Mikhail Bakunin, father of the modern left’s version of strategic thinking

Dominic Cummings: the evil genius who will fashion Boris Johnson into a British Bonaparte?
No concession

In your report of my debate with Mike Macartney, Communist University Journal (CUJ) on September 5 (in my opening remarks that the Hebrew Communist Party of America, in my view, would not be a nation (‘Spaces for left thinking’, September 5). I have no intention of going into detail about the views of a response Jack wrote in 2010 (‘The phases of communism’ Weekly Worker September 23, 2010) that is a rather different article of mine. Jack quotes only from my 2010 article and provides no evidence that he has read my more recent articles. It seems a long time since I have considered the questions of the first major blocks of response to my work he wrote in his major scientific work in much the same way the destiny of the Palestinians or Kurds, have the right to form a state. In what way I questioned what, in practice, self-determination, they are ‘self-determining’ persons? What are the means by which they become and remain so? It is the big capitalists who are forced (not a preference) to employ immigrant labour. Immigrants, especially the undocumented ones, are often offered wages below the general rate of wages. The political and economic circumstances in which they are the result of the class struggle. Immigrants play a dual role in the capitalist economy. They are used as a reserve army of labour. They are not used to shape wages; and as scapegoats in times of economic crisis. But, unlike domestic labour, the business cannot lower the rate of unemployment.

Delusions

It seems Corbynism has secured some resonance - even a strong foothold in council prior to any actual actions or forming government. Through their union, the British Airline Pilots Association (Balpa) British Airways pilots have gone on strike in pursuit of their demand for a “share” in annual profit. Points on the company’s offer of an 11% increase in basic pay have been agreed. Some want a share of a maximum of 9%, to be determined by the annual financial performance of BA. Brian Strutton, general secretary of Balpa, has said there’s an implicit assumption contained in their position in relation to British Airways management - “chauvinising the brand”, pointing out a short-term “squeezing of cash” from customers, alongside a “dumbing down” of commercial enterprise - and an pursuit of “short-term profits” to the general detriment of its workforce.

For the record, I wrote the academic paper, from which the two articles are drawn, some 18 months ago. It built on a talk I gave in September 2017 on Marx’s vision of communism, and a conference I participated in at Keele University on the same subject. The material in The Critique of the Request was not written with the academic paper in mind. That said, Jack’s misunderstanding of the Critique is more egregious than Lenin’s and Jack’s misreading of so much of Marx’s discussion of the “phases of communism” through the lens of a short-term “squeezing of cash” from customers, alongside a “dumbing down” of commercial enterprise - and an pursuit of “short-term profits” to the general detriment of its workforce.

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Peter Manson | worker.co.uk | September 12, 2019

Amid the confusion

Peter Manson reports on a special meeting of CPGB and LPM comrades

Septemb...r 8 saw an online meet...ng of members of the Popular Communist Party. Labour Party Marxists discussed the ongoing ruling-class crisis over Brexit and the prospects for the general election.

From the chair, Mike Macnair reported that when the Provisional Central Committee had called the meeting seven days earlier, it had believed “the situation would be clearer” after another week, but that was clearly not the case. Nevertheless, the aggregate proved to be useful in facilitating discussion about the likely outcome and the possibilities for the working class.

Opening the debate, Jack Conrad from the PCC reiterated how the whole thing had begun - when David Cameron decided to call a referendum over Britain’s membership of the European Union. This, of course, had nothing to do with “giving the people a choice” - his concern was to outflank the UK Independence Party and give the Labour Party a “bashing”. In the view of the CPGB, referendums are already anti-democratic manoeuvres of that way, which is why we oppose them in principle.

The Brexit crisis has taken place within a context of the global shift to the right, continued comrade Conrad, and that was certainly being reflected in what is now taking place within the Conservative Party. Boris Johnson’s “pump” of anti-Brexit rhetoric is not anti-EU. Nonetheless, the idea of a Tory breakthrough in the north is pretty unlikely. In current circumstances the demand for a “general election now” by sections of the left - Labour Briefing, Socialist Party in England and Wales, Socialist Appeal, Socialist Workers Party - is clearly wrong: it plays straight into Johnson’s hands. Clearly the left is very confused. The SWP, for instance, states that the new leadership of the Labour Party must not confuse opposition to Johnson with opposition to Brexit, but the two are inevitably intertwined.

Comrade Conrad emphasised once again that we are against a government of ‘national unity’ of any kind, just as we are opposed to any electoral bloc with the likes of the Liberal Democrats. We are for working class independence and, in that regard, our priority remains the fight to transform Labour. The campaign for trigger ballots must be stepped up in order to desist the pro-capitalist, right-wing MPs.

He ended by stating that the ruling class was now suffering from a lack of control and had been infected by a “national malaise”. But he reminded comrades that our programme was not for British capitalism, but for workers’ Europe.

Debate

First to speak from the floor was James Harvey, who emphasised that the current crisis had a wider basis than just Brexit. However, he disagreed with comrade Conrad over the total domination of an electoral campaign: he believed that, while the pro-Brexit vote would mainly go to the Tories, we would also see a return to “class-based, anti-Tory voting” in Labour seats.

In her contribution, Carla Roberts of Labour Party Marxists said that the opinion polls are “elevating the importance of Brexit”, stressing that the election would be about “the people versus parliament”. But there are other issues. William Sarsfield said that the left remained dominated by economics, whereas we needed to focus on a “revolutionary approach to democracy”. But instead the left was tailing different sections of the bourgeoisie.

For her part, Farzad Kamangar reminded comrades that the opinion polls were projecting differential results in the event of a delayed general election - and that was also the possibility of a “Scottish UDI”. But for her the central question was that of a “different Europe”, and the role of the working class in winning it. In my contribution, I agreed with comrade Conrad about the dismal position of wide sections of the left in both opposing Johnson and at the same time echoing his positions on Brexit and a general election.

Comrade Conrad pointed to the “bigger issue” of the role of parliament and the monarchy. He agreed that the main issue is democracy, but the left insists in taking one side or the other in the row amongst the ruling class over Brexit. On the Labour Party, then, our revolutionary alternative consisted in demanding not just trigger ballots, but a principled position on the constitution.

On the Conservative Party, Vernon Price noted that the only significant rule-change to be debated this year is the re-adoption of the original clause four. He observed that trigger ballots are facing an uphill struggle, given that the party is in “all hands to the pump” pre-election mode.

