

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly
worker



Iran's clerical regime conceals information - whether about elections or coronavirus

- Letters and debate
- Labour leadership
- LLA launch conference
- CPGB centenary

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LETTERS



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

Expelled

Socialist Fight has expelled Ian Donovan and his 'Trotskyist Faction' by a unanimous vote. They were expelled for anti-Semitism and support for the racist, anti-Semitic and left Mussolini-Strasserite fascist, Gilad Atzmon.

The following 2003 quote from Atzmon makes clear his fascist sympathies: "... we must begin to take the accusation that the Jewish people are trying to control the world very seriously ... American Jewry makes any debate on whether the 'Protocols of the elder of Zion' are an authentic document or rather a forgery irrelevant. American Jews do try to control the world, by proxy."

Gilad Atzmon has indicated his support for fascism in a forthright manner: "Fascism, I believe, more than any other ideology, deserves our attention, as it was an attempt to integrate left and right: the dream and the concrete into a unified political system ... And it is to our detriment that, in the post-World War II 'liberal' intellectual climate, it is politically impossible to examine fascism and 'national socialism' from an impartial theoretical or philosophical perspective ... stifling honest examination of national socialism has left open the question of whether the problems of global capitalism may be alleviated by combining socialism with nationalism."

Here he declared himself a fascist. As these arguments developed, it became clear Ian had developed a full-blown ideological outlook in lockstep with Atzmon. Subsequent arguments saw Ian defend Atzmon's admiration for Ku Klux Klan man David Duke. He wrote to me on Facebook:

"If you understood why political Zionism is worse than apartheid and Jim Crow, you might gain some insight. Clue: read Moshé Machover on different types of settler colonialism. If you understand that, you might understand why [Alan] Dershowitz [arch-Zionist] is worse than David Duke. Some forms of colonialism are genocidal. Some are not."

This really is beyond the bounds. South African apartheid leaders and the Ku Klux Klan are not as bad as the Zionists, so it is OK to ally with them against the Zionists ideologically, as Atzmon does in pursuit of his anti-Semitic and fascist ideas?

The defence of Devon Nola and Gilad Atzmon and the Rothschild anti-Semitic trope is a lying piece of far-right apologetics. Devon Nola wrote: "Bolshevism was a Jewish-led form of government, and we can delve into what caused anti-Jewish sentiment pre-Bolshevism."

Gilad Atzmon: "The fact that Stalin turned against the Jews is known to everyone here. I do believe that Stalin insisted eventually to give Russia back to the Russians and this clearly made some people upset ... it certainly explains Stalin's paranoia - he knew what he was up against."

So to clarify: Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks were absolute bastards because they stopped the tsarist and White Army's pogroms against the Jews, according to Nola. Stalin was restoring Russia to the Russians by getting rid of the Jews, because "he knew what he was up against", according to Atzmon.

And Gerry Downing's mad ideas that the problem is imperialism itself and not "the Jews" is totally

ridiculous, Ian claims. And, to cap it all, Ian contemptuously rejects my assertion of the obvious: "Netanyahu is Trump's puppet, not the other way around." "That is contradicted by reality," he says. He goes on to prove to his own satisfaction - and presumably also to the satisfaction of his faction - that it is the Jewish Zionist bourgeoisie who rule the world. There is no other conclusion we can draw from his stance.

Socialist Fight supporter Gareth Martin made the following comments to Ian: "All the rest is so much bullshit evasion. Either you agree with Atzmon and Mussolini that fascism resolves the class war, or you don't. Either you believe a 'Jewish will to power' is undermining motherhood and apple pie, or you don't. Either you 'hate the Jew ... and despise the Jew in you' or you don't."

"... If you articulate these positions, then you have to own them. If you want to cuddle up to someone who believes this racist garbage, then you have to own that ... None of this is in any doubt. Atzmon's association with far-right sites, his positive reviews from David Duke, even his covering for Richard 'alt-right' Spencer, give the game away obviously and immediately. If I had any inkling all this shit was lurking in your outfit, I would have had nothing to do with any of you."

