto any such thing. Obviously, any such gesture from the EU would be pure gamesmanship - it is Britain's fault, not ours (although, of course, that is largely true). In turn, Johnson cannot row back now from his Brexit commitment - that would be political suicide. Therefore he has to blame the EU for playing games.

If he somehow manages to secure a mid-October election - not impossible using this or that trick or device - he and his advisors are confident of victory. Nigel Farage has said Johnson will be a hero if he goes full steam ahead for a no-deal Brexit, and so his Brexit Party would enter into an electoral arrangement or pact of some description with the Tories - something certainly advocated by Steve Baker of the Economic Research Group. The polls currently look favourable. For instance, YouGov has the Tories on 34% against Labour's 22%, while the Lib Dems are on 17%, the Brexit Party 13% and the Greens 8%. The combined total of the pro-'leave' parties adds up to not far short of 50% - enough to give Johnson an absolute working majority to drive through Brexit, once you take into account Britain's 'first past the post' voting system. Even if Johnson makes one stupid gaffe after another, with Jeremy Corbyn running another brilliant election campaign. as in 2017, the 'remain'

campaign is divided four ways - with radically different policies once you get beyond Brexit (even there you do not have total agreement). Any sort of national government cobbled together under these conditions would be a weak hodge-podge and fall apart quickly, with Boris Johnson widely seen as our 'national saviour' - the 'man of the people' against the *Guardian*-reading, metropolitan elite.

We in the CPGB advise people not to panic: a sense of calmness is necessary when everyone around you is losing their head - why do you get thousands carrying 'Stop the coup' and 'Save our democracy! Parliament must sit!' placards? Why else are there court cases, judicial reviews, talk of a government of national unity, desperate clever tricks in parliament? Because people are panicking. Stay focused. From the communist point of view, the immediate task is not backing the plan to install Jeremy Corbyn at the head of a "caretaker government", going to Brussels to "extend article 50" and then demanding a "general election and a Corbyn led government" (editorial *The Socialist* September 4 2019). The SWP, Socialist Appeal and John Rees's People's Assembly have also been pushing essentially the same 'general election now' line.

The CPGB hopes that the Brighton conference goes ahead. We must keep up the pressure on Jeremy Corbyn for reselection - the most important task in this period remains the fight to transform the Labour Party into a vehicle for working class advancement and the rebuilding of the labour movement as a whole ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk



He is using revolutionary measures ... Jeremy Corbyn should follow suit

LEFT

Outmanoeuvred by Johnson

The left's response to the prorogation of parliament betrays a shallow view of democracy, argues Paul Demarty

It is not surprising to find widespread condemnation on the left of Boris Johnson's proposed prorogation of parliament.

We are all, of course, (to put it mildly) disinclined to admiration for Conservative prime ministers - especially if they are old Etonian dog-whistle racists who purchased water cannons to use against our demonstrations (toys the courts prevented him from playing with). Add to that his sociopathic ambition and egotism, and you have a singularly unpleasant proposition: his tricky manoeuvres, once all the heroic-Brexit folderol is properly discarded, can only be in service to the career of one B Johnson. (Asked once if he had any convictions, Boris famously replied that he thought he might have picked one up for speeding.)

What the response ought to be - now there is the poser. And posed, on the face of it, as a question of the urgency of the threat of a no-deal Brexit. We may take the most worried among us first of all - the die-hard left-remainers - and where better to start than the terminally confused Alliance for Workers' Liberty, which made the mistake of believing the imperialist establishment's democratic rhetoric in the fat years and finds itself tangled up in its present crisis.

Thus shrieks an article on the group's website: "Boris Johnson is shutting down parliament", presenting "a long-term threat to democracy". How serious a threat? Serious indeed: "Johnson is acting as a Mussolini figure"; and if *Il Duce* is a depressingly routine bogeyman, perhaps the reader might be titillated by an enigmatic reference to Austro-fascism?

History tells us what politicians that seek to rule by suspending parliaments are thereby doing. In 1933 Christian Social chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss suspended the Austrian parliament to cut through a parliamentary stalemate. Dollfuss used that opportunity to block all attempts to reconvene parliament, threatening to use military force.¹

Despite the scaremongering intent, this is a bizarrely *tame* picture of Herr Dollfuss; it does not even occur to the AWL to mention the dictator's brutal suppression of the Austrian social democrats in 1934. Indeed, the labour movement is barely mentioned in the piece, despite its headline ('Labour and unions must organise workers' action to stop Johnson's coup') - the starring role is for parliament as such, and our class is to serve as a spear-carrier for it, and the agenda of its 'sensible' wing. "Jeremy Corbyn and Labour should clearly come out in opposition to Brexit and demand a second referendum," the comrades write, unaware that the sentence contradicts itself - advocacy of a second referendum being nothing other than *obfuscated* opposition to Brexit, albeit concealed so badly we are reminded of those joke-shop plastic fake moustaches.

Popular front

The AWL is not alone in apparently inexplicable confusion about the course of the 1930s on the continent, mind. There is a truly baffling article by Paul Mason, who has made the long march from Trotskyist obscurity to the starchy firmament of bourgeois thought-leadership, resembling the common run of his new caste in nothing so much



No sense of tactics, no sense of strategy

as his incompetence at predictions. A month ago - between the coronation of Johnson and his 'coup' - Mason turned in his latest wizard wheeze to *The Guardian*: the need for a popular front. Some readers may already be in a huff: "Typical *Weekly Worker* - always using these scholastic insults against their targets. Ordinary people don't even know what a popular front is! Alas, we quote Mason verbatim:

The popular-front tactic has deep antecedents in the very political traditions the modern Labour left emerged from. In 1935 the Bulgarian communist leader, Georgi Dimitrov, single-handedly manoeuvred the Communist International into supporting calls for a "popular front" against fascism. This was about formal electoral pacts with centrist socialists, left nationalists and liberals - and it paid off within six months. In Spain, to the fury of conservatives, who had formed their own electoral alliance with the fascists, the Popular Front took power in January 1936.²

If the AWL's treatment of Dollfuss is oddly partial, Mason's account of the French and Spanish popular fronts is preposterously so. It escapes his notice that the Spanish republic was *defeated* in the civil war and the components of the popular front were suppressed in a blood-tide of revenge (in fact his account does not even include the civil war *at all*, as if the election took place and they all lived happily ever after ...). He also fails to note that the universal switch of the parties of the Comintern to the popular front tactic, despite tremendous expenditure of energy, *failed* to obtain material support for republican forces from the 'democracies', at the same time as the political compromises - *vis-à-vis* Spain's colonies, for example - which were necessary to have a chance of gaining French or British support, ruled out many military strategies.

He at least mentions the French defeat to Hitler, but not the plain role of sabotage and defeatism by the reactionary officers - the heirs of Dreyfus's tormentors - which made the invasion and subsequent Vichy and German regimes something almost like a deflected coup; and, thereby, the total failure of the "popular front tactic" to "[beat] an alliance of far-right populists and conservative amorlists", never mind being the "one proven response

in history" to such a threat.

So absurd, indeed, is this line that his good faith in advancing it must be called into question. In a longer and mostly useful reply to his article, *Socialist Worker* writer Nick Clark points out apropos Mason's treatment of France and Spain: "... as a former Trotskyist, he surely knows this is only half the story at best".³ Surely indeed. Either Mason has suffered some kind of head injury, or he is merely trolling his old comrades; far better to pull 'clever' tactics out of his arse in the liberal media than submit to the grind of *Workers Power* paper sales. Mason enjoys rather too much the sight of himself in the big league, and cannot resist scandalising the dwindling contingents of old-fashioned Marxists in the cheap seats. The rest of his audience he presumably holds in such contempt that he does not even expect the most cursory Wikipedia fact-checking exercise from them.

Confusion

Not that the Lexiteers manage to avoid confusion. It is most acute in *Socialist Worker* itself, which faces a very particular problem - there are mass protests going on, and mass protests against the Tory government; it would be a poor show if the Socialist Workers Party could not get very, very excited in its usual fashion. However, on the *particular issue* that divides the protestors from the government (as understood by those protestors), the SWP is on Johnson's side. Not for the first time has the SWP's ill-thought-out Brexitism led it into this uncomfortable position. Thus, in last week's paper, we find the following formulation in a piece by SWP leader Charlie Kimber:

The crisis has to be used to break Tory rule. It is crucial that these protests are anti-Tory and for forcing Johnson and the government out - not protests against Brexit. And they must be open to people who voted 'leave'.⁴

We might wonder, perhaps, if comrade Kimber has *anyone particular in mind* when he says that people who voted Brexit must be welcome. On the whole, however, even he must realise that this perspective is somewhat askew from reality. These are 'remain' protests and their objection to Johnson's move is its concrete meaning - that he is trying to ram Brexit through a remainder parliament. It is as if there was a

planning application to build a mosque, and the council were to say that it could go ahead, as long as it had no minarets or copies of the *Qur'an* and was open to Wiccan crystal healing types.

That said, it so happens that the political lie of the land at this exact moment is more apt to give Lexiteers a clearer view than left-remainers. The latter are too wrapped up in panic, too easily coopted by mainstream liberal rhetoric. *Socialist Worker's* Tomáš Tengely-Evans is hardly unique among Lexiteers when he points out that "there would probably have been a parliamentary recess during the party conference season ... so the parliamentary shutdown will amount to MPs losing four to six sitting days".⁵ The comrade goes on to pick out the most serious political danger of the situation:

Labour is right to oppose a no-deal Brexit. But lining up with austerity-mongers and racists is no progressive alternative to Johnson. If anything, it could strengthen Johnson's attempt to present himself as 'anti-establishment'. The recent picture of Labour's John McDonnell, Lib Dem Jo Swinson and former Tory Anna Soubry meeting to unite against no deal will make that easier.

This is a danger from which the Lexiteers are immune by definition, while left remainers are extraordinarily vulnerable. In the case of someone like Paul Mason, the damage is already irreversible.

Economism

So much for the short-term political outlook. But both sides are equally and disastrously wrong, once we start to look a year (or 10 years) ahead.

When I first started reading this paper - some 13 or so years ago - there was a particular line of critique of its opponents on the far left, which very much dominated its polemics.

That was the accusation of economism. The far left had apparently no interest in questions of democracy; we lived in a 'bourgeois democracy', the revolution would introduce 'workers' democracy', and the way to the latter was primarily through direct class struggle against the employer. Where issues outside that were dealt with - as they had to be - they tended to be taken care of simply by tailing elements of the bourgeoisie and petty

bourgeoisie. I do not mean to impugn the *spirit* of the wider far left on these matters, which were engaged with sincere energy and care; merely the limitations of political line. So anti-war activity was carried on under the sign of pacifism; objections to police brutality as a matter of liberal defence of rights or anti-racism; and so forth.

If that critique is no longer so pertinent, it is - sadly - not because anyone took much notice. Instead, that core commitment to socialist revolution itself has atrophied, and in many cases only the outer shell of liberalism, pacifism and so on remains (in others it lives on as a sort of sectarian shibboleth).