Replying to the debate, comrade Conrad said yes, the leadership it was a case of “Don’t rock the boat”. Corbyn was sure to plead “unity” at the conference - as well as pledging to resist “crushing out” of the European Union. As for the coming general election, though, he emphasised that Johnson will treat it as a second referendum over Brexit. In these circumstances the Tories could be expected to map up most of the pro-Brexit vote, while Labour, the Liberal Democrats, Scottish and Welsh nationalists would be fighting themselves to win over remain voters. He agreed it was disastrous for the left to be tailing one side or the other over the EU. Our position is clear: no to a national government and no to calls for an immediate general election. Above all we stand for working class independence!

Peter Manson worker.co.uk
Desperate times, desperate measures

Ever since he got elected, Boris Johnson has been acting in a ‘revolutionary’ fashion and shows no sign of rowing back, writes Eddie Ford

At the beginning of the week, the prime minister did a ‘flying visit’ to Ireland and gave royal assent to the Benn-Burt legislation. This requires the government to seek an extension to article 50 until January 31 next year, with a mandatory ‘meaningful vote’ reached with the European Union or parliament approves a no-deal Brexit - which is the government’s firm position - is never going to do, of course. Nor is it easy to imagine Boris Johnson ever running such a request, saying he would rather “die in a ditch”. For what it is worth, I believe him.

On the same day, quite predictably, 293 MPs backed Boris Johnson’s motion calling for a snap general election poll - five less than in last week’s vote on the issue and considerably short of the 432 needed under the Fixed-Term Parliaments Act for a two-thirds majority. In response, Johnson called Labour MPs “yellow bellies”, but Jeremy Corbyn was never going to fall into the “elephant trap” of an election before October 19. Let Johnson squirm. Now that parliament has been prorogued - albeit amidst raucous scenes of opposition MPs shouting “shame on you” and singing the ‘Red Flag’, and given the accompanying time to be taken by the start of a new session and the debate on a queen’s speech - the absolute earliest date for an election (at least in theory, thanks to the 20 working days required by current UK law) is November 22, well past the October 31 Brexit deadline.

There is now a lot of talk about Theresa May’s withdrawal agreement being resurrected from the dead, this week seeing the launch of the ‘exadar’ group, calling up to 50 supporters. The founders include Labour MPs Stephen Kinnock and Caroline Flint, Liberal Democrat MP Norman Lamb and former Tory MP Rory Stewart - now an independent after being broken out of the Conservative party for being part of the ‘rebels’ alliance’ of 21 Conservatives who voted for the Benn-Bill bill. The group’s proposals would involve using elements of May’s Brexit deal as the basis for an agreement, which a happy Boris Johnson could steer through parliament, possibly in time for an October 31 departure. Those supporting a second referendum would use the Benn-Bill to force a new deal in order to secure their horse - some people never go back. Frankly, there is more chance of hell freezing over than Johnson agreeing to a second referendum in this parliament.

In parallel, another dead plan from the past is being kicked around - the Northern Ireland protocol. This, previously rejected by Theresa May as a threat to the “constitutional integrity” of the UK, which “no British prime minister” could ever accept. Of course, it seems cyphers in the Irish Sea would be anathema to the Tory Brexiteers of the European Research Group as well as the Democratic Unionist Party. Sufficiency alarmed, the DUP’s leader, Arlene Foster, demanded a referendum “as a price tag” for the prime minister on September 10. Johnson brashly responded “confirmed his rejection” of the Northern Ireland-only backtrack. Once again, then, we are seeing the triumph of hope over realism.

A possible spanner in the works of the anti-Brexiteers is the claim that France will demand that any extension to the Brexit deadline should be at least two years to allow Britain enough time to “re-evaluate” its decision to leave the EU. Bruno Bontempi, a member of Emmanuel Macron’s Écume party ‘said France would insist on a lengthier time limit in order to avoid repeated crises every three months. This demand, if true, would be music to the ears of Boris Johnson - giving him an excuse to veto the unreasonable demand from the furious French and crash out of the EU on October 31, whatever the Benn-Bart legislation might say. Desperate times require desperate measures, especially now that the Court of Session in Edinburgh surprisingly ruled on September 11 that Boris Johnson’s prorogation of parliament was “null and of no effect”, because “it had the purpose of stymying parliament”.

The judges failed to issue an interloc, or injunction, ordering the UK government to reconvene parliament, deferring a final decision to the Supreme Court, which will hold a three-day hearing next week. Naturally, the government is calling into question the impartiality of the Scottish judges, but their decision has ignited a row over whether MPs should go back to the House of Commons - with Keir Starmer and others calling for an immediate “unproroguing” or recall of parliament.

Some are demanding that Johnson should resign, as he misled the poor old queen over the reasons for prorogation - something that has “disgraced” the office of prime minister and “deseased” Britain’s supposed international standing as a champion of democracy.

Volatility

Things are happening so fast, with all manner of unpredictable outcomes, that it is useful at this stage to outline a few basic ideas from the communist viewpoint.

Firstly, we are opposed to referendums in principle - the 2016 one on membership being a particularly bad example. David Cameron’s referendum had nothing to do with “putting it to the people”. Clearly he assumed he was going to win, arrogantly never conceiving of losing - then again, most of us assumed that would happen. But ultimately the 2016 referendum was about throwing some red meat to the rightwing “bastards” on his back benches, the seeming rise of the UK Independence Party, and also to pull a honeyfuggle over the Labour Party. The disastrous defeat that followed led John Major to call him the worst ever peace-time prime minister, which from the establishment point of view is probably true. Theresa May was left to pick up the pieces and try to make a bad job good - something the totally failed to do. But could anyone have done any better?

This brings us to Boris Johnson himself. Unless you were an ostrich, it was not in the least surprising that he overwhelmedly won the leadership contest - the Tory rank and file are far closer to Nigel Farage than Dominic Grieve or Philip Hammond.

