

weekly worker



**Then there were four:
candidates can be
pressurised from left**

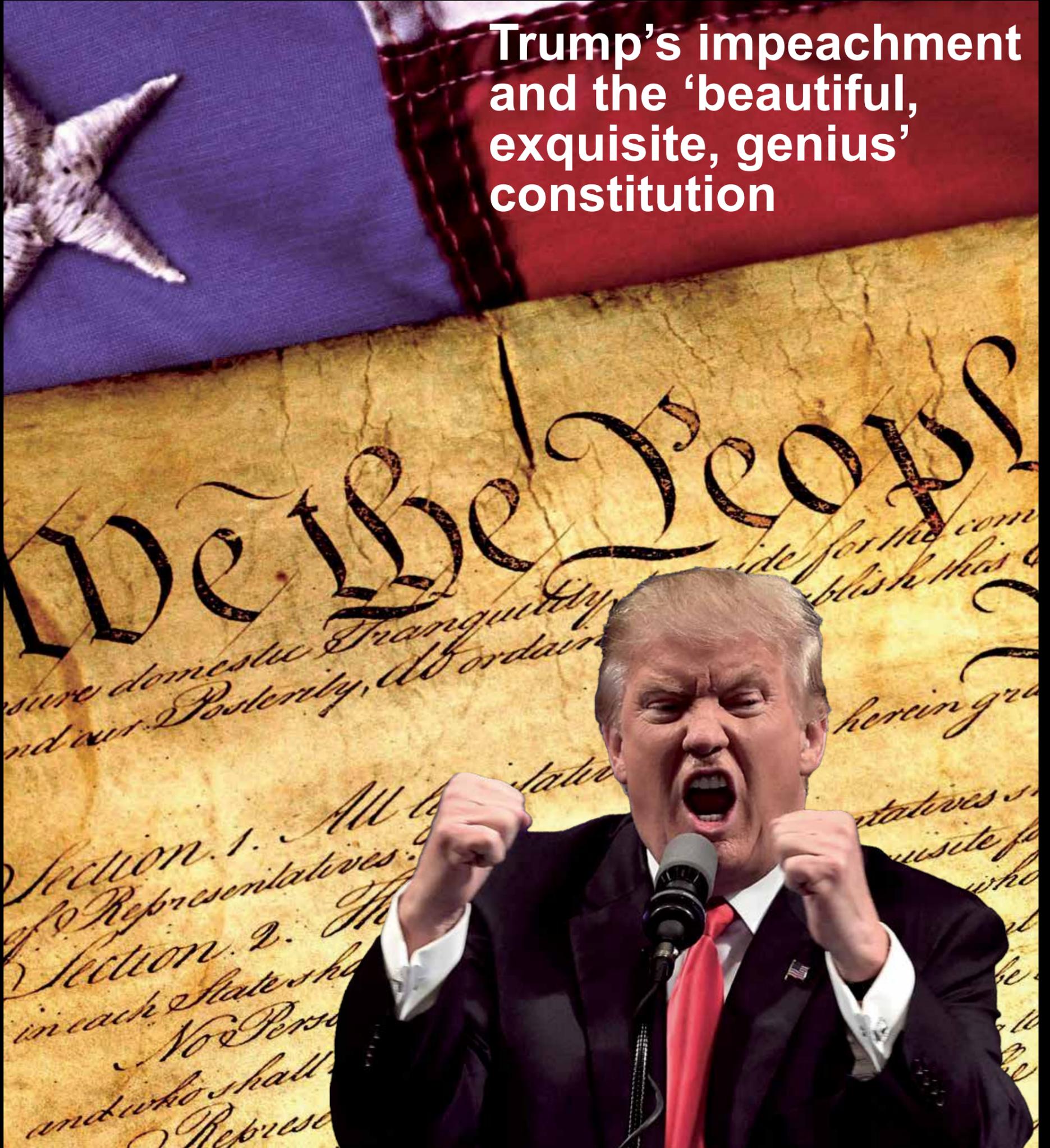
- Letters and debate
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No 1283 January 23 2020

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Trump's impeachment and the 'beautiful, exquisite, genius' constitution



LETTERS



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

Depoliticisation

Universities all across the world are considered to be the bastions of dissidence and resistance. Their extraordinary capacity to bring about a qualitative transformation in the institutional framework of a particular country is democratically advantageous. The convivial environment of universities is conducive to the cultivation of a critically charged political mindset. The fecundity and imaginative power of this kind of democratic mindset can greatly facilitate the development of society.

The recent attempts to depoliticise universities is extremely disturbing. There are two causal factors behind this attempt to evict universities from the body politic. First, the advent of neoliberal education has necessitated the obliteration of critically conscious universities. In lieu of these universities, new commercialistic institutions are being set up, which, like business barons, want to make money by promoting the sale of commodified knowledge. This commodification of knowledge has very neatly mopped up the complete idea of free education. Earlier, it was incumbent upon the welfare state to properly manage the equitable distribution of education and its ultimate aim in the educational domain was to democratise. But, with the introduction of neoliberal education, the whole concept of a welfare state has been rendered fatuous and anarchic, which can only be recommended by a socialistic cretin. Now everything is dependent on market forces, which act as the 'magical invisible hand of the market'. This 'liberalisation of education' has certainly liberated education from knowledge.

Second, the authoritarian rightwing coloration, which the democracies of the world have acquired, has certainly helped in the comprehensive destruction of public education. The interrelationship between rightwing populism and neoliberalism has been appropriately analyzed in the paper, *Neoliberalism and rightwing populism: conceptual analogies*, written by Stephan Pühringer and Walter O Ötsch. By reading this, one can comprehend the accelerated pace of destruction of public education.

The depoliticisation of universities is essentially a well-thought-out, despotic strategy to slice off education from politics. A critical and knowledgeable citizen always presents an existential threat to any fascist regime. Constructive criticism originates from this sense of criticality, with which the educated citizen is equipped. Education inculcates political, social and economic consciousness and this consciousness is a deadly, ruthless tool, which can make conspicuous chinks in the majoritarian edifice. An educated citizen is also a democratic citizen who tries to materialise the constitutional rights which have been conferred upon him/her by the democracy in which he/she is living. Educated citizens also try to establish democratic equilibrium by constantly questioning the ruling dispensation.

In a nutshell, an educated populace initiates the 'Gramscian ideological war', in which the continuous disarticulation/rearticulation of the 'organic ideology' presented by the governmental machinery as the general worldview results in the debilitation of its 'consensual hegemony'. The construal of public opprobrium as an ideological war may seem a gratuitous

amplification of its magnitude, but in today's world of 'informational autocracy', I think the usage of that term in this context is justified.

In informational autocracies, the efficient manipulation of information serves the utility of carefully constructing the majoritarian consensus, which demagogic populists require to perpetuate their rule. This heavy dependence on informational manipulation accentuates the role of what Louis Althusser called "ideological state apparatuses". These help in the creation of a "mediated experience of the world", in which the ubiquity of state power is established through the dissemination of its ideological material. So in an informational autocracy there is the predominance of consensual rule rather than coercive rule.

Due to this consensual rule, the importance of the educated citizens - and the universities which produce them - increases greatly. An effective counter-narrative made by the conscious citizens can easily facilitate mass mobilisations, because the falseness of governmental propaganda is exposed when these conscious citizens make a concerted effort to dissect the propagandist platforms of the government.

The possibility of weakening the authority of the government emanates from the universities, which pedagogically reconfigure the students to teach them the grammar of protests and democracy. So governments all across the world have decided to segregate the educational territory from the democratic fiefdom. An extremely efficient organisational structure has been provided by neoliberal education, through which this complex operation can be carried out. Neoliberal education has done this surgery by rapidly privatising education and gradually transforming it into an elitist privilege.

The universities, in contradistinction to the newfangled neoliberal markets of education, are the only remaining beacons of hope for democracy. Their atmosphere has still not been vitiated by the crassness of consuming knowledge. These universities still have the power to comprehend and question the authoritarian mechanisms. Those studying in these universities try to associate themselves with the socio-cultural complexities of their country. These students have chosen to transcend the vacuous dialogue about jobs and have instead engaged themselves in democratic conversations about their country. The government is hellbent on destroying these creative wellsprings of dissent and discourse.

Yanis Iqbal
Aligarh, India

Bright spot

Andrew Northall makes some very good points about the need for a mass Communist Party with hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of members, which can lead the working class across Europe in a socialist revolution (Letters, January 16).

Meanwhile, the inquest into the Labour's general election debacle continues and will continue at least until the new leader and deputy leader of the Labour Party are announced on April 4. Labour leadership candidate Lisa Nandy has made some interesting points gained from face-to-face discussion with working class people in and around her Wigan constituency. She has pointed out that, whilst Labour did well in the university cities of the north and west Midlands, including Liverpool, Manchester, York, Newcastle, Hull, Leeds, Sheffield and Birmingham, in the small to middle-sized towns surrounding these cities,

Labour was wiped out. Here many of the young have left and gone to live in the university cities. This has left these small to middle-sized town devoid of young people and composed of elderly, retired working class men who voted 'leave' in 2016.

Whilst my hometown of Wisbech in North East Cambridgeshire is not located in the north or west Midlands, it does have similar characteristics to the 52 'leave'-voting constituencies which were won by the Tories. Most young people who can go to university, never to return to Wisbech, apart from when they visit relatives. Those young people who don't leave Wisbech are usually in receipt of disability or sickness benefit, the employment and support allowance. Many of these young people smoke cannabis and are petty dealers of the drug.

Whilst Wisbech is only 40 miles north of the 'booming' university city of Cambridge, it could be on a different planet. Wisbech is part of the North East Cambridgeshire constituency of Tory Brexit secretary Stephen Barclay. In December his majority increased and his vote topped 38,000, with Labour coming a poor second with 8,000 votes, the Lib Dems third with 4,000 and the Greens on 1,850.

At the same time, the Labour Party in North East Cambridgeshire, just like in the small to middle-sized towns of the north and west Midlands, is almost dead. The few activists in North East Cambridgeshire Labour Party are some of the worst kinds of middle class liberals who commute each weekday to well-paid jobs in Cambridge.

The only bright spots in North East Cambridgeshire are the Unite Community branch and Wisbech, March and District Trades Council. Both organisations, of which I am a member, are involved in various campaigns, including anti-racism, and universal credit, and support for the local food banks and the homeless, and have a joint stall once a month at the weekly Job Club. We also plan to leaflet the local McDonald's amongst many other workplaces.

Whilst the Unite Community branch and trades council don't have the manpower and womanpower of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, or the resources to organise breakfast clubs like the Black Panther Party did in 1960s USA, we do have an effect far greater than our numbers, including a good rapport with the editors of the *Fenland Citizen* and the *Wisbech Standard/Cambs Times*, and often have reports of activities printed in those papers.

Leadership candidate Sir Keir Starmer has emphasised the need for Labour to be do something to end homelessness, including those living rough and the hidden homeless living in bed and breakfasts or hostels and those sofa-surfing. This is something the Unite Community branch and trades council are campaigning on, with pressure being put on Fenland District Council, especially when its 'local authority trading company' is launched this April.

Socialist activists should take every opportunity to get involved with their local Unite Community branch and their local trades council. The fightback against the Tories will start in the workplaces and on the streets. Unite Community and the trades councils will play a crucial role here.

John Smithe
Cambridgeshire

On the streets?

Andrew Northall says that the whole of the left, whatever that might be, "bet the entire farm on a Corbyn victory". I joined the Labour Party, from no party, to vote for Corbyn in the leadership election, but I don't know why that

would be betting any farm at all (Letters December 19 2019). So he, and the Labour Party, lost the election - so what? That's hardly the end of the world, or the struggle.

Most socialists I know, in and out of the party (Labour, that is) are disappointed, but not lying on the ground in tears. Yes, it is a "bourgeois workers' party", but that is no reason to just ignore it. Labour still got over 10 million votes and still has over half a million members - that's more people than you will find on the average "street".

Turning "to work ... on the streets", this for some reason reminded me of the Mothers of Invention lyric: "Gotta do a few things to make my life complete. I gotta live my life out on the street." Coincidentally this was released around the same time that I used to be demonstrating "on the streets" myself - over Vietnam, South Africa, Ireland ... and I would march with friends and comrades and then we'd go to the pub. There we would talk, including with members of the then International Socialists (now Socialist Workers Party). Today there are still hundreds of posters on marches with 'Socialist Workers Party' carefully torn off the top.

After a few years of this I started to ask myself what the point was. We might feel good and righteous, but what was being achieved? I'm not opposed to demonstrations by the way, but they are limited. There are demands; are they met? If yes, that's good. If not, what? Another demo. Unfortunately, for me, I subsequently joined the Workers Revolutionary Party - probably the biggest Trotskyist grouping of the time.

There was a printshop, a school, bookshops and an apparent end in view. T'was not to be, however. So where next? Obviously communists work with and within unions; they also join protests and seek to influence aims. But unions negotiate to win concessions from capitalists, not to overthrow capitalism. People on the streets want things to change: eg, withdrawal from wars, 'green new deals' and the like. Both unions and demonstrators are in general content with concessions, but concessions can be quietly withdrawn over time and both employers and governments tell lies - well, there's a surprise!

German workers won "the streets" in 1919, but with no clear idea as to what to do next. With no real organisation or leadership they were bloodily crushed. In 2003 we had one (two? three?) million people on the streets of London and it made no difference whatsoever to the government's determination to join an illegal war - except possibly a rather useless 'I told you so' a few years later.

The point is not to fight for changes or concessions, not to scream anger and defiance, but to win power and that will not be done by unions or "on the streets" - necessary as they may be - but by overthrowing capitalism. A Labour government obviously isn't going to do that, but it is where many workers, including some pretty conscious ones, are.

As the *Weekly Worker* reiterates every week, "There exists no real Communist Party today". Absolutely right. Meanwhile, the absolute necessity of overthrowing capitalism has never been more urgent and neither has the necessity of a global Communist Party. The Labour Party isn't going to do it, but then neither are the unions or "the streets". We have to fight with what we've got and that includes the Labour Party.

Meanwhile, Andrew Northall castigates the "Weekly Worker group" for the "effort and resources diverted

from the task of building a Communist Party". There is clearly advice and guidance needed from those having more success in this task. Ah, if only.

Jim Cook
Reading

Dictatorship

I recently pointed out that Marxism teaches that socialism comes from dictatorship - an idea which has had negative consequences for socialism. Alan Johnstone tries to make out that I misunderstand the phrase of Marx about the dictatorship of the proletariat, and attempts to divert the issue into one about the state in the period of transition from capitalism to socialism (Letters, January 16). But the question of the state must not be confused with the issue of dictatorship. The state can be controlled by people who believe in democratic accountability, or people who believe in dictatorship.