Rarely has this legacy been more obvious than in the AWL article quoted above, where a rote roll-call of working class protest is desultorily invoked to try to stop the *real* danger: the final eclipse of the liberal bourgeoisie by the nationalist-revanchist opposition it summoned against itself. The proletariat is to engage in mass strikes "against Johnson's outrageous attack on parliamentary democracy". In this, the AWL writers confuse Britain as it actually is - a *constitutional monarchy*, not a parliamentary democracy, in which moves like Johnson's are perfectly legal and, given particular circumstances, even normal - with the *false* democratic image in which the modern west presents itself.

At the opposite end of the scale, Robert Griffiths of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain took to that paper's pages to bang through an old refrain of his, decrying MPs for "defending 'parliamentary sovereignty' in order to overturn the 'popular sovereignty' of June 2016 and to keep sovereign decision-making powers in Brussels".⁶ In other words, the plebiscite is *more democratic* than parliament, in comrade Griffiths' view - an equally disastrous error. But, while few have openly argued, as he does, that plebiscitary 'sovereignty' is a higher form of democracy, *nobody* has correctly identified the referendum as anti-democratic *as such* - apart, that is, from us in the CPGB, and the small matter of the best contingents of our movement back to Marx in the 1850s.

The Marxist critique of bourgeois society's democratic pretensions is well and truly buried among today's 'Marxists'. In the best case, it was supplanted by an anarchistic conception of a workers' democracy appearing at day zero after the revolution, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter; but that rather threadbare conception gives way to fatuous liberalism or else Bonapartism. Johnson's non-coup has at least got us all *talking* about democracy; but, it seems, many on the left have very little to say about it ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. www.workersliberty.org/story/2019-08-28/stop-johnsons-coup.
2. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/02/labour-boris-johnson-progressive-pact-greens-lib-dems.
3. https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/48799/Paul+Masons+popular+front+of+failures+is+not+the+way+to+beat+the+right.
4. https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/48862/As+Johnson+suspends+parliament%2C+protest+to+kick+him+out.
5. https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/48871/How+to+make+sense+of+the+Tory+crisis+over+Brexit. This isn't quite the whole story - a recess of this type would not usually stop the proceedings of parliamentary committees and so on, which will be affected by the prorogation.
6. https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/f/how-can-todays-political-crisis-be-resolved-favour-working-class-and-labour-movement.

ECOLOGY

Climate change and system change

Mainstream politicians, jetting royals, 'progressive' capitalists and their army of paid persuaders have no serious programme to avert runaway climate change. We on the Marxist left have. This article is based on a talk given to Communist University on August 18 by **Jack Conrad**

Climate change is a real and present danger. But there is nothing new about climate change.

Our planet dates back around 4.5 billion years. Earth's first atmosphere mostly consisted of hydrogen and helium - unstable elements which gradually drifted off into space. Even after many millions of years of cooling, surface temperatures are thought to have stood at a sizzling 93°C.

Because of the close proximity of the moon, churning volcanic activity and countless asteroid and meteorite strikes, a second atmosphere formed: ammonia, water, methane, carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide. According to the Oparim-Haldane hypothesis the foaming, mineral rich, storm tossed seas acted as a primeval, or prebiotic soup. The first life forms appeared approximately four billion years ago.

Some 500 million years later, tiny, single-cell, blue-green algae were converting carbon dioxide into oxygen through photosynthesis. Earth's third atmosphere is the product of co-evolution. Our planet's climate results from the interaction of atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere ... and biosphere.

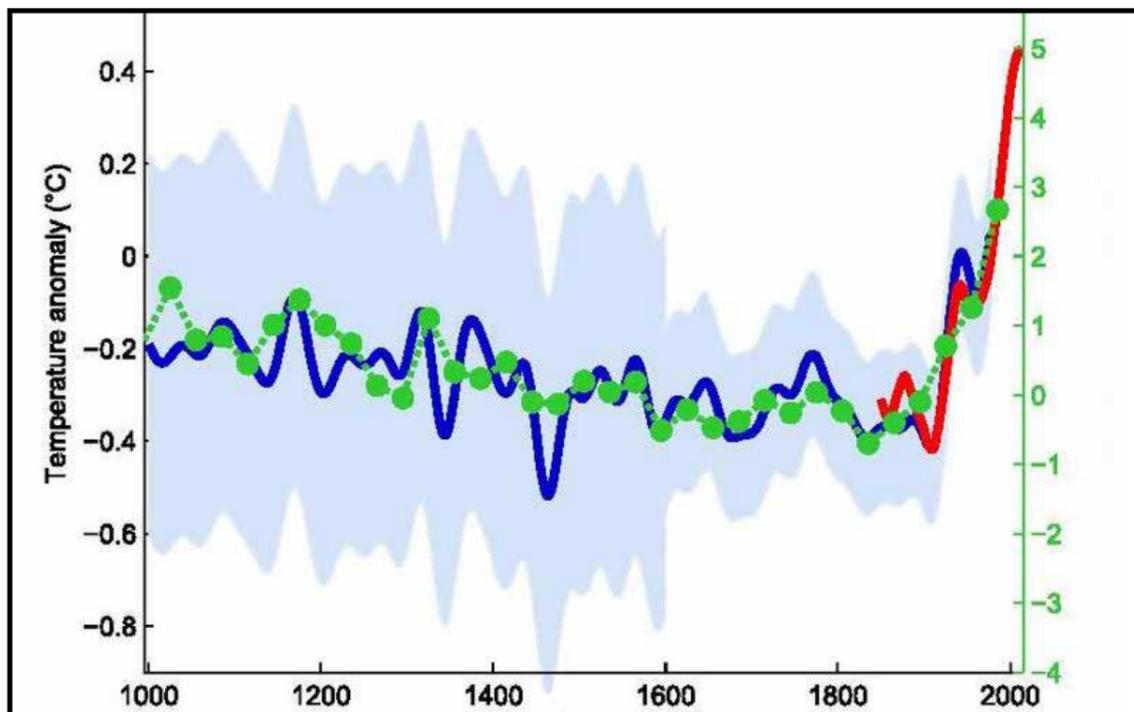
The ozone layer formed 600 million years ago. That made the existence of terrestrial, complex, multicellular animals possible. But the evolutionary leap happened in the shallow, balmy seas of 540 million years ago. The Cambrian explosion had a time frame of a mere few million years - in geological terms a blink of the eye - and led to "virtually all major groups of modern animals".¹

Temperatures tended downwards through the successive geological periods. Take 1960-80 CE temperatures as the benchmark. The Cambrian (600-500 million years ago) was 14°C hotter. The Silurian (425-405 million years ago) 4°C hotter. The Devonian (405-345 million years ago) 12°C hotter. The Permian (280-230 million years ago) 2°C colder. The Triassic 10°C hotter. The Jurassic 8°C hotter. The Cretaceous 4°C hotter. The Palaeocene (66-55 million years ago) 10°C hotter.

Doubtless, some of these temperature changes were due to volcanic activity and sun spots. There is also continental drift. Three billion years ago the vast mass of the Earth's surface was covered with water. There were only a few spots of dry land. The first supercontinent, the Arctic, arose some 2.5 billion years ago. Eventually it broke apart, but after many more millions of years there were other superseding supercontinents: Kenorland, Columbia, Rodinia, Pannotia.

Beginning in the Neoproterozoic, about 550 million years ago, most of the Earth's land masses are found joined together in the Gondwana supercontinent. Meanwhile, in the seas, giant plankton blooms resulted in a significant increase in atmospheric oxygen - conditions ripe for terrestrial animals. Probably, the invasion began in the Ordovician approximately 440 million years ago.² It shuffled, clambered, crawled and slithered onto the land and rapidly evolved to occupy every conceivable niche.

Something like our present configuration of continents appeared 60 million years ago. Doubtless this helped establish our contemporary climate regime. The American and Eurasian land mass more or less encircles the northern pole; that and the continental plate centred on the southern pole



Like a hockey-stick: little ups and downs and then a lurching rise

provide almost perfect conditions for ensuring an oscillation between cool and cold conditions. The bulk of the Earth's fresh water lies frozen in two gigantic ice sheets.

Over the last million years there has been an interglacial-glacial 100,000-year pattern. Each cycle has had its own particular features and oddities. Understandably, though, as with any study of the past, data becomes ever more uncertain, with increasing distances of time. So the best records we possess go from the interglacial, known as the Eemian, down to the present Holocene period - the last 130,000 years have in particular been revealed in some detail with deep ice cores drilled from Greenland to Antarctica.

In terms of climatic transition, the most reliable information is for what is called the Younger Dryas-to-Holocene, which ended the last ice age. At its maximum, some 15,000 to 20,000 years ago, the Arctic ice sheet extended all the way down to Chicago, New York, Moscow and London and saw much lower sea levels. What is now Britain was joined to France, the Netherlands and Denmark. And, using the 1960-80 CE benchmark, we have a -10°C difference.

The qualitative transition to our present-day climatic regime occurred 11,650 years ago and coincided with the retreat of the great ice sheets. The tipping point seems to have taken only a decade or two. "The speed of this change is probably representative of similar but less well-studied climate transitions during the last few hundred thousand years," argue the environmental scientists, Jonathan Adams, Mark Maslin and Ellen Thomas.³ These transitions include sudden cold events (Heinrich events/stadials), warm events (interstadials) and the beginning and ending of long warm phases, such as the Eemian interglacial.

There are less dramatic, but nonetheless significant, patterns of climate change on a smaller scale too. During the present (Holocene) interglacial period, there have been cold and dry phases occurring over a roughly 1,500-year cycle, and climate transitions on a decade-to-century timescale. There have been little ice ages, as well as bursts of relative

warmth. Between 1100 and 1300 CE, for example, Europe experienced temperatures which allowed more productive agriculture throughout the continent and saw flourishing English vineyards.

It is also worth recalling that the Thames regularly froze solid during mid-17th century winters and that the years from 1805 to 1820 were comparably bleak and inclement. What we are experiencing at present certainly needs to be put into the context of the transition from the little ice age, which finally ended around 1880.

Incidentally, the kaleidoscopic history of global atmosphere, temperature variation and continental drift explains why those with even a passing knowledge of the Earth sciences consider the Campaign Against Climate Change such an odd choice of name. It conjures up notions that humanity can, if there is the will, act like some almighty king Canute and command nature to stand still. We can't and it won't.

Natural and unnatural

'Climate' and 'change' go together like 'weather' and 'change'. The two are inseparable. The weather alters from hour to hour, day to day and month to month. Climate is just big weather. Nasa gives this useful definition of climate: "average weather for a particular region and time period, usually taken over 30 years".⁴ So there is nothing unusual about climate change *per se*. In fact climate without change is impossible. Climate change has never ceased, is ongoing and must therefore be considered inevitable. Or, to use a loaded phrase - it is natural. Notions of fixing in place the climate as it now is, or returning it to a pre-industrial ideal, through some kind of technical wizardry or a human exodus, are half-childish, half-sinister and, crucially, are bound to fail.