We now repudiate the use of the term, "the world 'Jewish-Zionist bourgeoisie'" and the whole notion of a Jewish-Zionist imperialist vanguard as anti-Semitic tropes. We will in future use the term 'Zionism' alone in describing the political tendency within the Jewish ethnicity that commits such dreadful crimes against the Palestinian citizens of Israel and those expelled Palestinians primarily in 1948, 1967 and 1973, all of whom have the right of return.

This in order to distinguish the rightwing Israeli government under Netanyahu and its international supporters from all anti-Zionist Jews and Jews who strongly defend the right of the Palestinians under international law. Nor do we now agree that it is appropriate to continually refer to Jews such as Henry Kissinger and Milton Friedman as "overrepresented among the most strident spokespeople for capitalist reaction" without openly recognising that they are doing so primarily as representatives of the interests of imperialist capitalism, as in the Pinochet coup in Chile against Allende in 1973, and not as any separate Jewish influence or conspiracy.

Although the *Jewish Chronicle* and *The Times of Israel* frequently boast of the wealth and influence of Jewish billionaires and rightwing Zionist academics internationally, it is completely wrong to conclude from this that these are acting in pursuit of a separate Jewish/Zionist communal conspiracy agenda and not primarily in their own interests and that of global capitalism and imperialism.

Ian demands that all Jews who support the state of Israel be expelled from the Labour Party. My friend, whom I have known for over 30 years, supports the state of Israel because she lost many of her family in the holocaust and she sees Israel as a place of refuge if the holocaust should come again. She strongly opposes what Israel does to the Palestinians. To demand the expulsion of all such Jews from Labour would be an absolute gift to Zionism, the Board of Deputies, the right wing of Labour and the whole capitalist establishment.

I have acknowledged my own responsibility for the crisis in

Socialist Fight in the document, 'On the crisis in Socialist Fight and my own responsibility for it'.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Disagree, learn

I note that, while piling in on Hannah Arendt, again, Gerry Downing, again, tracks thought from Plato, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and co to Heidegger and hence Arendt (Letters, February 20). This is as opposed to the more virtuous lineage from Heraclitus, Spinoza, Kant and Hegel again and so to Marx *et al.* I am reminded of the talk in the old Workers Revolutionary Party, especially at its implosion, of the "golden thread" that is Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky and hence to the right bit of the Fourth International.

I believe that Hegel said something along the lines of 'could there have been a Kant without Copernicus', making a reference to the critical theory tradition of which he, and Marx, were adherents. The most famous expression of this type of thought is Newton's, "If I have seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants". If all of the giants were correct, then there would be no need to stand on their shoulders.

Marx took a keen interest in a massive number of contemporary and past thinkers, including Adam Smith, Ricardo, Proudhon (good, but wrong), along with Sey, Bentham, Mill (bad and wrong), to name but a few.

In the more modern era there are plenty of thinkers with whom we might disagree, but from whom we might learn. Examples that come to mind include Perry Anderson, David Harvey, Ellen Meiksins Wood and, I would submit, Hannah Arendt. (I don't include any CPGB writers, as I would hate to embarrass them in their own paper).

Despite the comments above, I'm sure that Gerry will at least agree with my relief at John Smithee's letter (February 20), telling us that the word 'Workers' no longer has "the baggage" that we might remember from nearly 35 years ago and it now has "a positive gloss to it".

Mind you, there are still some fragments claiming allegiance to the WRP - perhaps they'll sue George Galloway?

Jim Cook
Reading

Dictatorship

Marx, I think, regarded capitalism as the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. That was its permanent setting because capitalism is built on class conflict and exploitation.

The dictatorship of the proletariat should be seen in this light: ie, keeping the bourgeois in their place so they can't carry out a counterrevolution; it's about disciplining the bourgeois. In other words it's no more radical than what the bourgeois have been doing to the working class every day since capitalism's inception.

Now I would argue this dictatorship is necessary, but what happened in the USSR was a perversion of how Marx envisaged this dictatorship (the Paris Commune is much closer). Ironically the Soviet conception of dictatorship has more in common with Tony Clarke's conception (Letters, February 13) than what Marx had in mind.