What has he done since? Effectively, he has acted in a ‘revolutionary’ fashion - to hell with precedent and convention. For instance, we did not see a cabinet reshuffle - rather a cabinet purge. Then there was the very cleverly timed proroguing of parliament that did not go straight through to October 31, as expected by many, including myself. In terms of demobilism, plausible or otherwise, this has enabled Team Boris to say that only four days of parliamentary time were actually lost, due to the conference
The willingness of the Labour leadership to bloc with Liberal Democrats, Scottish nationalists and Tory rebels is a mistake, argues Paul Demarty. It could easily presage a government of national unity

Now he is in the remain camp ... just where Johnson wants him

For the bourgeois establishment - this is a transformation of the continent of the workers' movement. The bourgeoisie and its amelioration of the disarray that this moderation seemed to win when a temporary freeze in energy prices was declared as the return of '1970s-style socialism' in the yellow press?"

This outlook survived the Labour left's transition to the commanding heights of the party's Victoria Street HQ; the strategy was to put all emphasis on ending austerity and using the levers of government to revive British industry and a working class battered by decades of neoliberal punishment. From this point of view, the Europe question was a divisive distraction, and no more effort was put into the remain campaign than it merited. Though the Brexiteers' victory seemed to place Corbyn's office under immediate threat, with rightwing Labour MPs furious at his lack of interest and contribution to the national disaster, it became clear - with the screeching of the chicken coop and then the spectacular turnaround in Labour's fortunes in the 2017 general election - that Corbyn's caution about the question was an astute electoral calculation. It was infinitely better to have fought against a tactically inept Tory campaign on bread and butter issues than to have done so on a commitment to remain (or to its ill-fitting disguise, the second referendum).

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fter a week of parliamentary alarums and excursions, and febrile talk of 'coup' and 'crisis of democracy', the prorogation of parliament appears to have given both political leaders and commentators a chance to take stock and prepare for the next act in the long-drawn out drama of Brexit. Amidst the hysteria and hyperbole there does seem to be widespread agreement that Boris Johnson's minority Tory government has lost the initiative to the combined (albeit disparate) forces of the opposition parties and could only remain in office through the parliamentary manoeuvre of prorogation.

The possibilities of a vote of confidence or a defeat of the Tory government's programme following the queen's speech debates in October or November remain strong. Consequently all parties are now gearing up for an election, with Johnson making the running with all manner of promises about spending on education, the police and the health service, and - above all - leaving the European Union "do or die" on October 31. Jeremy Corbyn's commitment in his speech to the Trades Union Congress on September 10 that a Labour government would offer "a public vote with a credible option to leave and the option to remain" was made in a similar electioneering vein. This pragmatic approach seems to be an attempt to unite both 'leavers' and 'remainers', and to shift the fight back onto Corbyn's favoured electoral ground of anti-authority and attacks on 'the elite'.

However, a key factor in any electoral contest that many expect to see up these calculations in the continued dominance of politics by Brexit and the emergence of the Brexit Party. Founded in February, its candidates emerged as the largest group with 31.6% of the poll and 29 MEPs. In pushing Labour into third place (14.1% and 10 MEPs) and the Tories into fifth (9.1% and four MEPs), the success of the Brexit Party, along with the second-placed remain-supporting Liberal Democrats (20.3% and 16 MEPs) and the strong showing of the Greens, seemed to point to a radically altered political landscape. This electoral upset confirmed what had very quickly become the established narrative that the long-standing electoral politics of Labour and Tory had been replaced by a new division between remainers and leavers.

As we enter another electoral period, this conventional wisdom remains largely intact. At its core are a number of assumptions about the politics of the Brexit Party: the nature of its appeal and its level of support, which require much closer examination. In terms of opinion poll ratings the Brexit Party has remained consistently in fourth place over the summer with a range of support between 9% and 17% (early September). As the experience of the UK Independence Party in the 2015 and 2017 general elections has shown, under the first-past-the-post system these figures are unlikely to yield a single seat for the Brexit Party. However, a key question will be which party - the Tories or Labour - will be most damaged by voters remaining or shifting to the Brexit Party? Likewise on the other side, can both the Tories and Labour retain support from remain voters who might switch to the Liberal Democrats? The churning of votes between the parties in this way and the electoral consequences of slight movements of opinion do more than provide endless hours of fun for psephologists and political analysts: the developing electoral strategies of both the Tories and the Brexit Party rest on a common assessment of these patterns and the nature of the so-called leave vote.

The current positioning of the Brexit Party and its offer of an electoral arrangement to the Tories is very revealing in this regard. In return for a free run at up to 90 parliamentary seats in "Labour heartlands" which strongly voted leave, it is reported that Nigel Farage would not field candidates against sitting Tory MPs or in Tory target seats. The benefit for the Tories, according to the IP, would be a huge majority for Boris Johnson and a clear mandate for a "clean-break Brexit". This reflects much of the evidence that the leave vote since 2016 has been drawn from older, Tory voters. Much attention has been given to the so-called 'left behind' voters in areas of low wages, unemployment and social deprivation. However, the leave vote in the referendum was more evenly spread than this popular analysis: in fact it included the home counties, and rural Scotland and Wales, along with safe Tory seats in the English shires, far from post-industrial Britain. Moreover, the subsequent electoral successes of the Brexit Party were more likely to be found in these constituencies than amongst "traditional Labour voters".

**Suitable vehicle?**

This is not to deny that large numbers of Labour voters backed leave in 2015 and have continued to express their hostility to the status quo in this way since then. However, what the Brexit Party - and the Tories too - are relying on is that the leave vote can coalesce as a coherent bloc that can be mobilised in the forthcoming election, providing a bargaining counter for Farage in his dealings with Johnson by weakening the Labour vote in key marginals. Again much of the popular wisdom supports this assessment, but is the Brexit Party a suitable vehicle for such a project? Even in a period of electoral volatility and shifting political allegiances, does it really have a long-term future? The Brexit Party shares many of the ideological and organisational characteristics of a series of insurgent, populist movements that have emerged internationally in the last 20 years or so. Usually focused on a 'charismatic' leader embodying the struggle of ‘the people’ against ‘the elite’, these currents offer a programme mixing nostalgia for past glories and a brighter future, once ‘the people’ have ‘taken back control’. Farage’s ability to hail the Westminster bubble and the metropolitan elite - posing as the voice of common sense and the real British people - draws strongly on these themes. Using the powerful language of democracy, he frames his appeal to the ignored, the unheard and the forgotten, far from the centres of power and wealth.