Marx never invented the term 'dictatorship', but he certainly managed, like the German socialist, Joseph Weydemeyer, to misrepresent its meaning. Marx argues in the 'Critique of the Gotha programme' (1875) that between the abolition of the bourgeois state and the establishment of a communist society there lies a transition stage. This stage he called the "dictatorship of the proletariat". At times Marx referred to the rule of the working class, but it is the former term that came to define Marxism, and even before 'Critique of the Gotha programme' he stated that one of his contributions to political science was the view that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat (1852). Later, Lenin even argued that a Marxist was someone who recognised that the class struggle leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The problem here is that the Marxist use of 'dictatorship' is a misrepresentation of the meaning of the term, which originates in the time of the Roman republic. Dictatorship relates to an individual, or office. In other words, it is a form of government, where the dictator - be it an individual or collegiate body - is not subject to the rule of law. The two characteristics of a dictatorship are that it not only dispenses with democracy, but it is also above the law. Lenin categorically stated that dictatorship was rule untrammelled by any law, which, of course, opens the door to the abuse of political power, regardless of which class the dictatorship represents, as we saw under Leninism, and which later led to Khrushchev's secret speech denouncing Stalin at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956. The problem is that like Trotsky, Khrushchev and his team, and later Gorbachev, never saw any connection between Marx's teaching about dictatorship and the abuse of political power in the Soviet Union.

Clearly Marx, Engels, and their followers have misrepresented the term 'dictatorship', applying it to the rule of a whole class, when in fact the term refers to the rule of an individual or group, which is above the law and which dispenses with democracy. Marxism confuses the need for state coercion in the period of transition from capitalism to socialism, with the idea of dictatorship, but the two are not the same thing. A dictatorship in the Roman sense may be necessary as an emergency measure, but this is not the same as needing a 'dictatorship of the working class' to bring about socialism. Such terminology is the fiction behind which an individual or group arrogates all power to itself, usually in the service of a bureaucratic elite.

Tony Clark
Labour supporter

CWU

Prepare for a bitter fight

The Tories are bent on ensuring that effective trade union action is impossible, writes **Peter Manson**. How to respond?



That was the best time

Talks with management have broken down and the Communication Workers Union has agreed to launch a fresh national strike ballot. But how can the battle be won, given the determination of Royal Mail to crush the union and the eagerness of the newly elected Boris Johnson government to effectively end the right to strike?

The second ballot follows a high court judgement in November 2019 declaring that the union's first ballot of members was invalid - that despite the fact that no less than 97% of members voted in favour of strike action in a 76% turnout!

Justice Jonathan Swift declared that the CWU's actions, which he said encouraged members to vote at work, amounted to "improper interference" with the ballot. So what exactly had the union done? Nothing. Individual members "intercepted" their own ballot papers in sorting offices and voted on the spot (some filmed themselves voting for strike action), even though by law they are obliged to do so at home. According to Justice Swift, this was "a form of subversion of the ballot process".

The union claimed that Royal Mail had relied on the witness statement of one single manager and that no members had actually complained about any interference in the process, but such factors were ignored. The truth is, of course, that the strike action would have been called during the general election campaign and the pre-Christmas period, which is the busiest time of the year for the company. Not a good terrain for Royal Mail to fight on. Hence Justice Swift's judgement.

The dispute is over Royal Mail's asset-stripping plans - part of its scheme to set up a separate parcels company and run down the postal service - at the cost of thousands of jobs and an increased workload for those still employed. For example, the company wants to abandon its obligation to deliver letters six days a week (which also means a

poorer service for millions across the country, of course). But what do you expect from a capitalist firm? It has to consider the best way to make a profit, doesn't it? And, after all, the company was privatised to make things 'more efficient'.

After the high court judgement, the CWU decided to go for another round of talks with Royal Mail rather than defy the ruling or even call another ballot straightaway, and it was only after the negotiations broke down that it went for a second vote. But the problem now is, how will the company and the state react, assuming another huge majority for action? What is to stop them claiming further minor infringements, which have allegedly 'subverted' the ballot process?

It is absolutely clear that the Tories will do all they can to prevent, break or defeat any action. Boris Johnson's government has declared its intention to introduce yet another round of anti-union laws - this time aimed in particular at the rail unions, at least initially. Under the new proposals the Rail, Maritime and Transport union - which has been campaigning against the attempt of the various rail companies to get rid of guards on trains - would only be able to take industrial action if the union signed up to a "minimum service agreement", whereby some trains would continue to run. Mick Whelan, the general secretary of Aslef, the train drivers' union, has referred to the latest proposals as an attempt to introduce a form of "slavery and forced labour".

Organisation

There is no doubt that we are witnessing an attempt to break militant trade unionism once and for all. Emboldened by their general election victory and success in seeing off the Tory anti-Brexiteers, Johnson and co now aim to outlaw *effective* industrial action.

So how should we respond? Clearly just carrying on in the old way is insufficient. There is an

urgent need for rank-and-file union members to organise effectively. Yes, the leadership could urge members to defy legislation and court injunctions intended to impose "forced labour". But will they? The chances are, though, that the second ballot will be just as, or even more, overwhelming than the first. But now management will be fighting on its preferred terrain and will have the full backing of a much strengthened government. Probably there will be no more court injunctions - rather a fight to finish the union.

Under those conditions solidarity will be the key. Will the new leader of the Labour Party urge its 530,000 members to join the CWU's picket lines? Ask the four candidates. Don't be satisfied with evasive answers. Will the TUC call an emergency conference to rally practical support from the whole trade union movement? It needs to raise money to support the strikers. The TUC ought to call a national day of action in support of the CWU. Will Unite drivers refuse to cross picket lines at sorting offices? Unite should issue clear instructions regarding what should be expected of its members. The law limits pickets to just six people. If they could be transformed into solidarity demonstrations of many thousands, then the chances of effective scabbing would be much reduced, or eliminated altogether. That is what CWU militants should be demanding and organising for.

Clearly in the event of a national strike, Royal Mail will bring in scabs, including those employed by agencies and other delivery companies. Measures must be taken to stop strike-breaking. In the here and now that means reaching out to those suffering in the so-called gig economy, those on zero-hour contracts, including the casuals already working in Royal Mail ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.co.uk

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday January 26, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group: study of Abram Leon's *The Jewish question - a Marxist interpretation*. This meeting: chapter 2D: 'The Jews after the fall of the Roman empire'. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday January 28, 6.30pm: Series of talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. This meeting: 'How to lose an argument with Noam Chomsky'. Speaker: Chris Knight. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: radicalanthropologygroup.org.

A living wage for rail gateline staff

Friday January 24, 12 noon: Protest outside York House, 20 York Street, Manchester M2. Northern Rail gateline staff are outsourced to contractor Carlisle Support Services, which pays below a living wage and refuses to negotiate with the RMT. Organised by National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers: www.rmt.org.uk/news/living-wage-protest-for-northern-gateline-staff.

Palestine solidarity

Saturday January 25, 9.30am to 5pm: Annual general meeting, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Members review last year's work, decide future campaigns and elect the executive committee. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org/events/psc-agm-2020.

Higher education strike wave

Saturday January 25, 11am to 4pm: National UCU activist meeting, UCL Electronic and Electrical Engineering, Roberts Building, Torrington Place, London WC1. How to defend workers in further and higher education and strengthen the union. Organised by University and College Union, London region: www.facebook.com/events/3002545536425366.

Building the Labour Left Alliance

Pre-conference meetings organised by the Labour Left Alliance: labourleft.org/lla-launch-conference.

London (all): Sunday January 26, 1pm to 3.30pm.

Kurdish Community Centre, 11 Portland Gardens, London N4. (Meeting for LLA signatories not organised in an affiliated local group.)

Tees Valley: Monday January 27, 7pm.

St Mary's Centre, 90 Corporation Road, Middlesbrough TS1.

Manchester: Tuesday January 28, 7pm.

Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2.

Northants: Tuesday January 28, 7pm.

Kingsley Park WMC, 120 Kingsley Park Terrace, Northampton NN2.

Rotherham Momentum: Tuesday January 28, 7pm.

Bridge Inn, 1 Greasbrough Road, Rotherham S60.

Swansea and South/West Wales: Wednesday January 29, 7pm.

Peppermint Bar (upstairs area), 13-17 Wind Street, Swansea SA1.

York and North Yorkshire: Wednesday January 29, 7pm.

The Golden Ball, 2 Cromwell Road, York YO1.

Cambridge and Cambridgeshire: Wednesday January 29, 7.30pm.

The Hut, Argyle Street Coop, 3 Fletcher's Terrace, Cambridge CB1.

Sheffield: Thursday January 30, 7.30pm.

Crookes Social Club, Mulehouse Road, Sheffield S10.

Isle of Wight: Thursday January 30, 7.30pm.

Boardroom, Unity Hall, 20 St Thomas's Square, Newport PO30.

Croydon: Monday February 3, 7.30pm.

Mandela Room, Ruskin House, 23 Coombe Rd, Croydon CR0.

No war on Iran

Thursday January 30, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, 12 Jesus Lane, Cambridge CB5. Speaker: Sadiya Hashim from the Campaign Against Sanctions and Military Intervention in Iran. Organised by Cambridge Stop the War Coalition and Cambridge CND: www.facebook.com/events/610719579758431.

Stop the war

Thursday January 30, 7pm: London activists meeting, Leslie Foster Suite, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1. To plan the next stage in the campaign to prevent a new war in the Middle East.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/events/2574457679506090.

Remembering Robin Page Arnot (1890-1986)

Thursday February 6, 7pm: Public meeting, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. First of three weekly talks about prominent CPGB educators. Speaker: Mary Davis. Tickets £5 (£3).

Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.facebook.com/events/2916854228327624.

Stand Up To Racism

Saturday February 8, 11am to 4pm: Trade union conference, Brunei Gallery, SOAS, Russell Square, London WC1. Bringing together trade unionists from different industries and sectors to promote anti-racism in unions and workplaces. Registration £12 (£6).

Organised by Stand Up To Racism: www.facebook.com/events/425078621764076.

Labour Left Alliance launch

Saturday February 22, 10am to 5pm: Delegate conference, venue in Sheffield close to the railway station. To discuss structures, organisation and strategy for bringing together and strengthening the Labour left.

Organised by Labour Left Alliance: labourleft.org/lla-launch-conference.

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.

LABOUR

Then there were four

Carla Roberts of Labour Party Marxists shows how appeasement has a terrible logic. But candidates can be pressurised from the left

We know, of course, that Jeremy Corbyn is not, and never has been, a Marxist. He is a sincere, but dithering, left reformist who will do anything to try and appease his opponents rather than fight them - we have had plenty of opportunity to witness this political weakness over the last five years.

And yet we have to admit to still being gobsmacked about his proposed nominations for the House of Lords. Firstly, the man is supposed to be a republican. Why on earth would he nominate *anybody* for this wretched symbol of privilege, whose only purpose is to stop and delay the 'commoners' from making any decisions that are seen as too radical? We note that Labour's manifesto in the 2019 election promised to abolish the House of Lords (though it wants it replaced with an elected "senate" - but why should there be *any* checks and balances from above?).

During his first leadership campaign in 2015, Corbyn told Channel 4 News he saw "no case" for appointing new peers.¹ A position he should have stuck to. But he quickly backtracked, successively nominating, amongst others, Shami Chakrabarti in 2016 and, in 2018, former witch-finder general Iain McNicol. As general secretary of the Labour Party, McNicol helped to launch and maintain the witch-hunt against Corbyn and the left and appointed many of the rightwingers who still control layer upon layer of the party bureaucracy. He now goes by the fetching title, Lord McNicol of West Kilbride, and makes ample use of claiming the attendance allowance of £305 per day (which he enjoys in addition to subsidised restaurant facilities and travel expenses).²

His nomination was a way to sweeten and hasten his overdue departure from the general secretary post. We would have preferred it if Corbyn had tried to get him sacked outright - was there no chance of a majority on the national executive committee for that? Still, we can understand why Corbyn went down this route: it was a way to get rid of one of his biggest and most powerful opponents in the middle of the civil war, when he had everything still to play for.

The situation today is vastly different - Corbyn has finally been forced out of his job. Which is why we really cannot see any rational reason for him nominating Tom Watson, just before his own departure as leader of the Labour Party. For four and a half years, Twatson did everything in his power to undermine the leader. He orchestrated both coups against him, launched a number of open letters, and cohered the right wing inside the Labour Party. So, even if Corbyn had foolishly promised him a seat in the House of Lords in order to get rid of him just before the election, the result of that election surely should have led him to rip up that promise - after all, Watson's activities have played a huge role in making sure Labour under the 'unelectable' Corbyn got trounced.

But the fact that Corbyn seems to feel the need to honour that promise just shows that he is and remains very much part of 'the system' - an honourable and thereby rather ineffective Labour politician. The nomination of the former speaker is easier to understand. John Bercow has been on a journey. Beginning as a Monday Club Tory he is now described as an "independent". He certainly made life difficult for Theresa May and Boris Johnson over Brexit. That said, we are more than puzzled

that Corbyn's close comrades, Karie Murphy and Katy Clark, would be interested in taking up a position in that house of privilege. Like the hundreds of people who have over the years rejected the so-called 'honours' bestowed by the monarch, real socialists should just say no.

This is part of the astonishing legacy that Corbyn leaves behind. Yes, there was a mass influx into the party, a real sense of hope that things could be different. But we have to be honest: the political opportunities that opened up with Corbyn's election were all but wasted. There has been almost no progress in terms of the democratisation of the party. Corbyn squandered the opportunity to reintroduce the mandatory reselection of parliamentary candidates at the 2018 conference, by instructing Len McCluskey to use Unite's block vote to stop open selection. And, worst of all, Corbyn and his allies have silently stood by and watched, as hundreds of his supporters were thrown to the wolves in the ongoing witch-hunt in the party.

The refusal by Corbyn and his advisors to stand up to the right is already having serious political consequences that go far wider than the Labour Party: council after council is banning the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS), which before long could well be declared anti-Semitic and thereby illegal (witness the decision of the German parliament). Perhaps we will soon see official regulations characterising anti-Zionism as violating official anti-racism, being closely associated with terrorist tendencies and therefore notifiable to the Prevent bureaucracy (I am little bit surprised it has not happened already). Any war in the Middle East, especially if it involves Israel, will increase the intensity and scope of the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' smear campaign. Anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism could easily fall into the net too.