Consider Britain's climate - a solid record of it lies in the ground, mud and rocks beneath our feet. As well as periodic glaciations over the last 20 or 30 million years - in the Quaternary and Tertiary periods - as already noted, temperatures have in general been far higher than today. The coal

seams of south Yorkshire, south Wales, Lanarkshire and Nottinghamshire were formed in tropical forests and swamps; Dover's white cliffs were laid down under shallow, warm seas; London's clay contains the remains of elephants, hippopotamuses and rhinoceroses.

So claims such as that the hottest 10 years "since records began" have just occurred might apply in terms of reports issued by the London Met Office, but hardly when one considers the geological timescale.⁵

Nonetheless, runaway climate change is now an almost universally recognised danger. The global climate system probably stands on a knife's edge. Only the self-interested, the downright stupid or the wilfully blind deny it nowadays. If we take temperatures in the northern hemisphere from 1000 CE to the present moment in time, we see alternating ups and downs, but then, around 1880, a sudden and very steep upward curve occurs. The result resembles a hockey stick. Already average global temperatures are 1°C above pre-industrial times⁶ - given the time span, very big in climatic terms.

Two additional points.

Firstly, while the climate constantly undergoes change, that happens within a relatively stable equilibrium, within a self-adjusting system. Till recently most scientists thought that all large-scale global and regional climate changes took place over a timescale of many centuries or millennia: ie, at rates hardly noticeable during a human lifetime. Gradualism was the ruling orthodoxy. That is no longer the case.

Scientific opinion nowadays recognises that quantitative change reaches a trigger point and then flips over into qualitative change. Adams, Maslin and Thomas vouch: "All the evidence indicates that most long-term climate change occurs in sudden jumps rather than incremental changes."⁷ Such conclusions were long anticipated by Marxism. Frederick Engels in his *Dialectics of nature* described the jump or leap: "qualitative change takes place ... it is determined by a corresponding quantitative change."⁸ Given the right conditions, climate change can be triggered by some relatively "small perturbation", the entire system tips over into another system. New, radically different weather patterns, prevailing

winds, oceanic currents, etc, kick in.

Second point. Scientific opinion is overwhelmingly agreed. The temperature rises over the last 100 years or so are primarily due to "human activity".⁹ We really are in the Anthropocene. Industry, agriculture, transport and domestic heating release carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O) and other such greenhouse gases which have an observable climate impact.

Paris

A recent report by the International Panel on Climate Change projects that warming will continue at the current rate of ~0.2°C per decade and reach 1.5°C above pre-industrial times around 2040.¹⁰ However, 1.5°C could easily be exceeded in half that time - around 2030 - and 2°C reached by around 2045.

Though theirs is an inexact science, climatologists fear that 1.5°C itself represents a boundary, a tipping point. If that is correct, after that we could see much reduced cloud cover, an end of the ice caps, soaring temperatures, much higher sea levels and the inundation of low-lying cities and fertile planes. Because this might happen within a, relatively speaking, exceedingly short period of time, it could conceivably threaten the "survival of human civilisation".¹¹ Given the continuation of existing social relations, expect mass migrations, resource wars and pandemics.

True, there is the 2016 Paris climate agreement. Its 195 signatories pledge to limit emissions, so as to ensure that temperatures do not exceed a 1.5°C increase. But the Paris agreement is voluntary, vague and contains all manner of get-out clauses.

And, suffice to say, the leaders of all countries are in thrall to the mantra of economic growth. Typically this is done in the name of ensuring the wellbeing of all. But in reality outcomes are extraordinarily unequal. The mass of the world's population barely ekes out a living. Meanwhile, the few accumulate staggering riches. *Forbes* reports that 1% of the world's population own 45% of the wealth.¹²

Then there is Donald Trump. He threatens a US withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement in 2020. The 45th president has already rolled back the Obama administration's environmental measures and is on record as saying that global warming is a hoax concocted by the Chinese government in an attempt to hold back US industry.¹³ He is, of course, one of many influential climate-change 'sceptics' operating in high politics.

Jair Bolsonaro, Matteo Salvini, Marine Le Pen, Nigel Farage, Hungary's Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland all come from the same mould. All view action on climate change as an imposition on national sovereignty and a barrier to growth. These counterrevolutionary revolutionaries seek to undo the 'evils' of the October Revolution, roll back democratic rights, stoke up blood-and-soil national chauvinism and extinguish even the possibility of socialism. That is the meaning of the so-called populist right.

There are many brilliant scientists, engineers and technologists who are busily working away, using their considerable talents, to develop, refine and invent. They offer the wonders of nano-technology, stunning computer advances, electronic aeroplanes, novel power sources, automated vehicles and genetically modified crops and animals.

However, as shown by William Stanley Jevons back in the mid-19th century, such innovations lead to a paradox. Increased efficiency results in cheaper commodities, which in turn results in increased demand, and with that comes the increased use of resources. The Jevons paradox is his one and only worthwhile contribution to human knowledge. Amazingly, early Fabians, such as Sidney Webb, George Bernard Shaw and Herbert Somerton Foxwell, considered Jevons and his marginal utility economics far superior to Karl Marx's labour theory of value. Deservedly, however, Jevons is now nothing more than an obscure historic footnote.

However, the point has been made. Capitalism treats increased efficiency merely as an opportunity to increase demand. Exchange-value rules. Not use-value. Capitalism moves according to a single-minded formula: M-C-M'. Money is laid out in order to secure materials and labour-power with a view to one objective and one objective alone: gaining more money. That law of political economy controls the capitalists themselves - even the greenest of greens amongst them - and makes capitalism the most uncontrollable, the most rapacious, the most polluting, the most short-termist system imaginable. Frankly, if one wanted to design a system with the intention of wrecking nature, it would be capitalism. Capitalism is a mode of destructive reproduction.

Should the left rally to the defence of the Paris agreement and seek allies amongst greens, NGOs, liberals and 'progressive' capitalists, such as Bill Gates, George Soros and Mark Zuckerberg? Absolutely not. There are two main reasons.

Firstly, we have already demonstrated the criminal inadequacy of the Paris agreement. Its *maximum* goal could actually represent the tipping point that brings civilisational collapse. Why uphold that? We stand for working class political independence. That requires developing our own programme - not calling for a general strike and the formation of soviets to ensure the implementation of the Paris agreement.

Secondly, it should not be assumed that protests, declarations and speechifying against the danger of runaway climate change leads to progressive conclusions. Environmentalism usually comes with an ingrained acceptance of capitalism as the natural order and easily leads to demonising the urban and rural poor, especially females, in the so-called third world. This is decidedly the case with the so-called 'population problem'.

Population

In class terms greenism amounts to a disenchanting petty bourgeois rebellion against capitalism's accelerating despoliation of nature. Yet, whatever the good intentions, greenism carries a deadly barb. Its denunciations of ecological destruction are joined with talk of "overpopulation" and the limited "carrying capacity" of the planet: "population growth ... must be addressed to avoid overpopulation", says the Green Party.¹⁴ Alan Thornett, of Socialist Resistance and Campaign Against Climate Change, likewise argues that a "major contributory factor" to the ecological crisis is overpopulation.¹⁵

Greenism has a very dark side too. The Nazis had their green wing, Hitler's agricultural expert, and later a *Reichsminister*, Walther Darré, was a nature-worshipper. Hitler himself expressed his longing for a new faith rooted in nature. He fervently believed that humanity - authentic Aryan humanity, that is - must eventually break with Christianity and fully merge with nature. His alternative religion ended, of course, in the holocaust and the extermination of millions.

In Britain the Soil Association

counted Jorian Jenks amongst its leading members. He edited its journal *Mother Earth* till his death in 1963. He is also considered something of a founding figure of the green movement. However, in the mid-1930s he became a regular contributor to the *Blackshirt* and stood as a candidate for the British Union of Fascists. He was the BUF's official advisor on agriculture: "fascism alone could make agriculture prosperous again".¹⁶ No surprise - the language Jenks used about Jews "is very close to genocidal".¹⁷

The origins of the Green Party in England and Wales lie in the feudal ideal of Oliver Goldsmith and the PEOPLE party. Aristocrat and commoner alike would once again know their place. And let's not forget Jonathon Porret and David Icke. They advocated halving Britain's population.

There are royal greens too. Speaking barefoot - wow - at a recent Google ecocamp in Sicily's exclusive Verdura resort, Harry Windsor promised to limit his family to no more than two children - his contribution to saving the planet. The irony is unmistakable. The 300 A-list guests flew into Verdura aboard 143 private jets, landed in luxury yachts and stayed in luxury apartments - each with its own swimming pool. The total carbon footprint must have been hundreds of tons. More importantly - much more importantly - the royal parasite legitimised the toxic notion that 'people are the problem'.

In that ominous spirit (Saint) David Attenborough backs Population Matters - a charity which opposed Syrian refugees coming to Britain because of its insistence on zero migration.¹⁸ Another Population Matters sponsor is Paul R Ehrlich, the US biologist and author of the bestseller *The population bomb* (1968). Back then Ehrlich apocalyptically announced: "The battle to feed all of humanity is over." Instead of giving aid to the needy and feeding the hungry, responsible states should henceforth put in place hard measures designed to dispose of surplus people on a *global scale*.¹⁹

Indira Gandhi sought to implement that Malthusian programme. During her 1975 emergency six million men were forcibly sterilised. And, of course, China imposed a one-child policy. Selective abortion has robbed China of 11.9 million females. Even with the abolition of the one-child policy, today there is a 100:117 disparity between the number of girls and boys.²⁰

Laws

In fact, each society possesses its own population laws. Put simply, the reproduction of the human species takes place within different social formations and under different historical circumstances - something the reverend Thomas Malthus palpably 'forgot'. His theory of population floats outside a *theorised* history and therefore took no account of the fundamental distinctions that exist between one society and another. Eg, 11th century feudalism had significantly different population dynamics compared to present-day capitalism.

The peasant family - indeed broadly speaking patriarchal production as a socio-economic system - has an interest in maximising the number of children. Put more accurately, maximising the number of *male* children - a vital distinction. Sons are treasured because they remain *within* the family and through marriage bring in extra wealth in the form of dowries, wives, inheritance and in due course their own children. Girls leave the family and marrying them off costs a small fortune ... their birth is often the cause of mourning in pre-capitalist social formations. Female infanticide was therefore frequent.

The family is a unit of *production*. Boys and girls alike labour in their father's fields from the age of five or six and, of course, not in return for money wages. Food, clothing and shelter are provided - little more. After the age of

10 it is reckoned that children are fully paying for their upkeep. From then on it is gain. Male heirs are also expected to maintain parents into old age. Children are therefore unpaid labourers and a form of social insurance. Given high infant mortality rates, it can easily be appreciated why it is a case of 'the more, the better'.

Apart from capitalism's more primitive, unrestrained and brutal forms, children are an enormous expense for the proletarian family - from the cradle and now well into adulthood. During the industrial revolution, it is true, parents sold their children into work from a tender age. Children of eight or nine did 12 and 14 hour days (until factory acts limited hours). Families could only survive if all available members brought in some kind of wage package (the wife was frequently pregnant - and, lacking reliable birth control and with the peasant mentality still lingering on, she was also typically burdened with a brood of young children hanging on to her breast and skirts).