Whilst this potent, ‘populist’ appeal may appear to have some demagogic echoes of the far right, in fact it has far more in common with historic strands in the ideology of British Toryism. His is the voice of ‘the Country against the Court’: he stands for native common sense against metropolitan sophistication. Farage’s own roots lay in the Thatcherism of the 1980s and his appeal to the politics of that decade locates him firmly within that wider Conservative Party tradition. Hence his current manoeuvring and public calls for a no-aggression pact with Johnson can be readily understood as part of a wider project to realign the Tories and to secure his own personal position within any such new reconfiguration. As the Tory civil war over Brexit continues to rage, he strategises it from the side-lines, and hopes, like young Fortinbras, to reap his reward when the battle is finally over.

As a minor player on the fringes of Toryism, Farage and the Brexit Party will continue to play some role in British politics. But his party does not have the ideological coherence or deep social roots of popular Toryism or the class identification of Labourism to sustain a long-term political movement. It can continue to benefit from the current crisis within the Tories: it will pick up sections of both petty bourgeois and working class voters, who express their alienation from contemporary society through opposition to ‘Brussels’ and responds to calls to ‘take back control’. But, as a programme and a party, Farageism does not really exist in any meaningful sense: other than the admittedly powerful rhetoric of democracy and respecting the will of the people, its specific demands are a pathetic rag-bag of Populism, limited to calls to ‘rebuild the regions, free broadband for all, hope for the high street, the scrapping of inheritance tax and interest-free student loans’.4

However, it is unwise to write off the Brexit Party because of the shallowness of its policies. Much in current politics will remain uncertain and unpredictable: if British withdrawal is either delayed or is delivered in a way that can be defined as ‘Brexit in name only’ (Brino) - still the ruling class’s preferred option as a way out of the current impasse, in my opinion - then Farage’s party can continue to play a major role. The mythology of ‘the stab in the back’ is always potent in time of uncertainty and defeat.

Nigel Farage is a talented charlatan, a mountebank capable of drumming up a crowd if enough voters feel that Brexit is Briton and that once again they have been betrayed by the elite.

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**Notes**

2. See, for example, the videos on the Brexit Party’s website (www.thebrexitparty.org) or the opinion-poll scorecard. 
3. www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/sep/11/farages-brexit-party-wants-free-run-at-90-seats-in-european-elections. See, for example, the 2014 debate between Farage and Nick Clegg: www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQecSS5ribM.
4. A for a further discussion on these ‘populist’ themes see: "Understanding the ‘populist movement’" Weekly Worker August 31 2017, and ‘Possibilities and challenges’. September 7 2017.
Eric Blanc’s February 2019, Jacobin article, ‘Why Kautsky was right (and why you should care),’ not only carried a provocative headline, but came from an author whose prior political writing and activism placed him substantially to the left of Vivek Chibber and James Maddox, with whom he was polemising. Blanc was at least between 2010 and 2018 a member of Socialist Organizer, the organisation in the US aligned to the international Lambertist-variant-Trotskyst ‘Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International’, based in France. He has more recently joined the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). He has also prominently been a schoolteacher and the author of a book on the 1991-18 Russian Revolution, ‘The path to anti-capitalist rupture in Russia’, by V. I. Lenin, and a member of a Trotskyist ‘Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International’, based in France. He has also been a schoolteacher and the author of a book on the 1991-18 Russian Revolution, ‘The path to anti-capitalist rupture in Russia’, by V. I. Lenin.

The core of Blanc’s case is:

Following Lenin’s arguments in his 1917 pamphlet The state and revolution, Leninists for decades have hinged their strategy on the need for an insurrection to overthrow the entire parliamentary state and to place all power into the hands of workers’ councils. In contrast, Kautsky argued that the path to anti-capitalist rupture in conditions of political democracy passed through the election of a workers’ party to government.

This is backed (within this article) by the core claims that:

1. Kautsky’s failure to oppose the war in 1914 was rightly understood as a betrayal of his previous ideas, not as their continuation, but that it arose from failure to grasp the role of the union and party bureaucracy.

2. The ‘insurrectionary road’ is to be rejected, because 

   a. democratically elected governments had too much legitimacy among working people and too much armed strength for an insurrectionary approach to be realistic.

   b. Not only has there never been a victorious insurrectionary socialist movement under a capitalist democracy, but only a tiny minority of workers have ever even nominally supported the idea of an insurrection.

The ‘insurrectionary road’ in Russia, he argues, “bypassed an autocratic, non-capitalist state, not a parliamentary regime”.

The ‘Kautskyan’ policy was in practice successfully applied by the Finnish Social Democracy in 1916-18.

4. The ‘Kautskyan’ policy was in practice successfully applied by the Finnish Social Democracy in 1916-18. However,

Unfortunately, this strategy has been attempted in practice few times since Finland. For almost a century, much of the far left has been politically disoriented and marginalised by attempts to generalise the Bolshevik experience to non-autocratic political contexts. At the same time, the vast majority of elected left governments have never even tried to move down Kautsky’s suggested path due to the moderating pressure of labour bureaucratisation and the immense economic power of the capitalist class.

Blanc argues that taking Kautsky’s strategic line (as he interprets it) as a starting point is necessary, because “Without first winning a democratic election, socialists won’t have the popular legitimacy and power necessary to effectively lead an anti-capitalist rupture.” And, beyond this point, he argues that there are three advantages:

First, moving away from dogmatic assumptions about the generalisability of the 1917 model should help socialists abandon other political dogmas, including on pressing issues such as how to build a Marxist current and whether it’s okay to ever use the Democratic Party ballot line ...

Second, reclaiming Kautsky’s strategy should prompt socialists to focus more on fighting to democratise the political regime - a tradition that has gotten lost since the era of the Second International ...

Lastly, upholding the best elements of Kautsky’s approach is important for helping leftists take the electoral arena more seriously ...

Critics

Blanc’s critics have to a considerable extent responded to this argument in two directions - one which is right, but
The argument which is right, but inconsequential, is that Blanc's narrative involves a fairly clear falsification of the history of the Russian Revolution, which involved just as much 'electoralism' as the activity of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) - and, so far as October 1917 can be called an 'insurrection' (which, for Petrograd, is questionable), it took place in the name of the only general elected body in the country - the pending Congress of Soviets - to forestall an expected coup against that body (and was, in fact, backed by a majority of that body when it met). Thus the arguments of Mike Taber and John Riddell.