10 pledges

This is, of course, why most of the candidates in the Labour leadership elections have been falling over themselves to sign up to the so-called '10 pledges' published by the Board of Deputies of British Jews. They all want to appear respectable and seen to be doing 'everything in their power to eradicate anti-Semitism from the party'. However, most members know from first-hand experience that this is based on a lie. Anti-Semitism is *not* rife in the Labour Party - there have been a minuscule number of genuine cases, while most allegations were trumped up in order to smear Corbyn.

No wonder really that Rebecca Long

Bailey's enthusiastic support for the pledges has been hugely controversial on the left. There is a real risk that this has, in effect, handed the leadership to Keir Starmer: support for her campaign, which was only ever lukewarm, has cooled considerably as a result.

The reason is obvious. The pro-Tory BoD demands that the Labour Party hands over its disciplinary process to "an independent provider" (the BoD would probably volunteer itself) and wants to decide who should or should not be a member of the party: "prominent offenders such as Ken Livingstone and Jackie Walker" should receive lifetime bans, the BoD demands.

As a much-publicised open letter by Labour Against the Witchhunt (signed by almost 4,500 people) states,

The BoD is not a neutral body, but one with an evident political agenda: to attack, weaken and destroy any opposition to the systematic and brutal oppression of the Palestinians by the Israeli government. The BoD encourages the conflation of criticism of the Israeli government (anti-Zionism), with anti-Semitism (hatred of Jews). The BoD, and its individual officers, have maintained open hostility to Labour since Corbyn took leadership of the party. They organised the 'Enough is Enough' demonstration outside parliament in March 2018, which was clearly aimed at weakening and attacking Jeremy Corbyn.

We believe that the BoD's '10 pledges' are an outrageous political interference by an organisation that is overtly hostile to today's Labour Party and everything it stands for. If implemented, these policies would, for example, result in the suspensions and expulsions of the thousands of Labour members who have stood in open solidarity with those wrongly accused of anti-Semitism, including Chris Williamson, Jackie Walker, Ken Livingstone and Marc Wadsworth.³

It was refreshing to see that Richard Burgon, standing for the deputy leader of the party, used the official hustings meeting in Liverpool last week to volunteer his position: "I have not signed and will not sign the 10 pledges. I have concerns, for example, about the outsourcing our disciplinary process." He also said that he wants to work with all Jewish organisations and not just the ones the BoD considers worthy (needless to say, Jewish Voice for Labour is excluded from its list). He also pointed out that, "On the IHRA definition, the party agreed to add in a clear statement that it wouldn't

undermine freedom of expression on Israel and Palestine. These are points I want to raise with the Board of Deputies."⁴

Dawn Butler, at the same hustings event, also said she has not signed the pledges - however, in a rather rambling contribution, she suggested that instead she wants to make sure that the "report being produced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission into the Labour Party is fully implemented". Without even knowing what kind of results or recommendations this biased body will come up with! Even the centrist, Angela Rayner, who *has* signed the pledges, disagreed with its key demand to hand over the disciplinary process: "I don't want to outsource the problem - we have to deal with it ourselves."

Rebecca Long Bailey would do well to row back on her support for the pledges - though her campaign manager, Jon Lansman, is probably stopping her from doing so. But, just like Corbyn, she will never be able to bend backwards far enough to appease the right. Surely, that is a lesson we all should have learned over the last five years.

Open selection

Lansman and Long Bailey have instead decided to go for the 'open selection' ticket to save her campaign. Momentum has sent out a rather strange email, celebrating this "huge news": "Our movement has been pushing for open selections for years, and this announcement shows that Rebecca is a Labour leadership candidate who really listens to members."

Well, it is not exactly the *whole* movement that has been pushing for open selection, is it, Jon? As soon as Corbyn became leader, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy - which then still involved Lansman - ditched its decades-long demand for the mandatory reselection of all parliamentary candidates, because Jeremy Corbyn was reluctant to go for it (in one of his many futile attempts to keep the right on board). And in the run-up to the 2018 party conference, Momentum argued *against* open selection, pushing for the lame reform of the trigger ballot instead.

However, when the campaign for mandatory reselection became absolutely huge in the party, Lansman changed tack and jumped on the bandwagon - one week before conference. Only to jump off it again at conference itself, when Corbyn let it be known publicly that he favoured the reform of the trigger ballot. While over 90% of the Constituency Labour Party delegates voted in favour of the rule change, the unions voted it down and went with the NEC compromise

on reforming the trigger ballot. We have seen how useless that rule change has been - the few trigger ballots that *did* take place ended up with the confirmation of the sitting MP.

It remains to be seen though if this is enough to turn around Long Bailey's faltering campaign. There is no doubt that she will join Keir Starmer and Lisa Nandy on the ballot paper. Unite is about to nominate her, pushing her over the required 5% hurdle from affiliated organisations. The official decision will be made on January 24, but United Left, which won a majority of seats on the 63-strong Unite executive in 2017, has already endorsed her - and, somewhat more surprisingly, Richard Burgon for deputy. It would take some extraordinary action by Unite leader Len McCluskey to stop either from getting onto the ballot paper.

Emily Thornberry will hopefully soon go the same way as Jess Phillips, who has just stepped down from the leadership race - into political oblivion. Phillips proved to be absolutely useless, even when playing to a friendly media. Thornberry, on the other hand, has managed to alienate the left *and* the right and is bound to drop out of the race soon, having secured zero nominations, either from CLPs or affiliates. Lisa Nandy, who has just been nominated by the GMB union, has done surprisingly well and might yet slip in through the middle - she has quite successfully positioned herself as the 'sensible candidate' between the cold careerist, Starmer, and the Corbyn continuity candidate, Long Bailey. She probably does appeal to many of the over 100,000 new members who have joined since the 2019 election (the majority of whom will probably be somewhere on the political 'soft left', rather than the hard left or right of the party). In this context, it is interesting to note that only 15,000 people have paid £25 to become 'registered supporters' of the party in order to vote. Compare that to the 180,000 who made use of this provision in 2016 - overwhelmingly in order to support Jeremy Corbyn.

This leadership election is an important, politically fluid period and it gives us an opportunity not just to sound out the various candidates, but to attempt to pull them to the left - and in so doing influence Labour members to fight for what is necessary. We urge Labour members to set Long Bailey a number of conditions before they agree to their CLP nominating her. All of these demands go to the heart of the ongoing civil war in the Labour Party:

- Will you retract your support from the Board of Deputies' 10 pledges?
- Will you campaign for Labour to support the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaign?
- Will you campaign for Labour to fight for the abolition of Trident and for unilateral nuclear disarmament?
- Will you campaign for the mandatory reselection of all parliamentary candidates and the further empowerment of Labour members?
- Will you issue an apology to Chris Williamson and ask him to rejoin the Labour Party? ●

Notes

1. www.politicshome.com/news/uk/constitution/house-lords-reform/news/91828/former-unite-boss-tony-woodley-insists-he-will.
2. www.parliament.uk/business/lords/whos-in-the-house-of-lords/house-of-lords-expenses.
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Presumably Emily Thornberry will be the next to go

ECONOMICS

From socialism to ‘stabilising finance’

Hyman Minsky acted as a forerunner for protagonists of today’s ‘modern monetary theory’, writes Michael Roberts

Recently, the Levy Institute, the think-tank centre for post-Keynesian economics (and in particular the theories of Hyman Minsky, the radical Keynesian economist of the 1980s), published a short video that shows Minsky explaining his theory of crises under capitalism in his own words at an event in Colombia, November 1987.¹ It is a very clear account of his theory of crises based on “financial fragility”.

When the great recession hit the world capitalist economy, many radical and Marxist economists, and even some mainstream economists, called it a “Minsky moment”. In other words, the cause of the great recession was a financial crash resulting from excessive debt that eventually could not be serviced. Minsky’s key contention - that financial instability is endogenously generated - implies that not only financial, but also “real” crises, arise as a result of the inner workings of the financial system: “History shows that every deep and long depression in the United States has been associated with a financial crisis - although, especially in recent history, we have had financial crises that have not led to a deep and long depression.”²

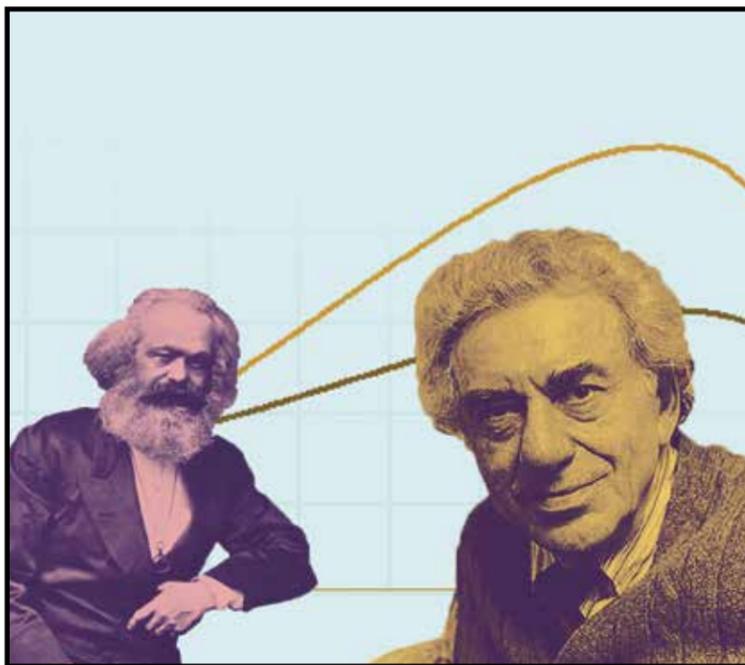
In my view, this is an accurate statement. A financial crash occurs in every capitalist slump, while financial crashes can occur without a slump. But this suggests that what is going on in the ‘real economy’ is what decides a financial crash, not vice versa. Indeed, as Guglielmo Carchedi has shown,³ when both financial profits and profits in the productive sector start to fall, an economic slump ensues. That is the evidence from the post-war slumps in the US. But a financial crisis on its own (as measured by falling financial profits) does not lead to a slump if productive sector profits are still rising.⁴

Indeed, if you listen closely to Minsky’s account of his crisis theory, he recognises that excessive debt in the form of Ponzi finance only leads to a crash when the profits engendered in business and in banking are no longer sufficient to sustain debt expansion. As he puts it, “borrowers are myopic to the past and blind to the future.”

Minsky v Marx

At the recent Allied Social Science Association 2020 conference - the annual meeting of mainstream economists organised by the American Economic Association - there were also sessions by the more radical wings of economics: post-Keynesians and Marxists. Riccardo Bellofiore, the erudite scholar of Marxist, Sraffian and Keynesian economic theory, presented two papers that offered interesting insights on Minsky’s theories. In his first paper, Bellofiore argues that “the current crisis is the outcome of the money-manager capitalism stage of capitalism - the real subsumption of labour to finance, in Marxian terms. The most promising starting points are the structural dimensions of Minsky’s analysis and the monetary circuit approach.”⁵ In his second paper, he argues that “Minsky’s contributions are major necessary ingredients to a rethinking of Marxian theory of capitalist dynamics and crises.”⁶

I beg to differ. I do not think that Minsky’s theories dovetail with Marx’s theory of crises or that they provide a better explanation of booms and slumps than that of Marx.⁷ As Maria Ivanova from Goldsmiths University, London has argued effectively (in a



Minsky: ideas not compatible with Marxism

paper of a few years ago comparing Minsky and Marx’s theories of crises), Marx was firmly opposed to blaming crises on financial speculation, or on the recklessness of single individuals. As Ivanova put it, “Speculation and panic may trigger crises, but to trigger something does not mean to cause it. For Marx, the ultimate origins of all crises lie in the ‘real’ economy of production and exchange.”⁸

Ivanova argues that Marx’s concept of money could not be more different from Minsky’s. Marx saw money as the social expression of value - the amount of socially necessary labour-time embodied in a commodity. Money thus expresses the deepest contradiction of the capitalist production relations in “a palpable form”. The Minskyan perspective prides itself on its Keynesian origins:

In contradistinction to Marx, Keynes accorded primary importance to interest-bearing capital, where capital appears as property and not as function. And, since capital in that form does not function (ie, does not engage in immediate production), it does not directly exploit labour; class conflict appears obliterated since the rate of profit now forms an antithesis not with wage labour, but with the rate of interest.

Ivanova reckons that implicit in the Keynesian-Minskyan perspective is the insight that finance can repress production, overpower it and ‘decouple’ from it (at least temporarily) to the detriment of the wider economy - this is what Bellofiore argues is its major insight. But it follows from this that Minsky reckons that if finance were controlled, regulated and restrained, some of the worst ills of capitalism could be kept at bay. This view is in sharp contrast to Marx, who reckoned that the inherent contradictions of capitalism were beyond human control.

Minsky believed, in line with the Keynesian tradition, that the crises arising from the permanent disequilibrium of the capitalist system could be contained by the concerted effort of ‘Big Government and Big Finance’ (monetary authorities). As Ivanova puts it, “the popular tale of the purely financial origins of the recent crisis dovetails nicely with the belief that financial instability and crises - albeit tragically unavoidable

and potentially devastating - can be managed by means of money artistry”. No wonder many mainstream economists in the depths of the global financial crash, like Paul Krugman, reckoned that “We are all Minskyans now”.⁹

But the belief that social problems have monetary/financial origins, and could be resolved by tinkering with money and financial institutions, is fundamentally flawed. “For the very recurrence of crises attests to the limits of fiscal and monetary policies as means to ensure ‘balanced’ accumulation”, as Ivanova puts it. Minsky considered the dependence of non-financial businesses on “external funds to finance the long-term capital development of the economy” a key source of instability.¹⁰ This provided an important rationale for government intervention. In his famous book, *Stabilising an unstable economy* (1986), he wrote: “Once Big Government stabilises aggregate profits, the banker’s reason for market power loses its force.”

So the job of the radical economist was to restore the profitability of capital by the intervention of the monetary and fiscal authorities, according to Minsky. This was more important than shifting the burden of any financial crisis off the backs of the many. As Minsky said in *Stabilising an unstable economy*,

It may also be maintained that capitalist societies are inequitable and inefficient. But the flaws of poverty, corruption, uneven distribution of amenities and private power, and monopoly-induced inefficiency (which can be summarised in the assertion that capitalism is unfair) are not inconsistent with the survival of a capitalist economic system. Distasteful as inequality and inefficiency may be, there is no scientific law or historical evidence that says that, to survive, an economic order must meet some standard of efficiency and equity (fairness).

Radical

Riccardo Bellofiore in his ASSA paper is keen to tell us that, in his book *John Maynard Keynes* (1975), Minsky adopted a more radical position than Keynes on the need for the “socialisation of investment” as the solution to crises.