What of the present-day proletarian family? It is a unit of *consumption*. With universal primary and secondary education, and around half the school population expected to go on to university, the financial outgoings are considerable. Prudential, the insurance company, estimates that on average children cost over £40,000 each.²¹ Even after graduation many mums and dads go on to help out their offspring with mortgages, etc.

Certainly nowadays, for the *simple reproduction* - not expansion - of the proletarian family, it requires *two* adult incomes. Average *individual* hours might have been forced down - in 1846 parliament passed the first 10-hour act (for what was a five and a half-day week). Full-time male workers in Britain now notch up an average of 39.2 hours.²² But the workforce has expanded significantly; not least by drawing in more and more women. The total number *employed* is now over 32 million. Roughly a threefold increase over the 1930s. At the beginning of the 20th century females made up 29% of the workforce. Now it is 48%. Women workers today do on average 34.3 hours.²³ Add those figures together and what it tells you is that the family unit is more exploited nowadays and is certainly under more psychological pressures (put another way, an intensification of labour and relative exploitation). Not least due to these extra drains and life-limiting pressures, on average women have children later and fewer in number compared with the recent past.

In 2018 the average woman in Britain had 1.7 children²⁴ - down from 2.6 in 1960. What is true of Britain is also true of other so-called developed capitalist countries.

Technoquackery

Then there are the many and varied technological solutions on offer. In all probability though they would release a Pandora's box of demons. What is being contemplated is proudly upheld by Cambridge University's Centre for Climate Repair.²⁵ Amongst the suggestions are sucking CO₂ from the atmosphere, spraying salt water over clouds, seeding the oceans with iron filings, firing dust into the upper atmosphere, stationing a giant, 2,000-kilometre-diameter eye patch in space to deflect 2% of the sun's rays, growing huge algae beds in the oceans to absorb carbon dioxide, building massive cloud-generating machines, etc. Carbon capture belongs in the same category. Holding, transporting and storing all have considerable costs - in total an estimated \$70-100 per ton - and, especially given the vast lacunas in our knowledge, could easily produce completely unintended results.

Programme

Influenced by Justus von Liebig, the founder of modern organic chemistry, Marx developed his theory

of a metabolic rift between capitalist production and nature. See 'Large scale industry and agriculture' in *Capital* volume 1 and 'The genesis of capitalist ground rent' in volume 3. Driven by its lust for profit, capitalism pollutes the water and air, destroys forests, exhausts the soil and creates deserts. The natural metabolic cycle has to be restored. There has to be sustainable development.

As a step towards that end I would recommend this immediate programme - ie, what can be technically achieved under capitalism.

- Nationalise the land. Nationalise the banks. Nationalise water, electricity, gas, railways and other such natural monopolies.
- Industrial, transport and agricultural polluters must be progressively taxed according to the emissions they produce. That includes shipping and air flight. Carbon, methane and other such greenhouse gases must be minimised. Set a date for the banning of fluorinated gases. End tax breaks for the oil and gas industry. Phase out fossil fuels.
- Boost solar and wind power.
- Those who produce harmful waste materials should be made to safely dispose of them. Supervision to be carried out by committees of workers, local residents and elected specialists. Recycling must be enforced. The export of waste material for dumping abroad must be banned.
- Reduce meat and dairy consumption. Encourage a vegetable-based diet.
- Free urban transport. Restrict international business air flights. Encourage conference calls. Shorten the distance between home and work. Facilitate cycling and walking.
- End the housing shortage. Build good-quality, energy-efficient, well-insulated council houses.
- Encourage urban parks, small farms and roof gardens.
- Rewild selected areas of the countryside. Native species should be reintroduced. Restore flood plains, marshes and wetlands. Turn grouse moors and upland estates back to nature. There must be a concerted programme of reforestation.
- Establish no-fishing zones in the seas. Create a sustainable fishing industry.

Prometheanism

Historically too many on the left have taken for granted a kind of technological Prometheanism, whereby human beings can do what they like with nature - an approach that can be seen in the Soviet Union. In *Literature and art* (1924) Leon Trotsky breathlessly writes:

The present distribution of mountains and rivers, of fields, of meadows, of steppes, of forests and of seashores, cannot be considered final. Man has already made changes in the map of nature that are not few nor insignificant. But they are mere pupils' practice in comparison with what is coming. Faith merely promises to move mountains; but technology, which takes nothing 'on faith', is actually able to cut down mountains and move them. Up to now this was done for industrial purposes (mines) or for railways (tunnels); in the future this will be done on an immeasurably larger scale, according to a general industrial and artistic plan. Man will occupy himself with re-registering mountains and rivers, and will earnestly and repeatedly make improvements in nature. In the end, he will have rebuilt the earth, if not in his own image, at least according to his own taste. We have not the slightest fear that this taste will be bad.²⁶

And the heedless technological Prometheanism preached by Trotsky, Joseph Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev tried to put into practice. Leave aside the radioactive waste littered over Kazakhstan, the open-cast mining

and the ruinous industrial practices, which caused choking air pollution, poisoned rivers and dead lakes.

In the second half of the 1940s Stalin proposed his 'great plan for the transformation of nature'. This was in response to the 1946 drought, which in 1947 left an estimated 500,000-one million dead. Tracts of land were forested in the southern steppe to provide a gigantic network of shelterbelts. Rivers feeding into the Aral Sea were diverted - once the world's fourth largest lake, it has now virtually disappeared. Irrigation canals, reservoirs and countless ponds were to improve soil fertility. Crop rotation would ensure high yields. Scientific oversight was given to the now thoroughly discredited agronomist, Trofim Lysenko (he considered the Mendelian theory of gene inheritance an example of "metaphysics and idealism"²⁷). Due for completion in 1965, the whole project ended in disaster. The trees died. Crop yields were disappointing. The soil was soon exhausted and blown away on the wind.

Khrushchev had his virgin land scheme. In the 1960s the black earth belt was put under the plough. However, crop yields steadily declined. And to irrigate the arid south Khrushchev looked at proposals to divert 12 rivers that were "uselessly" flowing into the Arctic ocean. Reversing the flow of the Pechora was not only going to boost agricultural production: the shrinking Aral and Caspian seas would be replenished. Part of the project envisaged the digging of a new channel, using 250 nuclear devices. Three 15-kiloton devices were actually detonated - inevitably causing fallout. The harebrained scheme was finally abandoned in 1986 - who knows what the dreadful consequences would have been if it had been fully implemented?

Our maximum programme begins after the overthrow of the capitalist state and involves the epochal transition to communism. However - and it needs to be emphasised - even the associated producers can make disastrous choices. Nature must be treated with respect and care. The humans of one generation have to pass on the Earth to succeeding generations in an improved state. They should therefore act as responsible guardians. They are not the Earth's owners ●

Notes

1. SJ Gould *Wonderful life: the Burgess shale and the nature of history* London 1990, p24.
2. www.scientificamerican.com/article/first-life-on-land.
3. J Adams, M Maslin and E Thomas, 'Sudden climate transition during the Quaternary' *Progress in Physical Geography* March 1999: www.esd.ornl.gov/projects/qen/transit.html.
4. www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/noaa-n/climate/climate_weather.html.
5. *The Daily Telegraph* July 31 2019.
6. www.climatecentral.org/gallery/graphics/the-globe-is-already-above-1c.
7. www.esd.ornl.gov/projects/qen/transit.html.
8. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 25, London 1987, p358ff.
9. See climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus.
10. www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar5.
11. D Spratt and I Dunlop *Existential climate-related security risk: a scenario approach* Melbourne 2018, p6.
12. inequality.org/facts/global-inequality.
13. friendsoftheearth.uk/climate-change/what-are-donald-trumps-policies-climate-change-and-other-environmental-issues.
14. https://policy.greenparty.org.uk/pp.html.
15. A Thornett *Facing the apocalypse: arguments for ecosocialism* London 2019, pp161-62.
16. Quoted in PM Coupland *Farming, fascism and ecology: a life of Jorian Jenks* London 2017, p95.
17. beastrabban.wordpress.com/2018/03/21/jorian-jenks-and-the-fascist-arguments-for-a-jewish-homeland.
18. *Open Democracy* September 23 2016.
19. Quoted in www.overpopulation.com/faq/people/paul_ehrlich.html.
20. ourworldindata.org/gender-ratio.
21. news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/4482441.stm.
22. www.statista.com/statistics/280749/monthly-full-time-weekly-hours-of-work-in-the-uk-by-gender-year-on-year.
23. *Ibid*.
24. www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-46118103.
25. *i* May 10 2019.
26. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lit_revo/ch08.htm.
27. TD Lysenko *The situation in biological science* Moscow 1951, p24.

STRATEGY

Organisation or 'direct actionism'?

Mike Macnair takes issue with Charlie Post over his critiques of Vivek Chibber and James Muldoon on strategy

This is the third article in my series on the US left 'Kautsky debate'. I began with Vivek Chibber's arguments for Fabianism published by *Jacobin* under the 'Kautskyan' title, 'Our road to power' ('Widening frame of debate', August 8), and went on to James Muldoon's arguments for Kautsky, version 1919, as a 'councilist' 'third way' between social-democracy and Bolshevism ('Fabian or anarchist?', August 15).

In a certain sense, the next issue is Eric Blanc's 'case for Kautsky'. But since Blanc's arguments responded in the first place to Charlie Post's critiques of Chibber and Muldoon, these have to be the first port of call.

Post is a professor of sociology at the City University of New York, and a long-standing activist in US Solidarity and writer for its journal *Against the current* (ATC). This organisation was founded in 1986 as a result of an 'opening up' to regroupment of the remnant of the US International Socialists, after the 1977 split of the supporters of the British Socialist Workers Party to form the International Socialist Organization (dissolved earlier this year) and other splits.¹ The regroupment included the 'broad-frontist' wing of those who were expelled from or left the US Socialist Workers Party (not connected with the British organisation) after its open break with Trotskyism in favour of Castroism in the early 1980s.

The name 'Solidarity' was taken from the Polish 'trade union' formation (as it existed in 1980-82) to express the common position of the ISers and ex-US SWPers in identification with this formation and with Hungary 1956. Their 'About Solidarity' page carries this statement:

We do not attempt to put forward a monolithic platform which we all have adapted to; rather, we rely on the richness of our traditions and the creativity and newer experiences of our younger members to foster and develop a forward-looking socialist thought.

Solidarity was founded in 1986 by revolutionary socialists who stand for 'socialism from below', the self-organisation of the working class and oppressed peoples ...²

ATC has been hospitable to the 'political Marxism' of its lead editor, Robert Brenner, the late Ellen Meiksins Wood, and others. Charlie Post's major book *The American road to capitalism* (2011) is within this theoretical framework. Post's March 2018 polemic against Chibber on strategy³ is thus a Solidarity polemic against an ex-comrade: Chibber was still in 2003 acknowledging help with his theoretical work from comrades in Solidarity.⁴

Post v Chibber

I said in the first article in this series that Post was unduly 'soft' on Chibber on the 'party question', and I will add only one point on this issue. This is that - following a strong tradition of the 'third camp' left - Post treats the officials and elected representatives not merely as having interests which are partially opposed to those of the rank and file, but as *inherently* being uncontrollable by them, so that it is only *external* mobilisation - wildcat strikes and suchlike - which can win reforms.