This point is inconsequential for two reasons. The first is (partially) made by Blanc: whatever is the true account of what happened in 1917, the Communist International afterwards claimed that it, on the one hand, and Germany and Italy, on the other, showed the necessity of an insurrectionary road - and it is on this basis of this Comintern line that the modern far-left conception has developed. The second is that, however much the Bolsheviks were committed to democracy and to electoral work, it does not alter the point that Russia/the tsarist empire (here, it must be said, does not alter the point that Russia/the tsarist empire was in government, because both these governments at the top were state-loyalists and hence of the working class, and hence of the proletariat. As of December 1917-February 1918, with the result that German and Swedish workers' movements will not repeat the Mensheviks' and right SRs' error of setting up workers' councils and leaving them in existence until revolutionaries win a majority, so that the struggle for the revolutionaries to win the majority away from the state-loyalists has to take a different form. The argument which is flatly wrong is that made by Charlie Post against Muldoon and Chibber, and by several other authors against Blanc. It is the standard narrative that Kautsky's strategy; and another point made by Trotsky in 1923 in Lessons of October against the falsification of the Bolsheviks' argument, because until 1920 Kautsky argued - as Marx and Engels also had - that the capitalist state would not wait for the working class to win a parliamentary majority, but before it did so would take initiatives to prevent it - whether war, as Engels and the role of aristocracy in government was shared by Britain, among other 'western' states.

The second difference was that the tsarist regime had pursued a policy of police suppression both of trade unions and of socialist parties. The 'absolutist' ideological reasons for doing so were no doubt supported by the very practical point that the regime needed to attract foreign direct investment in order to modernise and, given its weak infrastructure and so on, all it could offer investors was the severity of its labour controls. But the consequence was that only very little had been done by the regime to build up a state-loyalist tendency within the labour movement. The nearest approaches to such a policy began during the war: the conscription of recalcitrant factory militants into the armed forces, and the attempt to build 'war industry committees'. But these both worsened the situation of the pro-war provisional governing bodies in 1917. The conscription of militants disrupted war production and helped radicalise the soldiers and sailors by adding 'agitators' to their ranks. The 'war industry committees', and analogous measures to use committees to improve rural production and grain distribution, provided an example for the pro-war wing of the socialists to improvise soviets after February as support for the war effort - but the soviets became democratic institutions, and their creators lost control to the Bolsheviks and left SRs in summer-autumn 1917.

In contrast, the German and Austrian Social Democratic parties had both been legal since 1890, and there were already visible in both (a) bureaucracies and (b) state-loyalist trends - and in the trade unions, before 1914 'workers' councils - Räte - were created in both Germany and Austria in 1918, factory councils in Italy, and 'councils of action', as well as radical shop-stewards' committees, in various places in Britain. But most clearly in Germany and Austria, the existing social democratic party and union leaders were state-loyalists and retained the support of the majority of the working class, and hence of the councils, for long enough to suppress or marginalise communists and other radicals, who wanted to turn these bodies into instruments of a counter-power.

The third of these points was already made by Trotsky in 1923 in Lessons of October against the falsification of soviets, and repeated by him on more than one occasion - notably in the 1931 piece on the Spanish revolution, which I quoted in my previous article. These points make inconsequential the objection to Blanc's argument that it falsified Bolshevism, because Blanc's basic point is that the forms of the Russian Revolution in 1917 will not be repeated, since they reflected the particular dynamics of the fall of tsarism, not the general dynamics of proletarian revolution. And, while Blanc's particular argument is unsound, the basic point is plainly true; and the third point above was already made by Trotsky - that the state-loyalist right wing of the workers' movement will not repeat the Mensheviks' and right SRs' error of setting up workers' councils and leaving them in existence until revolutionaries win a majority, so that the struggle for the revolutionaries to win the majority away from the state-loyalists has to take a different form.

The argument which is flatly wrong is that made by Charlie Post against Muldoon and Chibber, and by several other authors against Blanc. It is the standard narrative that Kautsky's scabbing in the face of 1914 - and all the more in 1918-19 - is to be attributed to his having a "passive" political approach, a "unilinear" or "sunk declassé" method, etc. etc. These arguments are in substance the arguments of the German lefts, but also actually shared by the German right - for whom an 'active' approach to politics meant the promotion of coalitions with the liberals. And a part of the 'activism' lefts, as I said before, went over to the right: notably the fascists Benito Mussolini and (syndicalist) Robert Michels in Italy, as well as the pro-war Die Gleiche tendency of Parus and others in the SPD. I have given reasons for rejecting the argument in my last article in this series (and elsewhere) and will not repeat them again here.

Critics have also made a point which is inconsequential in itself, but tugs at a thread which somewhat unravels Blanc's claims about Kautsky's strategy; and another point which, again, pulls at the threads of the claims. The first is the argument that the Finnish Revolution ended in a savage and bloody defeat at the hands of the Reichswehr and its Finnish allies. The point is inconsequential because it is not that the Finnish Social Democrats won parliamentary elections which led to the defeat, but that the Russian Red Guards were unable to stand up in open battle against the German eastern-front field army in December 1917-February 1918, with the result that German and Swedish regular forces were available to form the core of the Finnish White army. Trotskyist suggestions that, if the Finns had acted earlier or created a Cheka, or carried out this or that measure of expropriation, they could have won on their own are obviously nonsense. There was not the slightest sign of the German eastern-front field army breaking up before November 1918, and even then it remained intact for operations against the Bolsheviks in the Baltic states (requested of the German Majority SPD leaders by the Entente powers and accepted by them).

Moreover, this Finnish history could hardly be relevant to a revolutionary party which won a clear majority in US House of Representatives elections on the basis of an open anti-constitutional platform, which had mass political support reaching into the US armed forces, and which proceeded to denounce the Senate, presidency, Supreme Court and so on as anti-democratic or "burn the constitution": the US is not a small and largely disarmed country, and there would not be available a foreign force (hence immune to fraternisation tactics) equivalent to the victorious Reichswehr eastern-front field army.

The point, however, tugs at a thread of Blanc's argument, because until 1920 Kautsky argued - as Marx and Engels also had - that the capitalist state would not wait for the working class to win a parliamentary majority, but before it did so would take initiatives to prevent it - whether war, as Engels...
suggested (and in fact happened) or a cop-out of some sort." Thus Kautsky in The Social Revolution (1902):

... bourgeois liberalisms disappear in the face of a new social strata. The democratic regime of suffrage, by increasing the influence of parliament.