Riccardo reckons that

Minsky’s socialisation of investment, thanks to his reference to the New Deal, is not far from a socialisation in the use of productive capacity: it is a ‘command’ over the utilisation of resources; its output very much looks like Marx’s ‘immediately social’ use values. It is complementary to a socialisation of banking and finance, and to a socialisation of employment. Minsky goes further that a ‘Keynesian’ welfare state and argues for a full employment policy led by the government as direct employer, through extra-market, extra-private enterprise and employment schemes.

But that was in 1975. Mike Beggs, a lecturer in political economy at the University of Sydney, in a recent article¹¹ shows that, while Minsky started off as a socialist, at least in following the ideas of ‘market socialism’ by Oscar Lange, he eventually retreated from seeing the need to replace capitalism with a new social organisation (or ‘socialised investment’), to trying to resolve the contradictions of finance capital within capitalism, as his eventual ‘financial fragility’ theory of crises shows.

As Bellofiore says, in the 1970s, Minsky contrasted his position from Keynes. Keynes had called for the “somewhat comprehensive socialisation of investment” but went on to modify that with the statement that “it is not the ownership of the instruments of production which it is important for the state to assume” - it was enough to “determine the aggregate amount of resources devoted to augmenting the instruments and the basic rate of reward to those who own them”. But Minsky went further and called for the taking over of the “towering heights” of industry and, in this way, Keynesianism could be integrated with the ‘market socialism’ of Lange and Abba Lerner.

But, by the 1980s, Minsky’s aim was not to expose the failings of capitalism, but to explain how an unstable capitalism could be ‘stabilised’. Beggs states:

His proposals are aimed, then, at the stability problem ... The expansion of collective consumption is dropped entirely. Minsky supports what he calls ‘Big Government’ mainly as a stabilising macroeconomic force. The federal budget should be at least of the same order of magnitude as private investment, so that it can pick up the slack when the latter recedes - but it need be no bigger.

Indeed, Minsky’s policy approach is not dissimilar from that of today’s ‘modern monetary theory’ (MMT) supporters. Minsky even proposed a sort of MMT job guarantee policy. The government would maintain an employment safety net, promising jobs to anyone who would otherwise be unemployed, but these must be sufficiently low-paid to restrain market wages at the bottom end.¹² The low pay is regrettably necessary, said Minsky, because “constraints upon money wages and labour costs are corollaries of the commitment to maintain full employment”. The discipline of the labour market must remain: working people may not fear unemployment, but would surely still fear a reduction to the minimum wage (Beggs). Thus, by the 1980s, Minsky saw government policy

as aiming to establish financial stability, in order to support profitability and sustain private expenditure. He wrote: “Once we achieve an institutional structure in which upward explosions from full employment are constrained, even as profits are stabilised, then the details of the economy can be left to market processes.”

Minsky’s journey from socialism to stability for capitalist profitability comes about because he and the post-Keynesians deny and/or ignore Marx’s law of value, just as the ‘market socialists’, Lange and Lerner, did. The post-Keynesians and MMTers deny/ignore that profit comes from *surplus value* extracted by exploitation in the capitalist production process and it is this that is the driving force for investment and employment. They ignore the origin and role of profit, except as a residual of investment and consumer spending.¹³ Instead they all have a money fetish. With that, money replaces value, rather than representing it. They all see money (finance) as both causing crises and also solving them by creating value!

In my view, far from Minsky providing the “necessary ingredients to a rethinking of Marxian theory of capitalist dynamics and crises”, as Bellofiore argues, Minsky’s theory of crises, like all those emanating from the post-Keynesian think-tank of the Levy Institute, falls well short of delivering a comprehensive causal explanation of regular and recurring booms and slumps in capitalist production. By limiting the searchlight of analysis to money, finance and debt, Minsky and the post-Keynesians ignore the exploitation of labour by capital (terms not even used). They fail to recognise that financial fragility and collapse are triggered by the recurring insufficiency of value creation in capitalist accumulation and production.

Moreover, by claiming that capitalism’s problem lies in the finance sector, the policy solutions offered are the regulation and control of that sector, rather than the replacement of the capitalist mode of production. Indeed, that is the very path that Minsky took: from his socialism and “socialisation of investment” in the 1970s to “stabilising finance” in the 1980s ●

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

Notes

1. www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mHBrixVarU&feature=youtu.be.
2. HP Minsky, ‘Reconstituting the United States financial structure: some fundamental issues’ (1992), *Working Paper No69*, Levy Economics Institute of Bard College.
3. G Carchedi and M Roberts (eds) *World in crisis: a global analysis of Marx’s law of profitability* London 2018.
4. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2017/10/20/the-global-debt-mountain-a-minsky-moment-or-carchedi-crunch>.
5. https://thenextrecession.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/minskye28099socializationofinvestment_preview-6.pdf.
6. https://thenextrecession.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/marxbetweenschumpeterandkeynes_augu_preview-2.pdf.
7. See <https://thenextrecession.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/marx-not-minsky.pdf>.
8. https://thenextrecession.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/conf_2011_maria_ivanova-on-marx-minsky-and-the-gr.pdf.
9. www.thenation.com/article/were-all-minskyites-now.
10. HP Minsky, ‘Uncertainty and the institutional structure of capitalist economies: remarks upon receiving the Veblen-Commons award’ *Journal of Economic Issues* No30 (1996), pp357-68.
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12. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2019/02/05/mmt-3-a-backstop-to-capitalism>.
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EUROPE

Up against the clock

By insisting that Britain is going to diverge from the EU, Sajid Javid is waving goodbye to the car industry, writes **Eddie Ford**

In his weekend interview with the *Financial Times*, Sajid Javid outlined a stance that will have profound political and economic implications for Britain - yet strangely did not generate anywhere near the sort of response you might have expected. Is everyone half-asleep from Brexit fatigue?

Almost casually, the chancellor told the newspaper that not all businesses will benefit from Brexit - there will be winners and losers. No more sunlit uplands. At the end of the transition period, "there will not be alignment" with the European Union - no legislation that follows the contours of the bloc. Free of its shackles, Britain will not be in the customs union or the single market, or be a rule-taker - and "we will do this by the end of the year", no ifs or buts. Rather, Javid insisted, businesses must "adjust" to the new regulations - do or die. After all, he argued, "they have known" since 2016 that Britain was leaving the EU, even if "they didn't know the exact terms" - which is one way of putting it.

This means that the treasury will not lend support to manufacturers that continue to "favour EU rules", refusing to embrace the exciting new world. Instead, the chancellor wants a "deep, comprehensive free trade agreement", and "that's what we are working on". Indeed, with a hint of Trumpian hubris, he declared that, once the deal with the EU is clinched, "we will continue to be one of the most successful economies on Earth". It is worth remembering that the very same Sajid Javid in May 2016 wrote an article for *The Daily Telegraph* saying the only thing guaranteed about Brexit was a decade of "stagnation and doubt" - Britain was better off, thanks to the single market, which was a "great invention" that Margaret Thatcher had "campaigning enthusiastically to create". Three and a half years is obviously a very long time in politics.

Javid also said in his interview that he wanted to double the UK's annual economic growth to between 2.7% and 2.8%, contrary to the expectations of most forecasters, such as the Bank of England - which believes you would be lucky to get half that. Apparently, the extra growth would come from "spending on skills and infrastructure" in the Midlands and the north of England - even if they did not offer as much "bang for the buck" as projects in other parts of the country. Therefore treasury investment rules would be rewritten, promised Javid, as they have tended to favour places with high economic growth and high productivity - a vicious circle helping to "entrench" inequality. But from now on, weaker and poorer parts of the country would have "first call" on the new money. New economy, new Britain - if you are prepared to wait a bit.

Of course, the government must be seen to be doing something in these regions in order to "repay the trust" of those who voted Tory for the very first time - otherwise they might quickly regret it. According to Javid, now that austerity is officially dead and money trees are sprouting everywhere, historically low interest rates were "almost a signal to me from the market that here's the cash" - so "use it to do something productive" and make a difference. You could almost call it Keynesianism.

The chancellor hinted as well that there might be tax rises, saying that he was determined to take the "hard decisions you need to sometimes,



Sajid Javid: Mr Changeable

especially at the start of a new government". But, naturally, we will have to wait for the budget to get more details - whether in March or the autumn. Funnily enough, that is not what it said in the Tory manifesto.

Friction

Javid's remarks clearly represent a *strategic* departure from Theresa May's approach, which envisaged some sort of close alignment with the EU in an effort to reduce friction at the border for traders. It will inevitably mean customs barriers, tariffs and delays - the very opposite of what we were promised by the Brexiteers and the government. Only a few days before the election, an ebullient Boris Johnson said companies reliant on the EU had nothing to fear, as the deal "we have got ready to go" does "protect the supply chains and keeps them intact and makes sure we have complete equivalence when it comes to our standards, our industrial requirements" - which seems like complete fantasy.

In fact, Javid's comments to the *FT* were essentially "the death knell for the concept of frictionless trade" with the EU - in the words of Tim Rycroft, chief operating officer of the Food and Drink Federation. Significantly he told the BBC's *Today* programme that divergence would "probably" mean food prices would rise when the transition period finishes, as businesses like his will have to take into account the costly new checks, processes and procedures - a lot of new paperwork. Yes, Rycroft acknowledged, some industries might benefit from UK-specific trade rules. But for him it is vitally important that the government clearly understands "what the consequences will be" if it goes ahead and changes the trading terms - it could spell bad times around the corner.

The Confederation of British Industry and the British Chamber of Commerce had similar concerns. Alignment supported jobs and competitiveness, as far as the CBI was concerned, especially in some of the most deprived areas of the UK - making a nonsense of what the chancellor said in the *FT*. Whilst its director general,

Carolyn Fairbairn, recognised that there are areas of the economy which could benefit from its future divergence from EU regulation - she urged the government "not to treat this right as an obligation to diverge". Think before you jump. In the opinion of Claire Walker, co-executive director of the British Chamber of Commerce, while business communities were prepared to be pragmatic about coming changes to regulation, "uncertainty around the extent of divergence risks firms moving their production elsewhere" - hence the government must provide "substantial support to help firms adapt". She might be waiting a long time. John McDonnell tweeted about "rightwing ideology overriding common sense".

It goes without saying that these concerns are hardly new. In October, the UK's largest manufacturing industries warned of a "serious risk to competitiveness" and "huge new costs and disruption to UK firms" if the government ends regulatory alignment as part of any post-Brexit trade deal. A group of trade bodies, employing 1.1 million people and accounting for a turnover of £98 billion, wrote to cabinet office minister Michael Gove and Brexit secretary Steve Barclay, highlighting their worries.

One very big loser from Javid's shakedown of the British economy will be the car industry - which faces annihilation. As the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders explained, the automotive trade between the UK and EU is "uniquely integrated" and "our priority is to avoid expensive tariffs and other 'behind the border' barriers that limit market access". In short, the car industry exists largely on the basis of two things - Europe, and foreign investment in order to be in Europe. If you take the British car industry, apart from Austin Martin (which is about to be bought up by a Chinese billionaire), it is basically European or Japanese-owned. Vauxhall, for example, is a subsidiary of French car manufacturer Groupe PSA (parent of Peugeot, Citroën, DS and Opel). Margaret Thatcher got the Japanese into Britain partly because of the European market.

If European and Japanese companies no longer have unfettered access to EU markets, then the British car industry is finished. It was always under question anyway, because Japan now has a trade deal with the EU and therefore does not necessarily need an actual manufacturing plant in Europe, let alone the UK. Furthermore, there is also a consolidation of the size of plants - electric engines need larger-scale facilities, so it is back to Japan or somewhere else with bigger and more efficient plants. The extinction of the British car industry must mean, directly or indirectly, *hundreds of thousands* of job losses in terms of components and direct production - but Brexit is a price worth paying as "ultimately" the British economy as a whole will "thrive" in the long term, if we are to believe the chancellor.

Javid was asked if his comments meant the government was prepared to "sacrifice some elements of manufacturing and industry" - which he strenuously denied, of course. However, a senior member of the cabinet told the prominent political journalist, Robert Peston, that "there will be friction at the border, we are under no illusion about that".¹ That means without any doubt that there will have to be checks at the border for compliance with EU standards, which for some businesses will be onerous - not just car-makers, but also livestock and agri-food exporters, chemicals manufacturers, aerospace, pharmaceutical companies, etc. Many will move plant and people across the Channel to avoid the new friction at Dover and Calais. For these businesses, Brexit might not feel like 'taking back control'.

Business leaders are now urging the government to publish detailed negotiating objectives for the oncoming trade talks with the EU. Brussels is expected to publish draft negotiating guidelines on February 1, yet so far nothing seems forthcoming from the government - though Boris Johnson is due to set out his "hopes" in what is touted as a major speech in the first half of February. The Institute of Directors has warned that business needs time

to prepare for the radically new relationship with the EU by the end of the year, finding in a survey that 55% said they would only be able to "make planning and investment decisions" with certainty, when "we understand our future with the EU". More than 60% of businesses said the EU deal was "more important" to them than a US deal. Get your skates on, Johnson - tell Donald Trump you are busy.

Naivety

Yet time is already beginning to run out for the British government, which is adamant that it will never seek an extension to the transition period. The European Commission has said the Brexit negotiations "will not start" until March, as the EU will "take some time" to agree its collective position. The EC's spokesman, Eric Mamer, said: "this is not a slowing down or speeding up of the process" - it is just "simply the nature of the institutional process and the consultations that need to take place before the negotiation directives can be formally adopted".

This leaves a remarkably short amount of time to secure an agreement, particularly when you bear in mind that it took seven years to complete the trade deal between Canada and the EU - which was almost blocked at the last minute by the Walloon regional parliament. Ratification of any deal between the EU and UK will probably take two to three months; therefore even in a best-case scenario an agreement has to be struck between March and September - which seems very unlikely. Complicating matters even more, Downing Street did not rule out starting talks with the US *before* the EU, as it appears that Donald Trump is prepared to "move heaven and earth" to get an agreement over the line in the summer.

However, despite the very early stages, Washington seems to be getting impatient with the British government. The White House has accused Boris Johnson of "foot dragging" over negotiating a trade deal, and is concerned about what it dubs as "naivety" in No10 over how long the talks will take. As with the EU, the UK is yet to publish its formal negotiating objectives for the US deal, but Washington made its public in February last year. Robert Lighthizer, the Trump administration's trade representative, again pressed Liz Truss, Britain's international trade secretary, to publish the UK's position last week - piling on the pressure. A US administration source said "we're up against the clock", because Washington "will close down in the autumn for the election", noting that "there are some really sticky issues here" - phytosanitary, lamb and beef standards, tariffs on cars and trucks, and so on, and congress is "likely to kick up rough when ratifying it". Anything could happen - leaving aside the impeachment circus, which will come to nothing.