On the question of strategy, Post argues that Chibber

envisioned a socialist movement capable of struggle both inside and outside the existing capitalist state.

Mass mobilisations, centred in the workplace, will be crucial to creating the social power that can compel the state to grant substantial reforms. At the same time, the left will need to 'gain power within' the existing state in order to implement 'non-reformist' reforms that will effect multiple breaks in the logic and power of capital.

This strategy is, he argues, "fundamentally unrealistic". In the first place, the "rules of reproduction" prohibit it, because all capitalist state activities are dependent on taxes and hence on profitability, and in periods of declining profitability the state is forced to pull back concessions. Secondly,

The capitalist state is also a bureaucratic institution, structurally separated from the private sphere of exploitation and accumulation, appearing as an impersonal 'public power'. While most contemporary capitalist states are parliamentary democracies, real political power resides in the unelected permanent officialdom - the civil service/executive agencies, judiciary and, ultimately, the military. These institutions - popularly referred to as the 'deep state' - have historically been the centre of resistance to attempts by the socialist left to 'use' elected positions within the capitalist state to implement meaningful reforms, much less to break with the logic of capital.

Hence, he continues, "Only a decisive rupture in the institutional structure of the state - the dismantling of the old state and the construction of a working class counterpower - can allow working people to win significant reforms and begin the construction of socialism." And:

Ultimately, socialists will have to choose between one or the other as the dominant method of struggle, when faced with capitalist resistance to any left government. Put simply, these governments will have to choose between 'playing by the rules' of the capitalist state (respecting 'constitutional legality', etc) or mobilising working people and building a counterpower to the existing state.

He argues that in fact the same is true of the struggle for reforms:

Unfortunately, the logics of movement building and electoral and legislative politics are often in contradiction to one another. On the one hand, election campaigns whose primary goal is winning office prioritise getting 50% plus one votes on the lowest possible political basis. Legislative politics involves coalition building that leads to continual concessions on policy. Neither requires the mass of voters to be active participants in democratically setting programme or strategy, and generally discourages confrontation and political radicalism.

By contrast, disruptive social movements - in particular those rooted in the workplace - require building solidarity across the racial and gender divisions capitalism constantly creates and recreates, and taking risks in confronting capital and the state to win the movement's demands. This requires active participation in a democratic process of crafting demands and deciding



Karl Kautsky: could not, would not, break with the right

tactics. Successful movements always involve rising levels of confrontation with the established political and economic order, and tend to radicalise many of their participants.

I have quoted these passages at length to display the plain character of the argument as what Trotsky called "anti-parliamentary cretinism". Post says that "Clearly, those committed to the primary task of building mass, disruptive movements have and should engage in electoral politics." But his further description shows an inability to distinguish between winning *election as a representative*, on the one hand, and winning *governmental office*, on the other. The result is that it is not at all obvious what point an electoral intervention which aims not to win could have. The role of the elected MP or senator as a "tribune of the people", who uses the parliamentary platform to speak from opposition - well understood by the Second International, including the *Bolsheviks*⁵ - wholly disappears.

Post claims that only "massive, disruptive movements" can win reforms. That statement is plainly untrue. Winning reforms certainly requires that capital is faced with both a carrot - the willingness to settle a particular struggle for reforms - and a stick - the possibility of something worse (more expensive to capital) than conceding the reforms. The 'something worse' can be "massive, disruptive movements" - as in the early 19th century 'Ned Ludd', winning temporary union legalisation in 1825, or the 1860s 'Sheffield Outrages', that gained more prolonged legalisation. But it can also be the fear of losing *political control* - as the First International and the suffrage campaign of the 1860s contributed to the extension of the vote to the top layers of the working class in the 1867 Reform Act, and as the appearance of the Labour Party produced the 1906 Trade Disputes Act and the 'Lloyd George' provisions of school meals (1907) and old-age pensions (1909).

On the other hand, adverse market conditions for capital do *not* invariably result in the refusal of reforms. This is transparently visible, not only in the US 1930s 'new deal', but also in the French People's Front government - in both cases situations where bad economic conditions and demoralisation over union action produced a movement into electoral politics. That did not *in itself* produce reforms, but rather,

when capital made reform concessions, led to increased mass confidence, which *triggered* mass action, which in turn led to further major (temporary) concessions.

In fact, the result of the far left's anti-electoralism is precisely to yield the initiative to the right wing of the workers' movement or to forces further right. Thus Trotsky in 1931:

Parliamentary cretinism is a revolting sickness, but anti-parliamentary cretinism is not much better. We see this most clearly in the fate of the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists. The revolution poses political questions directly and at the present stage gives them a parliamentary form. The attention of the working class cannot but be concentrated on the Cortes, and the anarcho-syndicalists will secretly vote for the socialists or perhaps the republicans. To fight against parliamentary illusions without fighting simultaneously against the anti-parliamentary metaphysics of the anarchists is less possible in Spain than anywhere else.⁶

The point has been strikingly visible in the British SWP, which started from the same basic ideas about 'electoralism' as those Post has defended, but then moved in 2000-07 in the Socialist Alliance and Respect exactly into opportunist political interventions which tried to pretend to be 'old Labour' - and then back to evasion of the issues of electoral politics. Most recently, the SWP's oscillation between opportunist electoralism and anti-parliamentary cretinism has largely silenced it in relation to the mass movement into the Labour Party around the election of Jeremy Corbyn, and the savage, coordinated capitalist campaign of media defamation in the endeavours to win back control of Labour, if not destroy it. Here *the struggle between the classes* has for the moment taken the form of a struggle over control of the Labour Party. No doubt this will not be the case forever; but the point is that - as Trotsky pointed out - the class struggle does, part of the time, take electoral and parliamentary forms.

Post v Muldoon

In March 2019, Post offered a polemic against James Muldoon on Kautsky.⁷ Unlike my critique of Muldoon in my second article, Post's argument is not addressed mainly to what Muldoon

celebrated - Kautsky's 1919 'Guidelines for a socialist action programme'. Rather, it is mainly addressed to denouncing Kautsky for not being a mass-actionist.

There is one oddball feature which does address 1919. Muldoon wrote:

Kautsky diverged from both the SPD and the Spartacists. He believed that universal suffrage and parliamentary institutions should form the basis of the new republic. But he did not see any compelling justification for restricting suffrage to paid factory workers, which would disenfranchise large elements of the lower classes, including many women, peasants and the unemployed.⁸

Post responds: "Kautsky's argument that a republic based on workers' councils would exclude significant groups of workers was demagogic and wrong." That is because "The councils organised the unemployed, and clerical and retail workers."

This point is, in fact, not in the 'Guidelines'. In *The dictatorship of the proletariat* in the same year, Kautsky wrote:

Even in a country so highly developed economically as Germany, where the proletariat is so numerous, the establishment of a Soviet Republic would disfranchise great masses of the people. In 1907, the number of men, with their families, belonging to occupations which comprised the three great groups of agriculture, industry and trade - that is, wage-earners and salaried persons - amounted to something over 35 million, as against 17 million belonging to other sections. A party could therefore very well have the majority of wage-earners behind it and yet form a minority of the population.

On the other hand, when the workers vote together, they need not fear the united votes of their opponents. By obliging them to fight their common foes, universal suffrage causes them to close up their ranks sooner than if the political struggle were confined to the soviets, from which the opponents are excluded, and in which the political struggle of a socialist party takes the form of attacking another socialist party. Instead of class-consciousness, sectarian fanaticism is thereby induced.

This is part of a more extensive polemic, the gist of which is that forms of denying the suffrage to the *bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie* both excludes sections of the working class who supplement their income by letting rooms to lodgers and other 'petty bourgeois' activities, and gives the working class a false sense of its own strength.⁹

This is a very different point from that made by Muldoon. Muldoon's point is, I *think*, taken from one of my own critiques of 'councilism', or from some similar source, rather than from Kautsky. In 2007 I wrote:

The point is that the 'classic image' of the soviet/workers' council form - as applied to a state, as opposed to an organ for struggle - would disenfranchise a large part of the proletariat as a class ... The proletariat as a class is defined in Marxist theory by its separation from the means of production: not by being at any particular moment employed,

or employed in industry. The unwaged, including 'housewives' and pensioners, are part of the proletariat.¹⁰

David Broder, criticising my *Revolutionary strategy* in 2008, made against this argument the same point that Post makes against Muldoon: that the Russian soviets were not mere councils of workplace delegates. I replied, in that blog discussion, that my argument was directed against the modern far left's fetishism of councils of factory delegates as being 'proletarian', because they were based on the workplace, as opposed to territorial suffrage, rather than against the much broader *ad hoc* expedients created in 1917.¹¹

So far this appears to be just a story of trivial sloppiness on both Muldoon's part and Post's in not looking up Kautsky's actual arguments.¹² But there is a point of very considerable substance posed by it.

My basic conclusion in 2007, and again in 2008, was that the idea that the working class's organs of struggle under capitalism form the natural basis of the proletarian dictatorship is misconceived. Rather, the very features which emerge from the character of these organs as *organs of struggle* prevent them, when used as *organs of power*, from mobilising the full weight of the proletariat as a class and from exercising an effectual oversight and accountability over the developing bureaucracy.

Kautsky's argument is a very different one, and it rests on the much larger claim that the proletariat cannot adopt constitutional means for the *institutional* subordination of the capitalists as a class without destroying its own political support. This is to misunderstand radically the mechanisms of the *dictatorship of the bourgeoisie*.

Certainly, Kautsky was right that formally disenfranchising the small employers and petty renters - as the 1918 Soviet constitution did - does not disenfranchise the capitalists; but the reason for this is not primarily petty bourgeois and working class support for capital, as Kautsky argues. It is rather that capital rules immediately through corruption, lobbying, the corrupt, advertising-funded media, the 'rule of law' and the normal sale of justice through the 'free market in legal services', and more mediately through flight of capital as a means of coercing governments. In Russia flight of capital started in 1917; corruption and lobbying persisted through 'war communism' and emerged into full visibility in the post-1921 New Economic Policy.

The problem of creating the dictatorship of the proletariat - meaning by this working class rule or a state subordinated to the working class - is to overcome these mechanisms of capitalist control without creating a dictatorship of the state bureaucracy, which will inevitably be *more* susceptible to such capitalist control. To give a couple of immediate and not ostensibly Stalinist examples, the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 is very unambiguously anti-democratic both in imposing the *Führerprinzip* post of 'leader' on all parties, and in allowing the Electoral Commission to prevent parties standing under their own names - a power which has been selectively exercised against the far left; and recent British proposals for state press regulation have been designed in a way which will penalise *small* presses, while the large-scale media can avoid the problem by hiring expensive lawyers.¹³ In the USSR, of course, trusting the state apparatus produced both police tyranny and economic chaos, and in the end the decision of the bureaucratic gatekeepers to restore capitalism.

Kautsky's approach in *The dictatorship of the proletariat* and the 'Guidelines for a socialist action programme' both left in place the mechanisms of capitalist control

(‘freedom of the press’ and so on) and *also* proposed to *increase* the bureaucratic and judicial power through forms of state control (no mean achievement at the end of the Second Reich).