And in The road to power (1909):

It must not be forgotten that our ‘positive’ and ‘reformatory’ work not only strengthens the proletariat, but also creates a mass movement, which brings more economic resistance to the bourgeoisie. The more the workers’ movement becomes a political battle, the more do the employers’ associations seek to argue that the power of parliament and government is a battle to and crumble their political powers.

So that it is now more the battle for political rights being forced into the foreground, and constitutional questions that sought to ensure suffrage and government offices of the judiciary, civil service, politicians, judges, and so on.

The opponents of the proletariat are constantly seeking to limit the political rights of the workers …

The first point made by Gil Schuster in his muckraking expose New Politics. This is that it is odd that intellectual and political workers could have carried some excellent articles exposing the undemocratic character of the US, when, at the same time, they should then write theory with the idea that socialists could win a (legal, effective) Jewish democratic regime under this undemocratic regime, and form a workers’ government which would then lead to mass action in defence of it. Rather, Schaefer argues: ‘The “Jewish problem” in the US Jewish system is not just a plank among others in a democratic socialist platform: it is the leading edge of the class political struggle that makes socialism possible.” This pulls in a different way at the same strand of Blanc’s weav...
T his book is based on painstaking research. Now available in an English paperback version, it is an important contribution to the understanding of the workers’ struggle. It raises many questions.

For those who have forgotten, or are too young to remember, the revolution “began to take place on 5th and 6th November 1975”. It was, argues Raquel Varela, “the most profound revolution to have taken place in Europe since the Second World War” (p.1). Over 19 months millions of people engaged in democratic political organisation, attempts to establish workers’ control and “duality of powers”, ranging from soldiers’ and civilians’ revolutionary committees to newspapers, factories, workers’ assemblies, and the land were taken over by the people.

Written in clear, precise prose, this is a book that everyone should read. It is a brilliant piece of social history. Apart from her own assured narrative, this is meticulously supported by primary sources: eg, reports and eyewitness accounts by those who were involved. In this way she is able to bring the revolution back to life. But this means the revolution was taken for what it is, and not just its consequences because it is not based on Marxist theoretical conceptions. Compare, for example, Marx’s The civil war in France (1871) or Trotsky’s History of the Russian Revolution (to which she refers). That said, she does raise some important theoretical questions. But this is left for future research in this important vein (see ‘Problems’ below).

Varela’s main aim is to celebrate the power of the oppressed masses when they decide to act together against their oppressors. This book today could be motivated to read her People’s history, they would realise that, when they act collectively, they are not powerless. Instead, today’s workers have once again been reduced to a mere commodity (not unlike the beginning of the industrial revolution). Under the hierarchy of neoliberalism, we have become a society of atomised individuals and/ or fragmented by identity and value systems. (But, if they really rely solely on its economic agenda: privatisation, gentrification, the welfare state, they also require an “idealistic dimension”.) Both are reinforced by a ubiquitous strategy and tactics?"

Given the fact that prices for everything were rising, the main problem was making enough money to pay for everyday needs. There was no investment to keep prices lower: hence, before the workers’ commissions were faced with the unavoidable task of making layoffs. This gave the provisional government the opportunity to intervene with the offer of “economic demands."

Workers’ control is such that it cannot forget that, at the same time, there was a growing movement for workers’ control against a shortage of housing and high rents. Here women were able to play an important role (as well as in the workplace). Residents’ commissions sprang up. They elected committees or “vagabonds of local decision-making”, which began to take over control of city councils - supporting occupations and helping to solve the housing crisis for working people (p18- 39).

Workers’ control was “used indifferently for participation in management”, “publication of accounts” and “control over production, and political organisations and unions imbued the term with a meaning in accord with their particular political strategy.” On the other hand, International Socialists leader Tony Cree argued that “workers’ control without workers’ power” is only a short step to the workers returning control to the bourgeois state. Activists in the Lisnave shipyard put it, “How can we have a workers’ state if we can’t change the control of the banks?” Socialism requires more than workers’ self-management. Varela puts forward a pattern of events: “crisis, decentralisation of enterprises [running out of money], workers occupations, state intervention in the self-managed businesses and/or workers’ control” (p44-46).

This means we had to plough a path of popular assemblies, which held many meetings with delegates from residents’ associations and/or soldiers from local barracks. There were 38 popular assemblies, and the attendance at these meetings … was in the hundreds. Some withered away, but many continued to meet up until the coup on November 25 1975 (p209, 10).

Dual power came too late and it was fragmented, whereas it needed to be democratic, representative and centralised; ie, it should have led to something like an all-Portuguese Congress of Soviets. The reason why this did not happen is clear: the main controlling parties were either Stalinist or reformist (as opposed to the Russian Revolution, which had a revolutionary party in waiting). On the one hand, despite having a strong social base in the workers’ movement – via its domination of the Revolutionary United Front, FUR (p40) – the CP’s strategy was to use this as leverage in order to push for a popular-front government, where it hoped to play a leading role. By doing so it tried to ensure the beligerant bourgeoisie that the revolution was safe in its hands. (In the main slogan was that “the working class had to win the battle for Production.”)

On the other hand, the CP was up against the fast-rising Socialist Party, whose strategy was to steer the revolution in the direction of “democratic normalisation”. Thus, in a sort of political “race to the bottom”, the CP/SPO competed for the leadership of one PC after another. Both were committed to the idea that reformism was all that could be achieved in a backward country like Portugal. In other words, they limited their goal to the introduction of a new managerial order: modern bourgeois democracy, based on a consensus between the bourgeoisie and the workers. But there would have to be some nationalisation of key industries under the state’s control, along with the introduction of state welfare for the first time in the country’s history. Ironically the same reformist project was about to fail in the rest of Europe, because the post-war consensus between capital and labour had come to an end.

October

Since the Portuguese Revolution took place in a western European country almost 50 years later, there are still lessons to be learned from October revolution in Russia. The first question that has to be asked is: what is the relationship between workers’ control and dual power? If we fix the October model, the correct strategy is that the struggle for dual power has to come before the existence of a revolutionary party) has to take precedence over the struggle for workers’ control, not vice-versa. This is because the latter develops by means of direct democracy, but it is politically uneven. Dual power has to go beyond popular democracy, because it represents a real challenge to a centralised alternative to what Marx calls the “centralised state power”. Therefore there is a task to transform organisations of representative democracy as well as, the election of representatives to send to workers’ assemblies to local soviets. (Today, of course, we would have to add journalists’ deputies, residents’ deputies who would then elect delegates to provincial ones, on up to a national Congress of Soviets to fight the reformists politically, before the revolution.