The fact that Johnson wants to complete his trade deal with the US as early as the summer is hardly something to fill you with joy - did you trust him when he said the NHS was not up for sale? Nevertheless, this year you might be enjoying chlorinated chicken or hormone-treated beef for your Christmas dinner ●

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Notes

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USA

America, the robotic

Daniel Lazare examines the role of a reactionary constitution in the battle over Trump's impeachment

Why are Democrats impeaching Donald Trump? Is it because pressuring Ukraine to investigate a political rival makes him guilty of "high crimes and misdemeanours"? Because colluding with Russia means that he is such a danger to American democracy that liberals have no choice but to cry out, 'Basta' ('Enough')?

No, it is because Democrats are caught in an 18th-century time warp. In 1787, a group of tribal patriarchs known as the Founding Fathers (always capitalised) wrote out a script that today's Democrats have no choice but to follow. The script requires them to do three things:

- Prove that Trump is guilty of "treason, bribery or other high crimes and misdemeanours" - the only constitutional basis for removing a sitting president prior to an election, according to article II, section four.
- Build the constitution up as the holy of holies in order to depict Trump's alleged violations as the lowest of the low.
- Portray themselves as true believers, whose only concern is protecting the constitutional faith.

Impeachment is thus less a political movement aimed at driving out a dangerous authoritarian than a religious crusade aimed at banishing the unbelievers. Just as a 12th-century knight rampaging through the Holy Land would insist that trade and plunder had nothing to do with it, impeachment advocates insist that political considerations are absent as well.

As black Democratic congresswoman Barbara Jordan proclaimed when Richard Nixon wound up in the dock nearly half a century ago, "My faith in the constitution is whole. It is complete, it is total. I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction of the constitution." The fact that the constitution allowed generations of Jordan's Texas ancestors to be held in slavery did not matter - faith was all. Not to be outdone, speaker of the house Newt Gingrich insisted 25 years later that politics were also irrelevant when Bill Clinton went on trial for the crime of having sex with someone other than his wife:

This is not about politics. I don't know - and I don't care - how this 'strategy' polls. This has nothing to do with vendettas or witch-hunts or partisan advantage. This is very simply about the rule of law, and the survival of the American system of justice. This is what the constitution demands, and what Richard Nixon had to resign over.

And now we have Gingrich's successor, Nancy Pelosi, saying the same. "What is at stake here," she told reporters on January 15, "is the constitution of the United States." She continued:

This is what an impeachment is about. The president violated his oath of office, undermined our national security, jeopardised the integrity of our elections, tried to use the appropriations process as his private ATM machine to grant or withhold funds granted by Congress in order to advance his personal and political advantage ... He's undermining a system, the beautiful, exquisite, brilliant, genius of the constitution, the separation of powers, by granting to himself the powers of a monarch, which is exactly what Benjamin Franklin said we didn't have.

It is not that national security and congressional prerogatives are



House of Representatives vote for articles of impeachment in December 2019

unimportant: merely that they are subsumed under the rubric of constitutional faith. As long as the United States adheres to its beautiful, exquisite constitution, the ancient religion holds that everything else will fall into place - checks and balances, separation of powers, free elections, relations with Russia, and so on.

Conversely, apostasy means the opposite: ie, that social decay and political breakdown will advance, as evil foreigners like Vladimir Putin 'sow discord' in an otherwise harmonious society. Indeed, the fact that the US is already flying apart - that Republicans and Democrats are at the point of civil war, that economic polarisation is shooting through the roof, that mass shootings are a near-daily occurrence - means that apostasy is well underway. The only way to roll it back is by restoring the ancient law. And the only way to restore the ancient law is by banishing the supreme law-breaker - Trump himself.

The constitution is thus supreme - not only legally, but morally, intellectually and politically - a fact that is never more apparent than when impeachment season rolls around, as it seems to be doing with growing frequency. Where other countries update political structure so as to conform to the needs of modern society, America expects modern society to conform to the needs of its ancient constitution.

Crisis

The upshot is a growing political crisis that impeachment is designed to evade rather than confront. Americans are perfectly aware of the unprecedented social breakdown taking place all around them. The newspapers are filled with little else. But, because the constitution is the holy of holies and hence beyond rational scrutiny, they suffer from a political blind spot that prevents them from analysing the role that a profoundly outmoded and undemocratic political structure plays.

Yet it is immense. In no other comparable country have basic political mechanics broken down so completely. Because the 'separation of powers' doctrine says that four main governing bodies - the presidency, Senate, House of Representatives and supreme court - must agree before anything can be done, well-positioned minorities are able to wield effective veto power by bringing the machinery to a halt. Under the filibuster rule, for instance, 41 senators representing as little as 11% of the population can block any bill. Under the

constitutional amending clause set forth in article V, thirteen states, representing just 4.4%, can block any constitutional reform.

Nothing happens as a consequence. Separation of powers is supposed to promote moderation and compromise by giving political passions time to cool. But in fact it is a gridlock machine that bottles up political pressure until it reaches boiling point. Even though Republicans and Democrats are bourgeois parties with similar class interests, they are so far apart as a consequence, it is as if they exist in separate universes.

In a system in which state representation counts as much as popular representation, governing institutions grow ever more undemocratic, as state population disparities widen.¹ The Senate, in which California (population 39.6 million) has the same clout as Wyoming (population 578,000), is thus more unrepresentative than at any time since 1810.² The electoral college - yet another archaic constitutional provision that is effectively unchangeable - has overridden the popular vote in two out of the last five presidential elections (the first time this has happened since 1876). The more democratic self-government deteriorates, the more society deteriorates with it.

Economic polarisation is greater than in any comparable nation, 'diseases of despair', such as alcoholism, drug overdose and suicide, have nearly quadrupled since 1999, while life expectancy in general has declined for three years in a row - a development unparalleled since the post-Soviet collapse.³ Polls show that a record two-thirds of Americans yearn for a third major party. Yet the current two-party system has been set in stone since the 1860s, thanks to a Balkanised political structure and a 'first past the post' voting system in thousands of federal, state and local elections.⁴

The likelihood of a change is nil. Under Stalin, soviets could vote for any party as long as it was the Communist Party. In the US, citizens can vote for any party as long as it is the 'Repocrats'.

Impeachment is a by-product of this epic breakdown rather than a response to it. Because nothing like a no-confidence vote exists in the US system, it is the only way of removing a chief executive outside of the quadrennial election process. Since Trump's legitimacy was already in question following his loss to Hillary Clinton by three million votes, it was all but inevitable that Democrats would give it a try. Indeed, just 19 minutes after Trump took the

oath of office on January 20 2017, the *Washington Post* ran an article entitled 'The campaign to impeach president Trump has begun'.

Still, with the Republicans in charge of both houses of Congress, the first two years saw something of a holding pattern. Instead of pushing for Trump's ouster, all Democrats could do was ally themselves with the intelligence agencies in the hope of proving that Trump had colluded with Russia. Collusion was perfect, not only because conspiring with a hostile foreign power is the ultimate constitutional transgression, but because it allowed Democrats to portray themselves as defenders of patriotism, free elections and the constitution itself.

Thousands of breathless headlines followed, linking Trump with the Kremlin. The effort faltered when special prosecutor Robert Mueller announced last March that his investigation had been unable to "establish that members of the Trump campaign conspired or coordinated with the Russian government". But a CIA analyst named Eric Ciaramella saved the day five months later by sending the house judiciary committee a densely-argued seven-page memo contending that Trump was "using the power of his office to solicit interference by a foreign country in the 2020 US election".

Corruption

With that, the ancient machinery began to clang and whirr. Since Democrats had regained control of the house in 2018, impeachment was a foregone conclusion. But, precisely because it was unavoidable, any pretext would do - which meant that a hastily-improvised case against Trump would be weaker than Democrats realised. Thus, they assumed that the investigation that Trump pressured Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky to launch in a famous July 25 phone call had to be "for corrupt purposes in pursuit of personal political benefit". What else could it be, since the effect would be to undercut a major political rival? All their friends in academia and the press said so, so how could it be otherwise?

But what they failed to acknowledge is that, by allowing his son, Hunter, to take a high-paid job with a notorious Ukrainian oligarch named Mykola Zlochevsky - at a time, no less, when Obama had named the then vice-president his point man in the Ukrainian anti-corruption effort - Biden was guilty of a conflict of interest so glaring that even the *New York Times* was taken aback.⁵ As a result, it is impossible

to rule out the possibility that Trump pushed for an investigation because he was legitimately outraged by Biden's behaviour and by Democratic efforts to cover it up.

Trump outraged by political corruption? Democrats scoff at the very idea. But it is how millions of voters will see it regardless. So not only will impeachment go nowhere, given that a GOP-controlled Senate will almost certainly vote to acquit, but it could actually backfire by making Democrats look no better than their opponents - and possibly even worse. Rather than hurting Trump, it might well wind up benefiting him, which is why he has pushed for a full-blown Senate trial, in which Republicans put Joe and Hunter Biden on the witness stand and subject them to a relentless cross-examination.

Not that Democrats care. Since they are above such mundane political considerations, the only thing that concerns them is upholding constitutional faith. If the ancient law says 'impeach', then that is what faithful servants of the constitution must do. Wherever the process leads, it can only be right because the constitution *is* right.

Never mind that blind allegiance like this can only lead to disaster - no party deserves it more than the Democrats. But it will also lead to disaster for broader society. Rather than a defence of democracy, impeachment represents an attack on Trump from the right. By withholding military aid, Adam Schiff, the neocon warmonger in charge of the impeachment drive, told the house last month that Trump was betraying a brave little ally fending off a Russian threat:

We should care about Ukraine. We should care about a country struggling to be free and a democracy. We used to care about democracy. We used to care about our allies. We used to stand up to Putin and Russia. We used to. I know the party of Ronald Reagan used to.

Trump's problem, therefore, is that he does not stand up to the 'evil empire' the way 'the Gipper' used to. A man who has brought the Middle East to the brink of a 1914-style military blowout is thus condemned not for being too confrontational, but for not being confrontational enough. It is not easy to out-hawk someone like Trump, but that is what Democrats have done.

This is what constitutional faith comes down to in an age of imperialism - a demand that America be more bellicose than it already is ●

Notes

1. Back when America had just 13 states, the ratio between the most and least populous - ie, Virginia and Delaware - was 10 to one. Today, it is 68 to one.
2. FE Lee and BI Oppenheimer *Sizing up the senate: the unequal consequences of equal representation* Chicago 1999, pp10-11.
3. JE Stiglitz, "The truth about the Trump economy" *Project Syndicate* January 17 2020: www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/grim-truth-about-trump-economy-by-joseph-e-stiglitz-2020-0; A Woodward, "Life expectancy in the US keeps going down" *Business Insider* November 30 2019: www.businessinsider.com/us-life-expectancy-declined-for-third-year-in-a-row-2019-11.
4. L Drutman, "How much longer can the two-party system hold" *Vox.com* September 17 2018: www.vox.com/polyarchy/2018/9/17/17870478-two-party-system-electoral-reform.
5. "Sadly, the credibility of Mr Biden's message may be undermined by the association of his son with a Ukrainian natural-gas company, Burisma Holdings, which is owned by a former government official suspected of corrupt practices," a *Times* editorial declared. "... It should be plain to Hunter Biden that any connection with a Ukrainian oligarch damages his father's efforts to help Ukraine." (Joe Biden lectures Ukraine' *New York Times* December 11 2015: www.nytimes.com/2015/12/12/opinion/joe-biden-lectures-ukraine.html).

POLEMIC**Lessons of Corbynism's defeat**

How to overcome the impediments to communist consciousness? Rex Dunn takes issue with Mike Macnair

While I agree with much of the detail in Mike Macnair's article, 'Corbynism is over', I disagree with its general thrust (*Weekly Worker* December 19 2019). As I see it, he is in danger of overestimating the potential of social democracy to transform itself. The rise of Corbynism represents the last gasp of social democracy as an "actual opposition", able to "give a voice to those silenced by New Labour and its support for free-market solutions". It failed, because the Labour left, like the Labour right, is unable to break with parliamentarism.

But this analysis does not go deep enough. He fails to explain why there was a split between the small town/so-called traditional Labour vote - which went Tory - and the big city/so-called middle class vote - which remained Labour; along with the fact that Labour lost the three million voters it had picked up in the 2017 election. This was despite the fact that Corbyn's 2019 manifesto offered a rational way forward, at least in the short term: ie, it promised a radical reform of capitalism, which would end austerity as well as tackle the existential threat of climate change.

To answer these questions, we need to go deeper. This defeat also reveals the perennial problem of how capitalism's 'mind-crippling' division of labour stultifies the thinking of many working class people - which is exacerbated further by digital media. At the same time, we are also living in an epoch of capitalist decline. As Hillel Ticktin argues, this occurs when the system finds it "increasingly difficult to deal with its contradictions and so crises".¹ Although the managerial bureaucracy which runs capitalism is being forced to undermine the law of value (eg, by 'quantitative easing'), the transition to socialism and communism has to be a consciously-led process. Meanwhile, in the absence of the latter, capitalist ecocide continues.

Analysis

But let us first consider Mike's analysis of Labour's defeat. Firstly, he is right to argue that the main weakness of Corbynism is its obsession with the 'governmental question'. As a result, it fell into the hands of the right: The latter were "campaigning for a Tory victory since 2015 through endless attacks on Corbyn" in order to "regain control of the party". This included pushing for a "statesmanlike" 'remain' policy: "The right's victories in moving Labour towards 'remain' were decisive in returning Tory MPs in traditional Labour seats." He links this to Corbyn's failure to confront "the effective monopoly of the advertising-funded and hence corrupt media and the state's BBC" and adds: "The very late production of the manifesto - some of it quite good - and the accompanying efforts to use the 'new media' to get the message across, were too little, too late." At the same time, the leadership lost the "'anti-Semitism' defamation [campaign] by trying to divert attention", in the hope that "any issues except the NHS and 'austerity' will go away". Finally, Corbyn allowed himself to fall into the remainder's trap of "seeking and demanding an early general election", which even the Tory remainers eschewed, so that he ended up

stringing along with these initiatives, [which] presented themselves over months, as a mere tail to the parliamentary cretinism of the Tory and Lib Dem remainers. The

**Jeremy Corbyn: pacifist, yes; revolutionary, no**

denouement [came] when the SNP and Lib Dems backed Johnson's call for a general election, forcing Labour's hand and producing an election at Johnson's preferred time and on Johnson's terms.