Anti-electoralism

I have spent more space on this constitutional issue than either Muldoon or Post did, because it is an important one. But Post's critique is mainly addressed to supporting his anti-electoralism, already developed in his critique of Chibber. It is, hence, more about Kautsky's overall record than about the ideas Muldoon wants to use. Post argues:

Fundamentally, Kautsky's strategy of 'combining' the independent working-class organisation and winning 'power' through elections was based on unrealistic ideas about both working class consciousness and organisation. The notion that the working class would gradually accumulate its forces through the building of larger and larger unions and popular organisations and increasing its vote until it became the majority party ignored the *episodic* nature of working class struggle and consciousness.

While social democratic party and union officials believed that power would come through 'slow and steady accumulation of forces', the reality is that working class struggle under capitalism takes the form of *massive and discontinuous* upsurges. It is during these periodic upheavals that working people can win gains and build democratic organisations that cement solidarity and overcome the divisions and fragmentation of the class.

This is, of course, rubbish, for the reasons I have already given in relation to the critique of Chibber. Working class consciousness develops *both* through gradual work - building up unions, cooperatives, parties and so on - *and* through episodic mass struggles and upsurges. To argue that it develops *only* through mass-struggle upsurges is pure Bakunin against Marx.

But it also radically misses its Kautsky target. Here is Kautsky in the notorious *The dictatorship of the proletariat*:

The Russian Revolution of 1905 brought the idea of the mass strike to a head in the German social democracy ... it resolved that when the executive should consider the necessity for the political mass strike to exist it should get into touch with the General Commission of the Trade Unions, and concert all measures necessary to secure successful action.

After all our experience with the mass strike, we know today that this resolution was fundamentally wrong. For one reason because a mass strike is likely to be all the more successful by breaking out unexpectedly in a particular situation, with spontaneous suddenness. Its organisation by party and trade union machinery would make necessary such preparations as would lead to its frustration.

We, therefore, understand why the trade union bureaucracy tends to oppose all spontaneous action on a large scale. Trade unions are absolutely necessary. The proletariat is the stronger, the greater the number of its members, and the larger the financial resources of its trade unions. Widespread and permanent organisations, with many ramifications, are not possible without a machinery for permanent administration: that is, a bureaucracy. The trade union bureaucracy is as essential as the trade union itself ...

This is not, however, to say that all its pretensions must be

recognised. It should be restricted to its first function, in performing which it cannot be replaced: that is, the administration of trade union funds, the extension of organisation and the giving of advice to the workers in their struggles. But it is unsuitable for leading that powerful mass strike, which tends to become the characteristic of the times.

By virtue of their experience and knowledge, trade union officials and parliamentarians may here successfully assist, but the initiative tends to fall into the hands of workshop committees. In various countries outside Russia, such as in England, these institutions (shop stewards) have played a big part in mass struggles, side by side with ordinary trade unionism.

The soviet organisation is, therefore, one of the most important phenomena of our time. It promises to acquire an outstanding significance in the great, decisive struggles between capital and labour, which are before us.¹⁴

I do not mean to celebrate this passage as *true*: it fails to recognise the need for the creation of institutional forms for the *subordination* of the bureaucracy to the members. It offers in substance spontaneity and workers' councils as a way of *going round* the bureaucracy without *overthrowing its rule in the movement* (like Post!). But Kautsky is here, precisely, celebrating spontaneous mass actions and arguing *against* the trade union bureaucracy's opposition to spontaneous mass actions.

Three episodes

Post argues for the rejection of Kautsky on the basis of three episodes. The first is the Prussian suffrage movement of 1910-11. The second is Kautsky on World War I and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). The third is the German revolution of 1918-19.

He concludes with the argument that Kautsky's perspective is politically unrealistic because an elected left government would be faced in the first place with flight of capital (correct) and then with a Chilean-style military coup, which it could only overcome by creating workers' councils.

On the Prussian suffrage movement, Post claims:

History would prove Luxemburg and her comrades correct on the suffrage issue. The SPD leadership, with the active support of Kautsky - the spokesperson of the emerging 'orthodox Marxist centre' - derailed the militant movement for suffrage reform in Prussia. The 'three-class' voting system remained in place until 1919, when massive strikes and mutinies and the threat of workers' revolution finally produced universal suffrage in Germany.

This is pretty certainly wrong. Both Lenin and Trotsky at the time judged that Kautsky was correct that there was insufficient mass support to go over to the all-out general strike, which would result in defeat.¹⁵ The experiment of 'driving the class struggle forward' with insufficiently *broad* mass support was tried in Saxony in March 1921, with disastrous consequences.¹⁶

Further, Jens-Uwe Guettel has shown that the SPD leadership was in the summer of 1914 actually planning a general strike to demand universal suffrage in Prussia; which was pre-empted by the war.¹⁷ And Post's characterisation of 1918-19 as a mere "threat of workers' revolution" is radically mistaken: this was the *actual revolutionary overthrow* of the Second Reich - although the Majority Socialists proceeded to create a republic which was, like the French Third Republic as "the empire of 1799 without the emperor" (Engels), the Reich without the kaiser.

The war question is important to

Kautsky's evolution to the right, but completely irrelevant to Post's anti-electoralism. There is no reason to suppose that anything less than the actual seizure of power, involving soldiers ceasing to obey their officers, can prevent any state from going to war. Mass demonstrations certainly did not do the job in 1914.

Post's integration of this issue in his anti-electoralist line invites reference to Alan Shandro's argument, in his *Lenin and the logic of hegemony*, that focussing on Kautsky's alleged fatalism or electoralism diverts attention from his *actual* over-valuation of unity - in 1914 and after, with the pro-war right wing of the party.¹⁸ Kautsky could have pursued a defeatist policy in 1914 - though it should be said that *only* Lenin and Zinoviev pursued this argument at this stage. He could certainly have pursued some sort of anti-war policy. But it would inevitably have been, at the beginning, a propaganda line. A substantial chunk of the 'direct actionist' left, led by long-time leftist Parvus, actually went over to support for the German war effort.¹⁹

1919 and the following period is a very unambiguous case of Kautsky scabbing, arguing evasively in relation to the Majority-SPD's alliance with the far-right generals, and rapidly moving back to support for the Majority-SPD, as the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany majority went over to the communists. In this case we actually have Kautsky's explanation: *The dictatorship of the proletariat*, written in spring-summer 1918 against the dissolution of the Russian Constituent Assembly, before the outbreak of the German revolution.

Kautsky's basic claim was that the Russian Revolution was premature - neither the society as a whole nor the proletariat in particular being ready for socialism; and that *in consequence* the Bolsheviks, though starting with Marxism, by the decision to take political power against the Provisional Government, were driven to Blanquism. There were two basic elements of this argument.

The first was Kautsky's rejection *a priori* of the idea that the proletarian revolution would pose the question of civil war:

Many people confuse civil war with the social revolution, considering this to be its form, and are therefore prepared to excuse the acts of force inevitable in a civil war. This has always been the case in revolutions, they say, and ever will be.

We social democrats are decidedly not of the opinion that that which has been must always be. Such ideas of the revolution are formed on the examples of previous bourgeois revolutions. The proletarian revolution will be accomplished under quite different conditions from these.

The bourgeois revolutions broke out in states in which a despotism, supported by an army separated from the people, suppressed all free movements, in which freedom of the press, of public meeting, of organisation and general suffrage did not exist, and in which there was no real representation of the people. There the struggle against the government necessarily took the form of a civil war.²⁰

The historical reasoning here is plain nonsense. Consider, without looking further, the American Civil War - one of the most destructive wars in history - characterised by Marx as a 'slaveholders' revolt' against the results of an election, and the sort of thing the workers' movement could expect if it won an election.

The second was Kautsky's explicit commitment to socialism in one country. This formed the ground of his claim that the Bolsheviks' gamble on the European revolution was unacceptable:

The Bolshevik revolution was based on the supposition that it would be the starting point of a general European revolution, and that the bold initiative of Russia would summon the proletariat of all Europe to rise ...

The revolution which would bring about socialism in Europe would also be the means of removing the obstacles to the carrying through of socialism in Russia, which are created by the economic backwardness of that country.

This was all very logically thought out, and quite well founded, provided the supposition was granted, that the Russian Revolution must inevitably unchain the European revolution. But what if this did not happen?

... It is an old Marxist saying that revolutions cannot be made, but arise out of conditions. The conditions of western Europe are, however, so different from those of Russia that a revolution there would not necessarily provoke one here.²¹

In the light of 1918-21 *across Europe*, Kautsky's reasoning in summer 1918 was plainly unsound. It was already falsified by the outbreak of the German Revolution.

But again, none of this is actually about electoralism versus mass actionism/strikism. Once we recognise that the real issues are Kautsky's *a priori* exclusion of civil war in a 'democracy' and his commitments to 'socialism in one country'/'national roads', it becomes apparent that *mass actionism* is no solution to the practical problem. The Chilean Cordones Industriales, though widespread, could not defeat the coherent army in the coup. The problem is to *split the armed forces* - which requires, precisely, a substantial period of *political undermining* the legitimacy of the constitutional order to which they are loyal.

Constitutional loyalism disguised as gradualism, like Chibber's, promotes the unity of the armed forces against the working class. 'Socialism from below' direct-actionism, like Post's, simply leaves this unity untouched. And, like the Spanish anarchists in the 1930s, it hands the *political* initiative to the right ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Socialists_\(United_States\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Socialists_(United_States)).
2. <https://solidarity-us.org/about>.
3. www.jacobinmag.com/2018/02/socialist-organization-strategy-electoral-politics.
4. V Chibber *Locked in place* Princeton UP 2003, pxx.
5. A Nimtz *Lenin's electoral strategy from Marx and Engels through the revolution of 1905 and Lenin's electoral strategy from 1907 to the October Revolution of 1917* London 2014.
6. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/spain/spain01.htm.
7. www.jacobinmag.com/2019/03/karl-kautsky-socialist-strategy-german-revolution.
8. www.jacobinmag.com/2019/01/karl-kautsky-german-revolution-democracy-socialism.
9. www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1918/dictprole/ch07.htm.
10. 'What is workers' power?' *Weekly Worker* August 5 2007.
11. <https://thecomune.wordpress.com/2008/08/29/revolutionary-strategy>.
12. Neither provides citations, so my hypothesis above about where Muldoon's point came from is necessarily tentative.
13. M Macnair, 'Leveson, libel and lucre' *Weekly Worker* October 17 2013.
14. www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1918/dictprole/ch07.htm.
15. L Trotsky, letter to Kautsky July 21 1910, quoted in extenso by P Nettl *Rosa Luxemburg* Berlin 1989, p433.
16. There is a convenient short discussion at www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/broue/works/1964/summer/march-action.htm.
17. 'Reform, revolution, and the "original catastrophe": political change in Prussia and Germany on the eve of the First World War' *Journal of Modern History* Vol 91, pp311-40 (2019).
18. A Shandro *Lenin and the Logic of hegemony: political practice and theory in the class struggle* Leiden 2014, pp75-79 (addressing 1910; but the other side of the coin is 1914 and after).
19. M Macnair, 'Die Glocke or the inversion of theory: from anti-imperialism to pro-Germanism' *Critique* Vol 42, pp353-75 (2014).
20. www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1918/dictprole/ch05.htm.
21. www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1918/dictprole/ch06.htm.