But it should be pointed out that in 1917 delegates to the soviets represented the workers’ movement – not the bourgeoisie. As Isaac Deutscher says in his biography of Trotsky.

Without this, there would only be “a mixture of anarchy and socialism – in part naturally, in part because of prevalent chaos, (which) tended to destroy the national coherence of industry, without which there could be no evolution towards socialism”.

A workers’ state is necessary to maintain a potential control over the state. But the counterrevolution which inevitably follows. Unless the latter is defeated, the former is endangered. The workers had to fight the reformists politically, before the bourgeoisie could begin to implement their promise of “peace, bread and land”, let alone move towards “socialist construction”. As Lenin put it in October:

In a recent article Nick Rogers points out that, for Marx, the socialist revolution must in order to succeed, overcome the “cage” of the “state of capitalist commodity society”. The “first phase” will involve the “allotment of resources to each according to his needs for consumption; distributing consumer goods according to the need of those who work in the collective sector, as workers who produce have undertaken”. By contrast, “socialism - as defined by Lenin in The state and revolution - was quite different: [therefore] it is legitimate to classify the state sector of the economy as social.”

But, given the harsh reality of the new situation in Russia, it was not possible to begin the transition to socialism/communism, because Lenin’s or Marx’s version. As Rogers points out,
immediately after October, there was an “exploration of popular democracy in all sectors of society”. But this was nullified by the start of the civil war, which was followed by an increase in war communism and the militarisation of labour. The working class was vastly outnumbered but still determined to try and eventually turn against it. Meanwhile, the revolutionaries were increasingly centralised, which laid the foundations for the “Stalinisation of Soviet society.”

This radical change in the social revolution will unfold only to be tested under optimum conditions: e.g. in a country that has been a centre of war communism and the militarisation of labour. It is too easy to blame representative democracy (even if it is in the hands of the proletariat and its allies). In the 20th-21st century, this should not be used as a reason to promote the idea that an “exploration of popular democracy” is not sufficient to begin the organisation of communist society.

**Problems**

The real problem of Varela’s approach is that it is not rooted in “the philosophical, historical and economic theories” worked out by historians and thinkers from the 18th to 20th century. Chapter 19 is the analytical heart of her book. But this is based on two major errors: to make a dichotomy between “researching the social consciousness of the masses” and making history; and to make a dichotomy between “direct democracy” and “representative democracy.” Apropos the latter, the problem is that workers and their families are not being run in the interests of the workers and their families, while the latter are being run by the former. The former is a revolution of the working class, the latter is the disruption of the working class.

She is right to argue that the coup “had been prepared within the MF-Arm Forces Movement” of Varela’s political opponents who opposed the far-right Estado Novo and who were sufficiently united to lead the state in a coup against grassroots democracy. But there was no centralised “duality of power” of the bourgeoisie and working class. Portuguese Intersindical was not prepared to take the state. Finally Varela points out that there was “no vanguard party and no equivalent of the Soviet system.”

November 23 “marked the beginning of the end of the revolution”. The “ideological strength of the victors” is no match for the consciousness of the masses. To what extent did Varela’s approach mislead the followers of the revolutionaries and reformists (cf the communist-led union. As a result, there are still lessons to be learned from this.

Turning to the November 25 coup, she states: “...the revolution was defeated.” The only revolutionary power that did not resist the 5,000 men of the Pak police force. It failed because there was no revolutionary party to lead it, or a counterrevolutionary party with the leadership of the masses with the spirit of the February revolution. To what extent did Varela’s approach mislead the followers of the revolutionaries and reformists who opposed the far-right Estado Novo and who were sufficiently united to lead the state in a coup against grassroots democracy. But there was no centralised “duality of power” of the bourgeoisie and working class. Portuguese Intersindical was not prepared to take the state. Finally Varela points out that there was “no vanguard party and no equivalent of the Soviet system.”

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The teaching of socialism ... grew out of the philosophical, historical and economic theories worked out by historians and thinkers from the 18th to 20th century. It is that the capitalists were insufficient to lead the state in a coup against grassroots democracy. But there was no centralised “duality of power” of the bourgeoisie and working class. Portuguese Intersindical was not prepared to take the state. Finally Varela points out that there was “no vanguard party and no equivalent of the Soviet system.”

November 23 “marked the beginning of the end of the revolution”. The “ideological strength of the victors” is no match for the consciousness of the masses. To what extent did Varela’s approach mislead the followers of the revolutionaries and reformists (cf the communist-led union. As a result, there are still lessons to be learned from this.

3. V Fouskas, ‘Communism–a system which recognises the importance of the worldwide transition to a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe. Nationalism, in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is international. Communists are internationalists. We are fighting for the closest unity of communists and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of nationalism. We are working with an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, “One state, one party”.
4. The workers opposition to the working class as a whole. As a result, there are still lessons to be learned from this. Capitalism’s in ceaseless profit search puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war. The world cannot be made safe for capitalism and lack coexists.
5. 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. The only way that allows to achieve a federal Republic of Europe, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
6. Without organisation the working class is nothing; with organisation it is everything. There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called “Communist” parties in reality they are confessional sects. Members of these parties are often described as “Communists”. But to be a Communist, the prescribed “line” are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that, or as with Stalin’s Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
7. Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is international. Communists are internationalists. We are fighting for the closest unity of communists and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of nationalism. We are working with an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, “One state, one party”.
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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 “Communist” parties in reality they are confessional sects. Members of these parties are often described as “Communists”. But to be a Communist, the prescribed “line” are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that, or as with Stalin’s Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class.
Victim of the global hegemon

Following Trump’s cancellation of talks, Yassamine Mather looks back at the disaster that is Afghanistan

For the past month of discussions on a ‘peace agreement’ by the US and the Afghan Taliban, at a time when an ‘emergency’ is being declared in a quest for a ‘peace agreement’ to be signed involving not just those two parties, but related to events by the Afghan government - whose absence in crucial parts of the discussions had been remarked upon - considering on September 6 Donald Trump first cancelled the trilateral gathering to sign the deal and then announced that the negotiations had been cancelled. The US president had tweeted that he was going to meet Afghan president Ashraf Ghani and senior Taliban leaders on September 7. However, he cancelled the ‘secret’ meeting at his Camp David retreat after the Taliban admitted it was behind a recent attack that killed a US soldier.