That said, I have three objections.

Firstly, Mike appears to be sowing the illusion that under a leftwing leadership Labour might be capable of an "actual opposition" to the Blairite right wing and its commitment to "free market solutions", which must also include "threats to the constitutional order" (abolishing the monarchy, dismantling the standing army, etc). But, instead of attempting a major reform of the party structure, Corbyn merely tinkered with it. Hence he failed to get rid of the right wing by means of deselection, whilst seeking to transfer power to the grassroots of the party. He allowed the latter to be turned into election fodder under the personal fiefdom of Jon Lansman (who also deserted him during the 'anti-Semitism' campaign). At the same time, Corbyn sided with 'left' trade union leaders: eg, Len McCluskey of Unite and Mark Serwotka of the PCS, both of whom are left Brexiteers like himself.

Therefore Corbynism was shackled by a chauvinist ideology, as well as being congenitally incapable of breaking with parliamentarism. So much for the left's strategy to "transform Labour" into a united front with a Marxist leadership. Clearly Corbyn's defeat opens the door to the return of the Blairites. Thus the need to struggle for a new "mass communist party" cannot be delayed.

But Mike's response to Corbynism's defeat is ambiguous. On the one hand, he warns the left against the danger of creating a new party, especially if it fails to "draw the lesson of breaking with the Corbynites' governmental illness", because that would lead to "a new Syriza at best - the road to another episode of demoralisation". On the other, he concludes, "what is needed and missing is a party disloyal to the constitution: a Communist Party." Let us hope that the left inside the Labour Party are not demoralised by this defeat as well.

In a letter to the paper (December

19 2019, Andrew Northall is right to ask: "Has the *Weekly Worker* group ... really got the time, capacity and energy both to be part of the Labour Party and to seek to 'transform Labour' into a united front with a Marxist leadership and build a single, united, ultimately mass Communist Party?" Given the group's small resources, it can't do both. As long as this two-pronged strategy is pursued, the future does not look bright. Stan Keable of Labour Party Marxists in his article, 'Unworthy crew', in the same issue appears to confirm this: he reminds us that the leadership election process is not exactly loaded in favour of the left. As if that were not bad enough, only an "unworthy crew of potential candidates is on offer. [But] None has stood up against the false anti-Semitism claims, as Chris Williamson did; none has shown solidarity with its victims."

My second objection concerns Mike's claim that "Cameron's project" to "take a sharp turn to the left" has finally been achieved "under Boris Johnson". I have argued previously that May represented the manufacturing wing of the Tory Party, whereas the opportunist and self-seeking Johnson finally came down on the side of the right wing: ie, the European Research Group. The latter represents the short-term interests of hedge-fund managers in the City, who are willing to play fast and loose with the British economy in pursuit of their own narrow interests. If Johnson continues to follow the lead of Rees-Mogg and co (which offers him a handsome financial reward into the bargain), then he will stick to his promise of a hard-Brexit after all: ie, divergence from the European Union, not convergence, even though the latter is the most sensible policy from the standpoint of British capitalism as a whole. If he does go down this route, he would take Britain towards a more deregulated economy, new trade deals with America and China - albeit to the detriment of those capitalists who invest in manufacturing at home. But in order to do this Johnson would have to sell off the national health service to the US pharmaceutical industry, which is not going to be easy. It could also lose him the votes that have just been 'lent' to him by Labour's traditional

working class supporters in the north and east of England. If that does happen, the British economy might tip into a deeper recession.

Mike is also unclear about whether we should take the Tory claim seriously that May's "austerity is over". He correctly describes the latter as "a policy of privatisations and redistribution towards the Tories' favoured groups". But he seems to be saying that Johnson has abandoned "the rhetoric" about austerity; because now "concessions" have to be made - even if this only amounts to the "announcement of major infrastructure spending in the north". Therefore he will try and keep his new 'blue Tories' on board via an "explicit rejection of Brino [and] proposing a hard deadline on trade negotiations with the EU. *Thus Johnson is still, even after his election victory, continuing to push Brexit-based populism*" (my emphasis). This hardly represents a turn to the left! Yet I have also heard comrades argue that the rise of 'nationalist populism' has forced the ruling class to make concessions to the working class. If this is borne out, consider the cost: a further erosion of workers' rights, whilst chauvinism continues unabated (cf fascism, which also made concessions to the working class). Still Johnson's new-found enthusiasm for public spending may not be enough to satisfy those workers who have 'lent' him their vote. It will take years for infrastructure spending in the north to bear fruit. He will not be able to fix the health service either. In a few years time these blue-collar workers might return to the Labour fold; but by then the Blairites would have regained control of the party.

My final objection is that Mike has left the 'remain' question hanging in the air. On the one hand, he is right to argue that the Corbyn leadership ended up "manoeuvring itself into a position where it would be seen as a remainder party", which played into the hands of the right: ie, in order to get a Brexit deal on the ballot paper, he was forced to include the 'remain' option. As Mike says, this resulted in Labour losing the election, because its traditional voters wanted Brexit. Feeling betrayed, they held their noses and voted Tory.

But some did not! Many voted

Tory, simply because they did not like Corbyn. In terms of a dearth of class-consciousness, this is an even bigger worry for the left - the fact that the masses are willing to vote on the basis of personalities rather than programme. That is why Johnson was able to get away with 'Let's get Brexit done' (ie, an oversimplification of what is really possible). As a result, we have ended up with a Tory government based on the support of 'nationalist populism'.

The question remains: if Corbyn had mounted a *sustained* campaign, would the mass of 'blue-collar voters' in those northern towns have supported his manifesto, despite the obstacles of the "advertising-funded and hence corrupt media and the state's BBC"? As for Brexit itself, would it have made a difference if he had stuck to the argument that Labour would *fight* to transform the EU parliament into a democratic institution, which would allow leftwing delegates to promote socialist solutions, not just in their own country, but right across Europe (not forgetting the need to protect the environment)?

Catastrophic defeat

Leaving aside its reformist limitations, Corbyn's 2019 manifesto offered a set of *rational* proposals designed to create a fairer society, which would also tackle climate change. In the 2017 election, under the same leader and a similar programme, Labour picked up nearly three million extra votes and nearly toppled the Tories. (The only difference was that then it pledged to negotiate Brexit based on the need to protect jobs and living standards.) But in 2019 the opposite happened.

Was this because of Brexit and Corbyn's failure to provide leadership? This was certainly a factor. On the one hand, he adopted a stance of 'studied ambiguity', which drew opposition from both the Brexit and 'remain' side among Labour supporters. Corbyn was also found wanting when he failed to deal with the anti-Semitism smear. But did his inability to deal with the question of alleged anti-Semitism in the party alienate Labour's traditional voters? Not really: rather his failure to do so reinforced their perception of him as weak and untrustworthy. On the other hand, Brexit was a spur

to English nationalism, or the British form of rightwing populism, wherein millions of workers blamed the EU for 10 years of austerity. Corbyn should have been hammering home the message that *neoliberalism* is the cause, not the EU *per se*. (See below.) Hence the demand for Brexit or the demand to 'take back control' and 'get Brexit done' cut through Labour's so-called 'Red Wall' like the proverbial scythe.

Prior to the election, when *Newsnight* reporters interviewed people in traditional Labour seats about their voting intentions, many said that they did not like Corbyn, so they were switching to Johnson.² Thus Corbyn's 2019 manifesto, *It's time for real change*, was irrelevant. It could not be taken seriously, even though it included a pledge to end the privatisation of the NHS and ensure that it was adequately staffed; a pledge to end zero-hour contracts and restore workers' rights; a pledge to nationalise the railways in order to make them more efficient and reduce fares; along with utilities like energy; a pledge to spend money on insulating people's homes to save energy, to subsidise the use of solar panels; a pledge to allow councils to build hundreds of thousands of homes at affordable rents.

Millions of workers rejected all of this and voted for Johnson instead, despite the fact that these policies are not difficult to understand! On the other hand, was the working class aware of the more sophisticated criticisms levelled at Corbyn's manifesto by the broadsheets? For example, the *Financial Times* attacked his proposal to increase state spending, because it was too modest: ie, it would merely bring the UK into line with Germany and France. Did Labour's traditional voters reject Corbyn's spending plan to borrow £250 billion for a green transformation fund to pay for electric car loans, a mass household insulation programme and a fleet of state-controlled offshore wind farms, because it was too ambitious? Did they vote against Corbyn because his plans would allow the rich to find ways to avoid paying more tax on capital gains: ie, they would still be able to pass the extra costs on to their customers and their employees? Were these workers bothered by the fact that Corbyn had reneged on scrapping Trident, along with getting rid of private schools? I don't think so.

Were they bothered by the claim that Corbyn is 'weak on the question of national security'? My guess is that they were not concerned about sophisticated arguments, such as the claim that the defence of Britain's 'national interest' is not safe in Corbyn's hands (despite the fact that he has endorsed the billions of pounds required to revamp Britain's nuclear defence); or because he is opposed to disastrous imperialist wars in the Middle East. It is more likely that workers abandoned Corbyn, because they see him as 'unpatriotic': ie, he does not say that he is proud of the armed forces who defended Britain's 'interests' in Afghanistan and Iraq (regardless of the human carnage which unfolded).

Was Corbyn defeated because he put forward a programme to reform capitalism - ie, to get rid of neoliberal economics by means of a liberal dose of Keynesian economics - instead of a socialist one? Again, I don't think so! Rather we have to see *this in the context of capitalist decline* (see below). After the financial collapse of 2008, governments - on the left as well as the right - continued to seek a way out via free-market solutions. Yet economic growth has continued to flatline. The situation was made worse by the fact that, in order to pay for the trillions of dollars which had been plucked out of the air, governments were also forced to step up their attack on the living standards of the working class - they imposed even greater

austerity. It was this which led to the rise of populist movements against the political establishment on a scale not seen for decades.

This is what I call the great disruption, which has deepened the crisis of neoliberalism. By the end of 2016, it led to the Trump presidency in the United States and the Brexit crisis here. The Trump version of the great disruption is based on his attempt to appease nationalist populism by means of protectionism: ie, a promise to invest in America's ageing infrastructure, as a means to bring jobs home and to "make America great again". But he has not delivered on either.

As for leftwing populism, this has been short-lived. The American left suffers from the same dilemma as Corbynism: ie, the working class as a whole has not been responsive to rational plans to reform the economy and to tackle climate change. This is a huge problem which we cannot simply brush aside. In 2018 there was a brief flourishing of the left inside the Democratic Party, which took the form of a demand for a return to Keynesianism: ie, an ambitious plan for a Green New Deal, that would have required the US government to borrow trillions of dollars over a 10-year period in order to finance new green technology and to create hundreds of thousands of new, better-paid jobs. Although eminently reasonable, this proposal did not win the support of the American working class. But in today's topsy-turvy world Trump is to the left of the Democrats on foreign policy, because he wants to have better relations with Russia and, ultimately, China, whereas the Democrats want America to resume its role as the world's policeman and go back to something like the cold war!

Here in Britain, the great disruption of nationalist populism has led to a similar situation. Brexit has split the working class (especially in the north of England). Therefore it languishes within an ideological fog of chauvinism, epitomised by its support for Johnson's demand to 'get Brexit done'. This has led to another topsy-turvy situation, whereby the ruling class has been usurped by its own version of Trump, which it does not really want, because Johnson might veer further to the right by dancing to the tune of hedge-fund managers in the City. Therefore the ruling class - or the more grounded sections of it, as reflected in the *FT* - flirted with the idea that a Corbyn government might be the best option, assuming that he would stick to his 2017 manifesto. But, when he came out with a manifesto which was more Keynesian-heavy than light, they were stunned. Thus almost overnight, the *FT* took fright and reverted to the *status quo*.

For a moment the ruling class paused, then passed up the Corbyn opportunity to alleviate the capitalist crisis, which neoliberalism is unable to solve, as well as do something about the existential threat to its own future, let alone the majority of humanity and the environment. Bourgeois *instrumental reason* prevailed: ie, "a specific form of rationality which focuses on effective means to an end [the need to accumulate capital based on a mind-crippling capitalist division of labour] and not, as other forms of practical rationality do, on improving living conditions, promoting reasonable agreement, or human understanding".³ The ruling class is always comfortable in its alienation, whereas the working class is not. Hence it is prone to other forms of false consciousness, such as chauvinism, etc, in its search for a solution.

A bit of theory

The first post-election YouGov poll revealed that 70% of older men who voted Conservative did not have a university education, and that they mostly came from small towns in the

north, despite the fact that this is where 10 years of Tory austerity had its greatest impact: eg, plant closures, zero-hour contracts, attacks on unemployment benefits, along with cuts in public services. On the other hand, the Tories drew a blank in the big cities, especially in London, where their vote stagnated. Given its cosmopolitan way of living, here the working class is less amenable to Tory lies.

This raises another question - ie, the "heterogeneous aspects of alienation", which leads to false consciousness. As István Mészáros points out, Marx in his *Economic and philosophical manuscripts* distinguishes between 'first order' and 'second order' mediations. Apropos the first, he means the "ontologically fundamental self-mediation of man with nature", which has existed since humanity's emergence as a 'species being'. In ancient times, man was alienated from his productive activity at an individual level, yet he remained a "communal being" (cf primitive societies today). There was much less scope for "the production of artificial appetites" and "the alienation of the senses". But, with the rise of the capitalist mode of production, second-order mediations emerge: ie, private-property - exchange - division of labour. However, "Labour (productive activity) is the one and only absolute factor in the whole complex". Therefore this distinction provides the possibility for *overcoming* alienated labour, even though it now takes the form of wage labour.⁴

Marx goes on to explain that, on the one hand, we have the fetishism of commodities; on the other, the worker is reduced to a commodity; hence we have a "definite social relation between men [and women] that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things".⁵ These second-order mediations may also be described as *impediments* (my term) to the attainment of socialist/communist consciousness (especially on a mass scale). But the bourgeois division of labour is the main obstacle to unblocking the others, because, for the bourgeoisie, the only rational way to accumulate capital is via a division of labour, whereby "the worker becomes more and more uniformly dependent in a particular, very one-sided and machine-like type of labour ... [which depresses him or her] both intellectually and physically to the level of a machine ...".⁶

In the period of late capitalism, we also have technological advances in the mass reproducibility of text/image/sound in the form of entertainment and the mass media, as well as mass production of human practical needs, within which "the production of 'artificial appetites'" plays an increasing role.⁷ Therefore we have to add two more mediations/impediments to those which Marx mentions.