COMMUNIST UNIVERSITY

Spaces for left thinking

Despite witch-hunting attempts, CU saw a full week of open and frank debate, reports **Danny Hammill**

For this year's Communist University, the CPGB's annual summer school, we returned to the very convenient location of Goldsmiths University in South London. However, for a while it seemed touch and go as to whether the event would even go ahead thanks to a little flurry of witch-hunting anti-red scare stories in outlets like the scurrilous Guido Fawkes blog and the high-Tory *Daily Telegraph* (August 15).

According to the *Telegraph*, the campus was hosting an event which includes a "number of individuals who have a history of baiting Jews or outright anti-Semitism" - naming Tony Greenstein of the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign for his crime of "accusing Zionists of collaborating with the Nazis"; Graham Bash, editor of *Labour Briefing*, as guilty for having "spoken at events" organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt; Moshé Machover, born in British-mandate Palestine and a "notorious" anti-Zionist campaigner, who is Hampstead and Kilburn Labour Party's elected political officer, and Tina Werkmann of Labour Party Marxists - giving a talk at CU about 'Turning the tables on the witch-hunters'.

The fact that three of these comrades are Jewish is neither here nor there, of course - they must be self-hating. We were also invited to believe that Goldsmiths is no longer a "safe space" for students of "Jewish heritage" due to the presence of these terrifying individuals. Naturally, this made the university authorities very twitchy because of its lawful commitment to 'safeguarding' polices - nobody should be made to feel uncomfortable or have precious beliefs challenged, with the so-called Campaign Against Antisemitism agitating for the university to cancel the summer school. In the end CU got the green light from Goldsmiths, but the furor highlighted how the Marxist left could well find it increasingly difficult to book venues or spaces for debate, especially in corporate bodies like universities.

Tipping point

Appropriately then, the very first speaker at CU was none other than Graham Bash, who spoke on 'How can we transform Labour into a vehicle for socialism?' - a very timely question. Comrade Bash immediately referenced how the left will find it harder to find places to gather and talk. In his view, Jeremy Corbyn's ascension to the leadership thanks to "the morons" marked a "shifting of the tectonic plates" in the Labour Party. Since then though, Corbyn and his allies have been surrounded by hostile forces and the left has been "firefighting" in the midst of a witchhunt and the "slow coup" against the Labour leader designed to restore the "primacy" of the PLP. One of the central tasks now, argued comrade Bash, was to build a "left alternative" to Momentum, which as a national organisation has become purely a bureaucratic tool of Jon Lansman in the service of the anti-left witch-hunt.

But the comrade stressed that "time is running out", both for the Marxist anti-Zionist left within the Labour Party and also in terms of looming catastrophic climate change - a recurrent theme throughout the week. Comrade Bash feared we were reaching the "tipping point" in every sense of the term and worried too about a national government from above designed to prevent both Brexit and Jeremy Corbyn's installation as prime minister.

In a related session, Jack Conrad discussed 'Brexit, elections and the Labour Party'. While he had predicted from the very beginning that Jeremy Corbyn would win the leadership contest

once he got his name on the ballot paper, comrade Conrad had, until now, never taken the idea of Brexit seriously, as the parliamentary numbers just did not add up - plus big business and the establishment were generally hostile. But things have changed radically since the 2016 referendum - primarily there was the election of Donald Trump as US president, who seems determined to break up the European Union. And then, of course, there is the advent of the Boris Johnson government, headed by someone determined to deliver Brexit by October 31, "do or die".

Comrade Conrad remarked that Jeremy Corbyn's recent letter to cabinet secretary Sir Mark Sedwill - complaining that Johnson's seeming intention to refuse to resign if he lost a no-confidence motion was an "unconstitutional abuse of power" - was a pristine example of "parliamentary cretinism". If we do have an early election, with a totally unpredictable outcome, the comrade was adamant that there must be no collaboration with the Liberal Democrats and Tories - the very people who imposed austerity on the working class. Not for the first time, nor the last, Jack rejected the 'lesser of two evils' approach to politics regrettably favoured by much of the left and warned of the dangers of Millerandism - ie, 'ministerial socialism', which VI Lenin denounced as "practical Bernsteinism". More broadly, the comrade reiterated the classical Marxist principle of hostility to referendums/plebiscites (so-called 'direct democracy'), which divide parties and the working class - as obviously demonstrated by Brexit.

On the following day, comrade Conrad gave another talk, titled 'Climate change and system change' - nothing could be more important. Programmatically, comrade Conrad insisted, we need to move away from the mega-intensive nature of capitalist agricultural practices that inevitably involves despoliation of the soil, as Marx noted - saying that we need to heal the "metabolic rift" created by capitalism, being uniquely 'designed' to destroy the natural world, driven as it is by production for profit, not use (see pages 6-7 of this issue).

Israel

Moshé Machover gave an excellent opening on 'One state, two states - two impossibilities'. The comrade outlined his theory that both 'solutions' are illusory as nothing can be resolved "within the box" of Palestine/Israel - that "deception is coming to an end", he predicted. Nor is there any way of overthrowing the Zionist regime "without the consent and participation of the Hebrew working class". The only viable way forward is within a wider Arab context that sees the Hebrew (or Israeli-Jewish) people become part of a wider, new, regional working class. In what the *Jewish Chronicle* described as "hugely inflammatory remarks", comrade Machover said the idea that the Jews were expelled from the region 2,000 years ago under the Romans was a "historical invention".

Later in the week, the comrade debated with Tony Greenstein on the issue, 'Israeli Jews: are they a Hebrew nation?' This was a curious debate in some respects, as comrade Greenstein conceded in his opening remarks that the Hebrew people in modern Israel could indeed be viewed as a nation - something he had previously consistently denied. However, according to comrade Greenstein, it did not matter that the Israeli Jews are a nation, as they still ought not to have the right to self-determination, since

that right applies only to oppressed nations.

As usual, Mike Macnair gave two richly detailed openings grounded in history - 'Identity politics and economism' and 'The programmatic bankruptcy of the left'. In the former the comrade pointed out that the recent split in the US International Socialist Organization was partly to do with intersectional politics, where essentially each group of the self-identified oppressed has a *veto* over the other - leading to paralysis and endless splits. The 'anti-Semitism' slander campaign inside the Labour Party is a mutated form of identity politics, he added, with the right saying that anti-Zionism is 'anti-Jewish identity' and hence anti-Semitic. But, of course, the essence of the Marxist programme was "for equal rights and equal duties of all, *without distinction of sex or race*". In the communist conception of working class organisation (democratic centralism), everyone has a voice and vote, but no veto - we need *common action*.

As for the all too obvious programmatic bankruptcy of the left, comrade Macnair pointed out that the 'mass strikism' associated with Rosa Luxemburg and so favoured by the Socialist Workers Party and others on the left frequently leads to tailism. On the other side of the coin, you have the fetishisation of soviets, especially by Trotskyists - a feature that was on display at CU - as if that is the only form of working class rule. But the real Leon Trotsky, as opposed to the imaginary one, warned against this fetishisation, writing in 1931 with regards to the situation in Spain that "parliamentary cretinism is a revolting sickness, but anti-parliamentary cretinism is not much better".

Instead, said comrade Macnair, we need a *minimum-maximum* programme: the minimum section specifies the nature of the transfer of power to the working class, the institutions of the working class, and how we exercise control over society. The maximum programme is the "imagination of the future society", as Mike put it - how we envisage the first and second stages of communism. What definitely should *not* be in the communist programme is a series of tactics - which should always be supremely flexible and can only be decided in the concrete. Unfortunately, a lot of the left adhere to the reverse view - tactical intransigence, programmatic flexibility.

Willingness

Now a CU stalwart, and entertaining as ever, Chris Knight of the Radical Anthropology Group gave two openings - 'Noam Chomsky and me' (describing a very fraught relationship) and 'When Eve laughed: the origins of language'. The latter session intersected to a certain extent with Yasmine Mather's session on 'The rise of machines, AI and quantum computers': both comrades agreed that machines/robots/AI will never understand humour or can be consciously self-aware - they do not possess or understand language in any true sense, which seems a uniquely human attribute.

Hillel Ticktin gave a talk on capitalist decline - we are *already* in a depression, he stated - and another entitled 'Predicting the collapse of the Soviet Union' - something he had done decades before the USSR actually fell. As a student in Kiev in the early 1960s, he was confronted daily by the appalling backwardness of the Soviet Union. For example, it was near impossible to find

items such as a ballpoint pen.

Michael Roberts informed us about 'Modern monetary theory', which is neither new nor radical - though it influences the likes of Chris Williamson, John McDonnell and Bernie Sanders. I do have to note that comrade Roberts does seem unduly enthusiastic about seizing the 'commanding heights of the economy', which ultimately is a variant of socialism in one country: in today's truly interlocked global economy, what exactly is a *British* company or firm?

Lawrence Parker talked on 'The Labour Party's historical relationship to Marxism'. Yes, Labour famously owes more to Methodism than communism, but it is significant that the party republished the *Communist manifesto* in 1948 (albeit with a disingenuous introduction by Harold Laski). Anne McShane discussed 'Russian Revolution: women as the barometer of social progress', focusing on Zhenotdel - the women's department of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) - and the Communist Women's International, both closed down in 1930 as part of the Stalinite counterrevolution.

Ed Griffiths, author of *Towards a science of belief systems* (2014), covered a topic never explicitly discussed before at CU - conspiracy theories. He identified two main types: the "less interesting" one that involves a super-villain like Professor Moriarty or Fu Manchu manipulating events, and those that involve some sort of evil ruling power that is *really* running the world behind all the cover-ups. Pauline Hadaway's session on 'Brexit: are politics transcending left and right?' was unusual in many ways. She is a regular contributor to Spiked Online, whose origins lie in the Revolutionary Communist Party - which left behind working class politics decades ago, embracing rightwing libertarianism. Pauline is also a member of the Full Brexit group, which is "committed to seizing the historic opportunity Brexit offers for restoring popular sovereignty, repairing democracy and renewing our

economy". But from her talk it was unclear whether she supported a no-deal Brexit or would back Boris Johnson's attempts at a "do or die" Brexit.

In a positive development, there were five fringe meetings put on by non-CPGB comrades - even if the quality was somewhat uneven (there was a rather incoherent opening on 'Stalinism and the new left' from members of the Platypus group). In his fringe on climate change, Alan Gibson of the Bolshevik Tendency in Ireland, who is now working inside Extinction Rebellion, expressed the opinion that a left split will emerge from such a movement, obviating the need to get involved in Jeremy Corbyn's "reformist" Labour Party. Naturally, as communists, we strive to give CU an internationalist flavour, and we must especially commend the constructive contributions from comrades representing the Marxist left within both the Socialist Party in the Netherlands and the Democratic Socialists of America in the US, who stayed for the entire week - as did comrade René Barthes of the Pole of Communist Revival in France.