Then on September 10 Trump announced that he had sacked John Bolton, his national security advisor, because of major disagreements related to Afghanistan and foreign policy, excluding Iran, North Korea and - most significantly - Afghanistan. Bolton himself claimed that he had offered to resign the previous day, but from the information provided by reports who had talked Trump out of signing the agreement, due to be finalised in time for a visit from Taliban leaders to Camp David, closer to the anniversary of 9/11.

The first point to remember is that the US now considers the progress made by Trump claimed. Of course, we do not know every detail of the proposed deal, but from the information provided by reporters who have followed a series of meetings between the two sides in Qatar, and from journalists who have interviewed representatives of both sides on a regular basis, it is possible to draw some conclusions regarding several aspects. For example, the US would withdraw 5,400 troops within 20 weeks, in return for Taliban guarantees that the Afghan government would not again be used as a ‘base for terrorism’. The Taliban, which is now in control of more territory than ever before at any point before the 2001 US-led invasion, had refused to hold direct talks with the US government until a timetable for the withdrawal of US troops had been finalised.

History

It is worth reminding ourselves of the recent history of Afghanistan, which last month celebrated 100 years of independence. The Anglo-Afghan treaty of August 1919 marked Britain’s removal of Afghanistan from ‘protected state’ status, allowing King Amanullah Khan to come to the throne. The dynasty he set up lasted another three years. In 1929, the PDA took power and the PDPA, with its two factions remained in power until April 1992.

The PDPA implemented a series of secular reforms, abolishing religious and traditional laws. As well as introducing women’s rights and banning forced marriages, the PDPA imposed compulsory veiling, the cutting of beards and the discouraging of traditional costumes - measures which were largely supported in towns and cities, but brought the PDPA into direct conflict with powerful traditional forces in rural areas. However, at the end of the day it was the party’s economic and land reforms that united its opponents.

The process for modernising Afghanistan’s economic infrastructure followed the USSR’s plan for all such states: the ‘non-capitalist road to development’. The Soviet Union sent advisors to oversee the building of the infrastructure, as well as bequeathing the Afghan army and security forces. Presumably following Soviet advice, the government launched a campaign of violent repression against its opponents. On the other side, the USA, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan were financing and arming tribal leaders, war lords and religious forces against what they called a Soviet-supported ‘godless’ regime.

In 1979, 24 out of the 28 Afghan provinces were ablaze. The central government was clearly losing control in the face of a well organised and well equipped armed uprising. The Soviet Union became directly involved in the conflict in December 1979, sending in 100,000 troops in support of the PDPA regime.

By this time US support for the traditional mujahideen had entered a new stage - the US and Saudi Arabia spent billions of dollars arming them, with direct help from Pakistan’s security forces. It was the CIA that provided surface-to-air missiles to groups that later became the Taliban and al Queda.

Civil war was taking its toll and, given the larger number of casualties as well as international pressure in the approach to the final demise of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev gave orders for Soviet forces to withdraw in 1989. The PDPA regime lasted another three years. In 1992, Islamist forces captured the capital and executed Afghan president Mohammad Najibullah.

During the Afghan civil war of 1989-96 various foreign powers intervened. Pakistan’s security forces worked in tandem with its close allies, while the Saudis were backing traditional forces in rural areas. Meanwhile, Iran’s Islamic Republic was supporting other Islamist forces. For the US, it was preparing its own regime-change alternative. All attempts at achieving some form of deal and a coalition government failed.

At this time the Taliban - a movement originating from religious schools for Afghan refugees in Pakistan - was gaining support for its campaigns against corruption and calls for ‘pure Islamic values’. By 1994 they were in control of a number of provinces in southern and central Afghanistan, aided undeniably by Pakistani forces. Just a couple of years later they held sway over three quarters of the country, where they enforced a strict interpretation of Sharia law.

All that ended with the US invasion of 2001. Although Afghanistan had given refuge to America’s main ally in the civil war - a certain Osama bin Laden - president George W Bush decided that the Afghan regime, instead of Saudi Arabia, should be punished for the horrific events of September 11 2001 (bin Laden, of course, Saudi-born).

Devastation

The fact that 18 years on, the war waged by the global hegemon against tribesmen in Afghanistan is still continuing is one of the most unbelievable stories of the 21st century. The continuing conflict and the unbelievably large number of people who have lost their lives in bombing by the Taliban, or in US air raids have been features of the continuing devastation and destruction of the country.

In recent years the cycle of violence has become so familiar to anyone following these events that we have almost become immune to the relentless killing. Afghan citizens are not the only sufferers - the suffering having been identified by US military intelligence as a Taliban meeting - bearded men wearing traditional Afghan costumes having come together that he was analysing this data, is apparently convinced that this is a political-military gathering and orders drones or military aircraft to bomb the place to smithereens. Then it turns out that this was actually a wedding, funeral or some other innocent gathering - yet more ‘collateral damage’ in an endless war. The Taliban publicise such events and retaliate by bombing civilians in Herat or Kabul. Following every single one of these ‘mistakes’ by the US military, the Taliban recruit yet more volunteers for battle, for suicide bombing, in their struggle to impose Sharia law.

To add to an already terrible situation, Islamic State is also moving into Afghanistan. For example, the bombing of a Kabul wedding in August, which took the life of 63 guests, was claimed by the Salafi group.

Of course, the war in Afghanistan (as in Iraq) was not supposed to end up like this. Both the UK and the US dispatched hundreds of technoarcade ‘experts’ to help ‘reconstruct’ the country as if it had the government of the actual situation as their political and military masters. Conferences have been organised since 2001 by both US and UK military and political institutions to work out the answers for failure - and indeed the failure of occupation and ‘reconstruction’. Yet no one seems to ask the obvious question: what was the purpose of these two regime change wars? Why were these two countries to be punished for 9/11? On the 18th anniversary of September 11 2001 we might celebrate the sacking of John Bolton, the neoconservative warmonger who wanted an expanded US military presence. But, with an unpredictable US president and continued US intervention in an unstable region, it is not just Afghanistan and indeed the Middle East as a whole seems as bleak as ever.