Firstly, we have what Adorno calls the *culture industry*, or the various forms of "commercial entertainment in capitalist society" - ie, distractions (cf Marx's "artificial appetites"), which Adorno describes as an adjunct to "the mechanised and rationalised labour process". To underline this, he adds: "In a communist society work will be organised in such a way that people will no longer be so tired and so stultified that they need distraction."⁸ Secondly, we have Debord's "society of the spectacle", which is "the very heart of society's real unreality": ie, "news or propaganda, advertising or the ... consumption of entertainment ... which serves as the total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system ... [and which] governs almost all time spent outside the production process itself".⁹

Both of these impediments to communist consciousness can and must be overcome. But this is virtually written off by today's critical theorists, who argue that commodity fetishism has become an all-pervading form of social

domination. The subjective factor and history itself are omitted. Like Adorno, they ignore events in the historical and socio-political sphere, such as the betrayals of social democracy in the run-up to 1914. That laid the basis for the imperialist counterrevolution *from without* in Russia during the civil war; which almost destroyed the October revolution (although it laid the basis for the Stalinist counterrevolution *from within*, which was to have lasting consequences for the international revolution). On the other hand, Adorno was "highly critical of the way communist parties have transformed Marxism into a dogmatic ideology".¹⁰ On the other hand, situationists like Debord argue that, under the exigencies of the civil war, the Bolshevik Party degenerated into a bureaucratic class. Therefore "Stalinism was a reign of terror within the bureaucratic class".¹¹ Thus he falls back on a spontaneist theory of revolution, which is a fallacy. As Lenin points out in *What is to be done?*, socialist consciousness can only be brought to the workers from the outside:

The history of all countries shows that the working class, solely by its own forces, is able to work out merely trade union consciousness ... The teaching of socialism ... has grown out of the philosophical, historical and economic theories that were worked out by the educated representatives of the propertied classes - the intelligentsia [along with advanced workers !].¹²

In this epoch of capitalist decline, the left urgently needs to work out a strategy that is able to overcome all the 'impediments' to adequate consciousness as a whole. This has to begin with *existing* society, as well as continuing through to the post-revolutionary period: ie, the transition to socialism and communism. In practical terms, the struggle for a new communist party is paramount, based on the need to educate, so that all have a grasp of Marxist theory, to a greater or lesser extent, as well as being able to articulate this to others. Otherwise we will end up with theory being the hands of the leadership, whilst the rank and file do all the practical work. The *nucleus* of the revolutionary party should also reach out to key sections of the working class: eg, tech workers, who refuse to work for the defence industry and have already formed a new kind of trade union movement. On this basis revolutionaries could then raise the *transitional* demand for a Green New Deal, which would require the training of hundreds of thousands of skilled new workers.

Capitalist decline

It might sound histrionic to some, but Corbyn's defeat has to be seen in the context of capitalist decline. Because the system finds it increasingly difficult to deal with its contradictions and crises, it is compelled to undermine the law of value - an important aspect of the transition to socialism. But such a transition also requires a *conscious* revolutionary class: ie, the proletariat. On the one hand, this is necessary for the future of humanity and its place in a properly managed ecosystem; but on the other, it is not guaranteed - either socialism or barbarism.

As I see it, we now have five *symptoms* of capitalist decline:

1. Neoliberalism - the ultimate attempt to control the system - is failing in its bid to mediate its constitutive contradictions. Hence the bourgeois state is disintegrating. Apropos the democratic process, at least a third of those eligible do not bother to vote in elections. The two-party system is not only undemocratic: it is becoming more unstable. Skewered by Brexit, in just three years, Britain lurched from a hung parliament to a Tory landslide.

Stable rule from the centre is being

undermined; hence we end up with topsy-turvy coalition governments between Conservative - and even far-right parties - and the Greens: eg, in Germany and now Austria. At the same time, private enterprise is incapable of dealing with capitalist ecocide, for which there can only be a socialist solution. The multinational state is also disintegrating, as constituent nations threaten to break away, in the blind belief that this will provide them with a way out.

2. Endless war in the Middle East, where the political tectonic plates are in constant collision. Starting with the world hegemon, when in doubt about one's popularity at home, bourgeois leaders dream up some new excuse to provoke a new war, even though they have no plan; such behaviour, of course, leads to unintended consequences. Meanwhile the masses in Iraq and Syria, already divided by sectarianism, are subjected to terrible suffering.

3. Capitalism fiddles whilst the world burns (eg, Brazil and now Australia). But the climate extinction movement has no answers.

4. An atomised - and distracted - working class is unable to grasp the need for a socialist alternative, which only it can provide.

5. The more austerity and inequality, the more people need the distractions of the culture industry, facilitated by technological advances and fuelled by mass addiction to gaming and social media, not forgetting the destructive effects of opiates and other drugs (cf Marx's idea of the way in which capitalism produces "artificial appetites", which exacerbate the "alienation of the senses"¹³).

The dilemma of the bourgeoisie is that it has to choose between two equally unpalatable alternatives. In order to maintain the system in some shape or form, as well as hold onto power, the next logical step would be to adopt the Chinese model of an authoritarian state and a regulated market. But that would undermine a key weapon in their ideological armoury. Or they could go back to a massive Keynesian economic stimulus, in order to end neoliberal austerity, as well as tackle the ecological crisis. But this would lead to another 1968 within a decade or so. So they have decided to muddle on instead.

Time is of the essence. Thus Andrew Northall is right when he says that "the *Weekly Worker* group" has to choose between its aim to "transform [the Labour Party] into a united front ... with a Marxist leadership" and "the need to build a united, mass Communist Party". Clearly we must focus on the latter, before it is too late, beginning with educational work - which is already being undertaken by small groups of workers and intellectuals up and down the country - but intervening in the class struggle wherever possible.

At the same time, we have to develop a strategy to deal with the capitalist division of labour; ie, get rid of the main impediment to communist consciousness, because it is the *key* to unblocking the others. ●

Notes

1. H Ticktin, 'Decline as concept' *Critique* No39, Vol 34, 2006.
2. *Newsnight* December 10 2019.
3. https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-1-4020-8265-8_200937.
4. I Mészáros *Marx's theory of alienation* Brecon 1970, pp78-79. The above work also dispels the notion that there should be no discrepancy between the 'young', humanist Marx and the 'mature' Marx of *Capital*.
5. K Marx *Capital* London 1992, p32.
6. K Marx, 'Economic and philosophical manuscripts' *Marx's early writings* London 1975, p285.
7. I Mészáros *op cit* p78.
8. Quoted in E Lunn *Marxism and modernism* Berkeley 1984, p156.
9. G Debord *Society of the spectacle* New York 1995, p13.
10. <https://philnotes.com/index.php/2018/08/05/adorno>.
11. G Debord *op cit* p74.
12. VI Lenin *What is to be done?* London 1963, p80.
13. I Mészáros *op cit* p78.

IRAN

The destruction factor

Judging by recent events in the Middle East, the US has abandoned all attempts to impose order. Now the world has a nihilist hegemon, argues **Yassamine Mather**



Now that the dust has settled on both the assassination of Qassem Soleimani and the tragic downing of the Ukrainian plane by Iran, it is important to look at some of the consequences of the events of early January - for both the Islamic Republic and the region as a whole.

Whenever any of us on the Iranian left criticises the methods used by the United States, the United Kingdom or other western governments on the international scene and in the Middle East, we come under a barrage of attacks - not just from rightwing, royalist 'regime change' supporters, but also by their 'leftwing' cheerleaders, who accuse us of undermining the battle against the Islamic regime.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The overthrow of Iran's Islamic Republic will not happen in a vacuum. We must be armed with a clear analysis of the world situation, including the policies of global capitalism, as applied in the region. In addition, as I have said time and time again, when the US administration fails to pay any attention (never mind respect) to what we are constantly told is 'international law', 'human rights' and the 'norms of international relations', and when such behaviour is not seriously challenged, why should anyone in their right mind expect dictatorships such as the Islamic Republic to behave differently?

In the last couple of weeks in order to defend its assassination of

Soleimani, the US has been going on about Iran not being a 'normal state'. It would be more than useful if US officials were to explain to the citizens of the repressive regimes in the third world just what they mean by 'normal'. Does that apply to states which target individual leaders of their enemies for assassination? What about those where a former head of the security services (in this case the CIA) admits - in fact boasts about - his involvement in the physical and mental torture of prisoners from other countries illegally 'renditioned' to US-supervised detention centres, yet is promoted to secretary of state?

Trump, who is supposed to be leader of the 'free world', and his officials took an extremely dangerous step on January 3, when they appeared to normalise not only political assassination, but the use of drones to carry them out. Meanwhile, the US brazenly violated the air space of Iraq, a 'sovereign' country. Unless this behaviour is challenged, we will soon see an even more chaotic and unpredictable situation in the Middle East. It will, in the main, be the peoples of the region, not the dictatorships or the sectarian states, who will pay the price.

So let me summarise the point: according to Trump and his paid employees (not to mention Iran's royalists and their leftist allies), the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *New*

US intentions are hardly benign. It acts to terrorise, to punish and to bring to heel ... Paradoxically this has increased Iran's influence in the Middle East

Too many exiled Iranian leftists believe the US will bring peace ... They are either paid or stupid



Yorker, CNN, the BBC, together with Justin Trudeau, most of the members of the Democratic Party in the US Congress and Senate, are all apologists for Iran's Islamic Republic, because they have questioned the contradictory reasons put forward by Trump and Pompeo for the assassination of Soleimani.

Long-term

The question - was it murder or was it an act of war? - is important, but it is probably not the central issue, which is what all this says about the current world situation. Comrade Mike Macnair has reminded me that 'murder' versus 'act of war' is merely one or another variety of spin. He believes it is better to call it murder, because the Israeli and US justifications for these killings amount to 'We are at war with terrorism and these guys are terrorists. Therefore we can kill them.'

According to Gholam Hossein Esmaeili, a spokesman for Iran's judiciary, his country will pursue war-crimes charges against Trump at the International Criminal Court in the Hague over the killing of Soleimani. Agnes Callamard, the UN's special rapporteur on extra-judicial executions, claims:

The targeted killings of Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al Muhandis [another victim of the January 3 drone] most

likely violate international law [including] human rights law ... Lawful justifications for such killings are very narrowly defined and it is hard to imagine how any of these can apply to these killings.

In the aftermath of the shooting and in order to justify the assassination, Trump claimed Soleimani was planning to take over four US embassy compounds. It is now clear from various leaks that this claim was based on the intelligence pack the US president received before a press conference explaining the potential threat to US embassies after Soleimani was assassinated as part of possible retaliations by Iran.

On January 20 I was at a meeting where a UK military official, who was speaking in a "personal capacity", talked of Iran's "malign" intentions in Iraq, plus possible intelligence about an "imminent" threat posed by the demonstrations and the short, limited occupation of the US embassy compound in Baghdad. As all the other speakers at the same event pointed out, the current situation in Iraq should not be taken out of its historic context. By that they meant not just the occupation of the country since 2003, but also the Iran-Iraq war, the conflict with al Qa'eda and Islamic State. Sadly it is not just journalists and the media that have no sense of

history: the malaise covers the highest ranks of the government and military - those holding state power. At times they make Tony Blair's catastrophic ignorance of the situation in the Middle East look like a minor failing.

Recent comments by Boris Johnson and foreign secretary Dominic Raab, putting forward the official position of the UK, are frightening reminders that, like Trump and the US administration, these people have learnt nothing from the fiasco of recent wars in the Middle East. They have no regrets about the 'failed states' that followed in Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. They even seem to be oblivious to the basic fact that it was these US-UK wars that gave Iran the regional influence it currently holds.

At a seminar in the University of Oxford a colleague commented that in all this discourse about Iran's 'malign' intentions, it is important to ask one thing: what should we make of the US and UK's own intentions? Can we not say they too were 'malign'? And here lies the real truth. Ironically the intentions of the United States and its allies - first to 'avenge' 9/11 by bombing the wrong country (Afghanistan instead of Saudi Arabia), then to punish Saddam Hussein for disobedience - have not helped their own long-term interests in the region. Unless, that is, we accept the explanation of French philosopher Alain Badiou:

... what is appearing on the horizon is the idea that, rather than taking control of the arduous task of establishing states under the supervision of the metropolis - or, further still, of directly metropolitan states - the possibility is that we simply destroy states. And you can see how consistent this possibility is with the progressive destitution of globalised capitalism. After all, in certain geographical spaces full of dormant wealth, we can create free, anarchic zones, where there is no longer any state and where, consequently, we no longer have to enter into communication with that redoubtable monster that the state always is, even when it is weak.¹

In addition, in the current climate, where anything vaguely anti-Zionist - or even anti-capitalist or anti-imperialist - can be labelled 'anti-Semitic', what we are witnessing is a blatant attempt to pre-empt any revival of the anti-war movement by casting the next US operation - whether against Iran directly or Syria or Lebanon - as driven by seeking to protect 'Israel's right to exist'. It is about time that those on the left who currently ignore the threat posed by such views, or who are apologists for Trump and the Zionists, realise that they could well be victims of consequent witch-hunts as much as the rest of us.

Whose fault?

A number of western politicians, including Trudeau, have said that it was the US that created the war-like situation which led to the tragic shooting down of the Ukrainian civilian plane on January 8. Yet the meeting of the leaders of the five countries whose citizens died in the disaster are asking for trial/compensation from Iran.

No doubt the immediate blame must lie with the Islamic Republic and, as I wrote last week, it is very much connected to the regime's incompetence and disdain for human life (including Iranian life).² We now know that whoever ordered the shooting has the backing of the supreme leader, ayatollah Ali Khamenei. However, as was pointed out at a seminar I attended in the aftermath of the Soleimani killing, taking military action without a

declaration of war and threatening to follow it up with a bombing campaign was sure to produce "retaliation". In that seminar, the speakers pointed out that in fact Iran's 'revenge' has so far been minimal, and calculated to reduce the chances of further military conflict in the immediate future.

By using repression, as well as bribes to families of the victims, the Iranian state has so far managed to calm the situation. We have not seen major protests in the last week or so. On this level we can say that - at least in medium term - Trump's assassination of Soleimani has given Iran's Islamic Republic a valuable gift.

In May 2018 the Trump administration withdrew from what he called "Obama's terrible deal with Iran". Since then the United States has imposed new sanctions on the Islamic Republic and in turn Iran has increased the levels to which it enriches uranium. Last week the Trump administration bullied the European powers - in particular the United Kingdom and Germany - threatening them with penalties if they continued to pursue adherence to the nuclear deal.