Throughout CU Socialist Fight members, dogged as always, made frequent interventions - even if that meant repeating the same old formulations whether on 'a party of the whole class' or the so-called 'transitional method'. And there were the usual inimitable interventions from the eccentric Economic and Philosophical Science Review group, who consistently warn us about an impending fascist takeover.

Apart from patience, this demonstrates our *insistence* on open and frank debate with our political opponents and different tendencies. This could not be more different from the dull summer schools of the left, the various sect leaders having no interest in developing the membership theoretically and politically. While the overall attendance was just over a hundred, many more joined us online ●

Fighting fund

Kind words

We narrowly failed to make our £2,000 fighting fund target for August, falling short by just £68. Still, the second half of the month marked a vast improvement over the first - no less than £1,434 came our way from August 15-31!

Let me highlight several outstanding donations. Pride of place goes to comrade EG, who contributed a magnificent £300 by PayPal. Then there were three substantial standing order payments, each of three figures, from, KB, PM and SK. Other standing orders included those from MM (£75), DG (£60), GB, TB and JT (£50 each) and TR (£40).

Then there was comrade PB, who handed over £60 in cash to our editor at the CPGB's Communist University. On top of that, two US comrades clicked on the PayPal button. In addition to regular donor PM (£25), comrade WE, who has been reading the *Weekly Worker* for "seven or eight years" now, has set up a new monthly donation of

£5 in appreciation.

Finally comrade OG sent us £15 - admittedly "a small cheque", she wrote, but that's "better than no cheque at all"! We ended August £1,932 better off.

And now we're into September and, as usual, the month has started with a good number of standing orders - no fewer than 17 of them, ranging from £6 from DC to the £30 contributed by CG and ST, EW's £40 and AC's £50. Finally, HT sent us a handy cheque for £25, which means that we start September with £327 in the kitty after just four days.

But now we need to make up for August's shortfall, so we can continue to put out the weekly paper, about which so many of our readers have nothing but kind words ●

Robbie Rix

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

TRIBUNAL

Reputational self-harm

Hammersmith and Fulham council is appealing against the employment tribunal's decision that its dismissal of Stan Keable was 'unfair'. Ed Kirby reports

Stan Keable was sacked by Hammersmith and Fulham borough council for the critical words on Zionism he spoke during a civilized exchange at the 'Enough is Enough' demonstration and Jewish Voice for Labour counterdemonstration on Parliament Square in March 2018. He was fully exonerated by an employment tribunal, but council officers have decided to appeal. If that appeal is allowed to go ahead, not only will more precious funds be wasted on lawyers' fees, but the council's reputation will be further damaged.

The appeal is, of course, politically motivated. Stephen Cowan, the Labour leader of the council, wants to uphold the British's establishment's 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' false narrative. In this Stan Keable is not the real target. That is Jeremy Corbyn - and the entire Labour left. In the attempt to see the back of Corbyn, the Labour right is quite prepared to extend the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' witch-hunt from the Labour Party into the workplace.

The council's failure at the five-day tribunal hearing in May - a full year after Stan Keable's dismissal - was humiliating. Judge Jill Brown found that the dismissal, for "serious misconduct", was "both procedurally and substantively unfair" and "well beyond the range of reasonable responses of a reasonable employer".

Stan Keable has asked for reinstatement, and his work colleagues are looking forward to welcoming him back into the housing team. Departmental director Nicholas Austin - the man who formally sacked him - told the tribunal that he had "an entirely clean disciplinary record", was "good at his job" and described him as "good, thorough, dogged in pursuit of landlords in trying to improve housing conditions". The issue of reinstatement was due to be resolved, along with appropriate compensation, at an October 2 "remedy hearing" - which may now be postponed, extending Stan Keable's time in limbo. Hopefully, the tribunal will refuse permission to appeal. Criticism of Zionism and Israel should be calmly debated, not gagged and banned.

On March 27 2018 - the morning after the 'Enough is Enough' demonstration, supposedly against Jeremy Corbyn's anti-Jewish racism - Cowan forwarded to the council's chief executive officer a 105-second video clip - an extract from a political conversation in Parliament Square between Stan Keable and an unknown man, which had been publicly tweeted by Chelsea and Fulham Tory MP Greg Hands. Cowan's email stated:

LBHF [London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham] employee Stan Keeble [sic] making anti-Semitic comments. I'll let Mr Keeble's words speak for themselves. I believe he has brought the good name of LBHF into disrepute and committed gross misconduct. Please have this looked at immediately and act accordingly and with expediency ... Please advise me at your earliest opportunity what action you have taken.

Hands' malicious tweet, tagged to Cowan and Hammersmith Labour MP Andy Slaughter, was not a complaint to the council, but a public attack on the Labour Party, smearing the party as a home for anti-Semites. Stan Keable's employment at LBHF was unknown to



Stan Keable: calm, reasonable and vindicated

Hands, but well known to Cowan, who seized the opportunity to extend the scope of the anti-Corbyn witch-hunt to the workplace. Cowan was, at this stage, the only complainant - joined later only by Greg Hands himself. His Twitter campaign to drum up a storm of protest - and of BBC *Newsnight* journalist David Grossman, who first tweeted the video publicly - produced zero results. Tens of thousands viewed the offending video, Stan Keable's comments were reproduced in the *Evening Standard* and *Mail Online* - surrounded, as usual, by reports of unsubstantiated allegations of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party - but no-one complained to H&F council. Hands and Cowan were alone.

By labelling Stan Keable's comments "anti-Semitic" and saying "gross misconduct", Cowan effectively instructed council officers to suspend and dismiss him. Judge Brown found that they were "clearly put under very considerable pressure by Mr Hands MP and by councillor Cowan to dismiss the claimant".

Four hours after Cowan's email, Stan Keable was unceremoniously suspended from work - on charges which *did not include anti-Semitism*. One presumes that the council's lawyers had pointed out that telling well documented, historical truths about the Zionist movement did not constitute racism. That would have been a good moment to tell Cowan that he was wrong and advise him to drop the matter. But an instruction is an instruction. Omitting the leader's unsustainable "anti-Semitism" complaint, the suspension letter described the comments as "inappropriate", "insensitive", "likely to be considered offensive" and having "the potential to bring the council into disrepute".

The tribunal, however, took a different view. Judge Brown "found that the claimant's demeanour throughout the video clip was calm, reasonable, non-threatening and conversational".

Stan Keable was not told that the complainant was the council leader, nor the substance of the complaint - that it was explicitly about "anti-Semitism" - those embarrassing facts were only revealed a year later, shortly before the tribunal hearing. Nor did the suspension letter specify which comments were considered "offensive". The original complainant (Cowan) had not done so. Two "offensive" comments were eventually selected by the investigating officer, Peter Smith: (1) "the Zionist movement at the time collaborated with them" (ie, the Nazi regime), and (2) "The Zionist

movement from the beginning was saying that they accepted that Jews are not acceptable here" (ie, in the countries where they currently live).

Stan Keable's Jewish former wife, Hilary Russell, had already very helpfully emailed the council: "I can say absolutely confidently that he is no anti-Semite ... it is not anti-Semitic to be opposed to Zionism, as many Jews are, or to criticise the government of Israel."

Keep digging

This would have been a good moment for Smith to climb out of the hole he had been dropped into and close the case. But he chose to keep digging, adding the Equality Act 2010 to the allegations. If anti-Semitism won't stick, let's try anti-Zionism.

He wrote: "If Zionism constitutes a belief under the terms of the Equality Act, then the statements made by the claimant that the Zionist movement collaborated with the Nazis and that it accepted that 'Jews are not acceptable here' might be deemed to have breached the Equality Act" and "do not promote inclusion nor treat everyone with dignity and respect and ... have breached the council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy".

Subsequently, whether a belief in Zionist ideology should be considered a protected characteristic under the Equality Act was neither claimed by the council nor determined by the tribunal. In any case, the act does not forbid *criticism* of a protected "religion or belief": it outlaws harassment, discrimination and victimisation of believers. But the council "did not find that the claimant had made anti-Semitic or racist or discriminatory remarks", so this seed fell on stony ground.

In his zealous search for a case to answer, Smith concluded his investigation report by adding a truly Orwellian allegation to the charge sheet, effectively saying that council employees must not attend demonstrations:

That, in attending a counter-demonstration outside the houses of parliament on March 26 2018, Stan Keable knowingly increased the possibility of being challenged about his views and subsequently proceeded to express views that were in breach of the council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and the council's Code of Conduct ...

Unsurprisingly, the tribunal upheld the right to demonstrate. The judge concluded that Stan Keable's comments were "an expression of

his views and beliefs. The claimant, as other employees, had the right to freedom of expression and assembly, which would normally include attending rallies and expressing their views there." As Justice Michael Briggs commented in the High Court (Smith v Trafford Housing Trust [2013] IRLR 86, HC),

The encouragement of diversity in the recruitment of employees inevitably involves employing persons with widely different religious and political beliefs and views, some of which, however moderately expressed, may cause distress among the holders of deeply felt opposite views. The frank but lawful expression of religious or political views may frequently cause a degree of upset, and even offence, to those with deeply held contrary views, even where none is intended by the speaker. This is a necessary price to be paid for freedom of speech.

Quite so.

Unable to dismiss Stan for anti-Semitism or anti-Zionism, the council's attempt to establish "misconduct" for being "offensive" failed at the tribunal. The judge "took into account the line of case law which says that for a single act of misconduct to justify dismissal it must be serious, wilful and obvious":

The misconduct must be obvious; it must be such that the employee would plainly recognise it as conduct which would merit summary dismissal if discovered by his employers. Such recognition might be either because the employers had expressly made known to their staff that a particular type of misconduct would be treated as a dismissible offence or because the employee, judging the matter for himself according to the ordinarily accepted standard of morality of the time, would recognise dismissal as the predictable consequence of such misconduct (Bishop v Graham Group plc EAT 800/98).

The basis of the decision to dismiss Stan Keable was Nicholas Austin's personal view that "the average person would interpret the claimant's comments as suggesting that Zionists collaborated with the Nazis in the holocaust and that that was highly likely to cause offence". However, the judge disagreed: "Mr Smith had not interpreted the claimant's comments in that way, nor had Mr Hands in his tweet or letter ... and nor had the other evidence which Mr Smith had relied on from the *Mail Online* or the *Evening Standard*."

Why is a Labour council pursuing this pathetic case - wasting public money in pursuit of the restriction of our hard-won rights of freedom of speech and assembly? These rights are the products of, above all, the class struggle of the workers' movement, from the Chartists onwards. This case illustrates the fact that the class struggle is taking place at present in a sharp form within the Labour Party - councillor Cowan has placed himself firmly on the side of the ruling class.

One can only assume the council is counting on the legal strategy of "deep pockets wins". Stan Keable's legal costs, if the appeal is permitted, are likely to rise above £10,000. Readers are urged to contribute at www.gofundme.com/ReinstateStanKeable ●

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.

The *Weekly Worker* is licensed by November Publications under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>. ISSN 1351-0150.