The response from the European signatories of the deal - known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action - was predictable. France, the UK and Germany collapsed into complete obedience and on January 14 a joint meeting of their foreign ministers announced that they are lodging a formal complaint that Iran is not meeting its commitments. This was part of the deal and it means they are triggering a 'dispute resolution mechanism', as per the agreement. The three countries claim they want to keep the JCPOA alive, but, in the current climate of threats and retaliation, Iran's response was predictable. A foreign ministry spokesperson threatened that Tehran would withdraw from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons if European countries brought alleged violations of the nuclear deal before the United Nations security council.

Johnson then told Iran that it should accept Trump's proposed deal as a replacement for the JCPOA. Of course, no-one knows what such a deal might involve, but journalists and politicians in Washington were claiming that, if someone merely changed the cover of the current agreement and relabelled it 'Trump's Iran deal', the US president would sign it tomorrow. All leaks from the White House in 2018-19 show that Trump's opposition to the JCPOA has nothing to do with its content, but the fact that it was Obama's deal.

What does all this tell us about the world situation? First of all, contrary to what some idiots on the left tell us (eg, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty³), we do not live in a multipolar world, where Iran's Islamic Republic is also an "imperialist state". The United States remains the hegemon and can force European countries to follow its dictates.

In addition, as Mike Macnair has also pointed out to me, it does look like the dominant political forces in the United States have turned towards a project of breaking up the European Union, as could be seen from some of the statements made by the UK's Brexiters. However, now we are witnessing a strategy emerging that has the clear aim of forcing more concessions in favour of US control, to deal with continuous European financial crises and in the long term pose the possibility of dismantling the EU as we know it. Comrade Mike Macnair believes that the core EU countries, France and Germany, will be forced to choose in the near future between accepting the collapse of the EU, and 'Bismarckian measures' to create a

Euro-state capable of pursuing its own geopolitical agenda.

So what is at stake here is not just the JCPOA and Iran's nuclear future: we are at the onset of major upheavals in terms of global power.

Imperialism

Inside Iran a number of students have refused to walk over the US flags painted by the regime on the footpaths outside the entrance to their campuses, in order to demonstrate their opposition to the government's slogan of 'Death to America'. Many of them are opposed to the Tehran regime and do not believe that all the blame should be placed on the US.

In response to this, after last week's Friday prayers addressed by Khamenei, state TV showed the crowds who were leaving angrily trampling on the Stars and Stripes - apparently these flags had been produced in large numbers for the occasion. A debate has emerged about the significance of the 40-year-old tradition of insulting the US. The problem remains the fact that both Iran's Islamic Republic and its opponents have no understanding of anti-imperialism. As I keep saying, Iran's economic integration and total dependence on global capital makes a mockery of the regime's anti-US rhetoric.

The question we need to deal with concerns the nature of imperialism in the 21st century. Michael Roberts and Guglielmo Carchedi give us some indication of what we should look for. Comrade Roberts say that, when it comes to imperialist states, he and Carchedi "define them as those countries which get a long-term appropriation of value from subaltern countries". He continues:

And this is achieved by the appropriation of surplus value by high-technology companies (and countries) from low-technology companies (countries). So imperialist countries can be defined as those with a persistently large number of companies, as measured by their high national average organic composition of capital (OCC), and whose average technological development is higher than the national average of other countries ...

The G8-plus countries own the vast bulk of all the foreign-owned assets. Even the so-called BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) own little abroad,

compared to the imperialist countries. The G8 has six times as much FDI stock as the BRICS.⁴

In this context Iran's economy is battered by sanctions precisely because it is identified as a 'rogue state'. It is deprived of trade relations with major companies, even though in its day-to-day economic policies it follows the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. It does so in terms of privatisation and the abolition of subsidies, while in every labour dispute it takes the side of 'capital' against 'labour' and because of this loses internal support. Yet its insistence on repeating its meaningless rhetoric regarding the US makes it a 'rogue state'.

At the seminar discussing the future of the Middle East after Soleimani's death, lieutenant-general Sir Simon Vincent Mayall - who incidentally made some very important and correct points about the current situation in the Middle East - commented on Iran's schizophrenic character as a state emerging from a revolution. On the one hand, it still wants to present itself as revolutionary, but, on the other hand, real politics have taught it to act differently in practice.

I would go further and say that, 41 years after the revolution that brought it to power, Iran's Islamic Republic has nothing left to justify any connection with the revolution of 1979 in terms of its main slogans: freedom, social justice and independence. I do not need to repeat what I have previously written about repression and the growing gap between rich and poor. All the regime can do to claim continued legitimacy is hang on to this pretence of political independence - not least since a number of serious overtures to the US, including offers of military and logistical help to the US before the wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq - backfired ●

Notes

1. https://miguelabreu.gallery.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/AlainBadiou_OurWoundisNotSoRecent.pdf.
2. 'No to war, no to the regime' *Weekly Worker* January 16.
3. See 'US-Iran: a clash of imperialisms': www.workersliberty.org/story/2020-01-08/us-iran-clash-imperialisms.
4. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2019/11/14/hm2-the-economics-of-modern-imperialism>.

Fighting fund Record week

As I had half-expected after last week's lowest income from standing orders for a very long time, things would be rather different in the week that followed. Just as, it seems, the period from the 9th to the 15th of each month is the least productive in terms of SO contributions to our fighting fund, so the 16th to the 22nd is the best.

Would you believe it? In terms of standing orders alone, we received £745 over the last week! Thanks go in particular to SK, KB and PM for their tremendous three-figure contributions, as well as to MM (£75), GB (£50), TR (£40), TB (£10) and Hassan (£5). On top of that there were bank transfers to the *Weekly Worker* made by JS for £40 (added to his £60 resubscription) and GS for £20.

Finally comrades TB (£60) and MG (£10) clicked on that PayPal button of ours to take the total for the third week of January up to a fantastic £875 - just short of what we received in the first two

weeks combined. However, I'm afraid there were no donations this week in the shape of cheques (do you think they're going out of fashion?). But, not to worry, the running total now stands at £1,759 towards our target of £2,000.

So we need just £241 in a little over a week to get there - I'd be very disappointed if we didn't make it. In fact, I really think we should aim for a bit more - not just to make up for last year's deficit (£127), but to build up a little bit of a surplus in case there are bad months ahead in 2020.

Please feel free to make a transfer (sort code 30-99-64; account number 00744310) or PayPal donation or even - yes - write us a cheque! ●

Robbie Rix

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

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly Worker

**First they
came for the
Muslims. Now
for the left**

Curing the country of Prevent

The list of 'extremist' organisations subject to intervention under the Prevent strategy is laughable - but the consequences could be grave, warns Paul Demarty

must begin with a correction. A few months ago I noted, in an article about a wave of Extinction Rebellion actions, that current militancy was not necessarily predictive of future radicalism, and I offered the example of Greenpeace, whose militant roots were "hardly obvious" from their current state as a well meaning NGO.¹

This, evidently, was to give too much credit to the police. For we now know that the national counter-terrorism unit, which provides training materials for teachers and other public-sector workers to spot the warning signs of violent fanaticism under the so-called Prevent strategy, decided to circulate some training materials that lumped Greenpeace in with XR as 'ones to watch'. Some scandal attached immediately to this decision, which had in the end the unfortunate result that well-meaning eco-charities backed by dangerous radicals like Joanna Lumley had their logos listed alongside cuddly outfits like Combat 18. Presumably some schoolteacher - a profession whose political centre of gravity is a little closer to Greenpeace than C18 - was horrified enough to circulate it to the liberal media.²

Also included, needless to say, are a bevy of small far-left organisations, be they anarchist or Trotskyist, and even the *Morning Star's* irreproachably social-pacifist Communist Party of Britain. Many front groups for the same - for instance, the Socialist Workers Party's near-defunct Unite Against Fascism makes the grade, suggesting that Knacker of the Yard may be a little behind the times (though the more-recent SWP hobby horse, Stand Up To Racism, also shows up).

The fact that there has been some scandal is worth noting. The most obvious sign of all that is the hopelessly confused and contradictory series of statements from the counter-terrorism unit as to the status of this leaked document, many of which directly contradict the text of the document itself. That sort of fumbling rearguard action testifies to the fact that, on the face of it, this is some pretty embarrassing overreach on the cops' part.

What they have done here is to breach a very important ideological *cordon sanitaire*, without following the proper protocols. So much of the apologetic structure of the capitalist world, after all, is founded on its reputation for having overthrown Nazi tyranny - in Britain, we speak solemnly about our finest hour and all that. The corollary of that is, first of all, that all schoolchildren have the evil of the Nazis belaboured to the point of parody, and so comparisons between some random protest movement and the Nazis tend towards the outrageously insulting.

By the same token, however, if it can be made to stick - bucketing some miscreant together with Hitler and chums is an excellent move in political combat: an instant checkmate. It cannot be overused, or it will lose its power; but it cannot remain unused, otherwise what is the point? Such is the fraught reality of the Nazi comparison



'Conservative' does not mean 'terrorist'

in official society. It is reserved for subsuming communist politics along with Nazism into the general rubric of 'totalitarianism'; vilifying whoever it is America wants to bomb this week; and, latterly, smearing those who sympathise with the Palestinian national cause.

Now, from the *practical* point of view of the policeman, this is a no-brainer. We do not have in this country, as they do to some extent in the USA, *armed rightwing militias*; so the problem posed by National Action, say, is substantially the same as that posed by XR. Either one might get a demonstration together - that demonstration may be rowdy, may involve forms of direct action against property. In short, it demands a police presence *in force* to control. Of course, UK Uncut is on this list (in spite of its relative antiquity by the standards of ephemeral protest movements). It was kettled like the rest of us in 2010-11; it too ensured that horses had to be fed and truncheons polished.

The error of the police is to allow this 'natural' ontology of political groups to leak into its public communications. The rest of us are nurtured in part on the secular hagiographies of non-violent protestors - your Martin Luther King archetype. We prefer the courageous preacher-man to the cops setting dogs on him, on the whole. When it comes to present practical politics, of course, that is hardly guaranteed - St Greta, still causing trouble, may be rejected in favour of the memory of St Gandhi,

safely in his grave. The point is that, as things stand, there is an apologetic job to be done here *by the defenders of 'law and order'*, not their opponents. We are presumptively in favour of the Rebel Alliance, and disinclined to admiration for the imperial stormtroopers. It is this job which is not done - or even attempted - by the hapless cops.

State power

Our amusement at their stupidity is, unfortunately, more than outweighed by our suspicion that they are riding on a rising tide. As we noted a couple of weeks ago, capitalism is in decline, and relies ever more on the state to manage its contradictions. It should be news to nobody at all that some of these contradictions are particularly troublesome at the present date, and readily discernible is a historic shift from the 'party of liberty' - which was broadly in the ascendant in the decade or two succeeding the collapse of Stalinism - to the 'party of order'.

In Britain, as the new decade creaks into gear, we have a particular situation. The bureaucratic liberalism that reigned under New Labour - which was, in fact, the standstill to which the municipal 'loony left' and the Thatcher government fought each other in the 1980s - remains the governing principle of many lower layers of the state, and the majority of the professional classes. Yet we have a government whose mandate is in part founded upon the *political defeat* of this ideology - first of all in the Brexit

vote of 2016 and then in the crushing Tory victory of last month.

Boris Johnson and his cronies do not often feel it possible to openly demur from the liberal multicultural consensus. They rather deal in dog-whistles that can rile up their base, while maintaining plausible deniability up to a point (for example, defending the right of women to wear the niqab, while 'in passing' mocking their appearance). If present trends continue, though, they soon will depart from that consensus. And then the apparatus of enforcement that presently ensures there is bureaucratic liberalism in government departments, local councils and corporate HR policies will begin to shift to punish the new enemies of the people: Marxists, socialists, vaguely liberal lefts, eco-warriors, anti-war types, and who knows who else.

It should be stressed that the apparatus is *inherited*. The Prevent strategy, after all, is not new: it is one of the many pieces of 'anti-terrorist' policy the British state has accumulated in its recent history. First in line were efforts to counter the on-line ideological influence of groups such as al Qa'ida. Then came "non-violent" Islamic extremism. In other words Muslim conservatives who refuse to accept the values of democracy or respect other religions. In 2011 the Prevent was "refocused" to include the "extreme right wing". The pro-Nazi organisation National Action was banned in 2016 under the terrorism act.

The management of far-right ideology has, of course, long been part of the remit of schoolteachers. The left, meanwhile, has long been insouciant about the increasing power of the state to regulate public discourse, so long as the targets are racist or otherwise purveyors of hate speech, about which *something must be done*.

This is exemplified by Niamh Sweeney, one of the respondents in a *Guardian* survey of teachers about this advice:

I would report someone for extremism, because extremism is the opposition to rule of law, liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of faiths and beliefs. It would be a safeguarding concern. But involvement in climate activism - absolutely not. I want my students to be radical thinkers.³

Radical thinkers, but not *extremists!* If ever there was a distinction to drive a coach and horses through, that was it. To stick to XR for a moment, we might recall to mind the case of one of its erstwhile leaders, Roger Hallam, who got in trouble for ill-considered remarks about the Nazi holocaust. One of his other eye-catching injunctions was that "democracy is irrelevant in immoral societies", which is presumably at least congruent with the "opposition to rule of law, liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of faiths and beliefs" that, for Sweeney, is a "safeguarding issue". Would she shop a student on the pessimist, misanthrope, Roger Hallam wing of XR to the police? If not, why does her usual rule of thumb not apply? If so, would she shop a teenager who (say) merely parroted the misanthropy of her favourite black metal records?

The truth is that teachers have little enough freedom of action in these matters anyway. It is a quite thoroughly proletarianised profession, at least compared to some others; policies are set by management in relation to the most risk-averse interpretation of the perceived wider environment. There was a moment when teachers seemed likely to boycott the standardised assessment tests imposed on 11-year-olds in this idiotic country, and that, surely, is the germ of the answer: collective action in defiance of a contemptible obligation.

To make that a reality, however, the left must get its head straight on many matters, and it must first of all dispense with its implicit acceptance of the 'safeguarding' outlook of the *status quo ante*. (That, of course, is one of the ironies of finding Stand Up To Racism on the police list: SWP politics in this day and age is a formally militant version of the most timid, prissy sort of liberalism available.) If we are worth anything, surely, we are dangerous; which means *we must reject the state's right to judge*, which in turn means we reject it *for everyone* - even bitter enemies like National Action and Islamic State ●

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Notes

1. 'Avoiding extinction for real' *Weekly Worker* October 17 2019.
2. www.scribd.com/document/443276332/Symbols-guidance-document.
3. www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jan/21/should-a-teacher-report-a-pupil-for-extinction-rebellion-activism.

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