Maren Clarke
email

Pathological

I burst out laughing after reading the response to my letter by the revered socialist, Ian Birchall. I couldn't have asked for better. And he even

suggested I should have a column in the paper - I'll have to think about that! He publishes a blog called *The Grim Dim*, which I hadn't heard of before. He is an exceptional comrade.

Hearing Ian Birchall's name reminded me of the time I spent in the Socialist Workers Party between 1989 and 1991. It was a very busy time for the SWP and I have happy memories of the comrades there, but today the SWP hardly exists in Hull.

I recall a packed public meeting at The White Hart pub in early 1990. They were discussing the situation in eastern Europe. After the meeting finished, Tony Cliff, who was the star speaker, was upstairs alone with his radio and a couple of senior comrades hanging around the door. Everyone else was in the downstairs bar. Me and another comrade decided to go up to speak to him. We were let reluctantly into the room. I remember Tony Cliff with distinction. He was pleased to see us and we chatted for five minutes. He was friendly and welcoming and willing to talk.

I've kept in touch with the SWP through the subsequent decades by reading *Socialist Worker*. Their decline is a tragedy. And I'm an avid reader of the *Morning Star* and a friend of the Communist Party of Britain. I keep them informed particularly about the anti-Stalinists who populate much of the leftwing press and dominate most of the left parties.

Anti-Stalinism is an obsessive fixation with the Soviet Union, which no longer exists. These anti-Stalinists - and there are tens of thousands of them - need pathological support. The truth is unbearable to them. They don't understand reality.

Trotsky was a charming knave. He brainwashed millions of otherwise decent people over nine decades. He should, if we are to save the world from the imperialist monster, be expunged from history. Let's reform our socialist dream, which is common to every left party, apart from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

Under a mass leadership, without the ringleaders of anti-Stalinism, the rest of the left can get on with the business of serving the working class and preparing for power. We are all good at heart. Unite the working class and the world is ours in peace and unity.

Elijah Traven
Hull

Forget Labour

How dare you? You accuse Sinn Féin of joining the bourgeois mainstream (Sinn Féin's success, left's collapse', February 13). We are yet to see if SF takes office or not, so yet to see if they will mount an attack on Ireland's working class. I think maybe they should wait - allow the real bourgeois parties to scrap it out.

However, to accuse SF in this way is way out of line - doesn't this paper advocate for the Labour Party, advising those of us on the left to vote Labour and even to join Labour? In the last few years this paper has told us that the definition of madness is to do the same thing over and over again, expecting a different outcome (May's Brexit negotiations), but your misguided support for Labour goes on and on. Over 100 years of disgusting anti-working class and pro-imperialist policies. A supporter of every war, Zionist to its core and racist beyond belief. When will CPGB ever learn?

We need a true workers' communist party, not hanging on Labour's disgusting coat tails: one free to push the Marxist-Leninist

line. Which brings me to the Workers Party of Britain, and the disgraceful attack on it ('George's marvellous medicine', February 13). An "ultra-Stalinist organisation". Why the "ultra"? Yes, it is Stalinist, but, as with Trotsky and others, why can't all revolutionary communists and socialists debate such issues without the paranoid vitriol?

I support the *Weekly Worker*, even though it makes mistakes - the constant harping of the republicans' 'defeat' in Ireland, which is just false; and what of your greatest blunder in your support of Kosovo, when you sat firmly in the imperialist camp? The CPGB Marxist-Leninist makes mistakes, but they also get much very right. Its anti-imperialist stance is exemplary, I read the *Proletarian, Fight Racism Fight Imperialism*, along with the *Weekly Worker*, and I wonder why we have so many communist parties in these Islands - or should I use the word 'sect'?

Which brings me to the Workers Party - yet another one. The far left needs another party like a hole in the head. I think the CPGB ML is making a mistake getting behind this project and it begs the question: with so many far-left sects, why couldn't Mr Galloway find a home in one of these? Any, just pick one. Why can't the two CPGBs and the Revolutionary Communist Group just be one Communist Party and from within hammer out the differences over Trotsky (one of history's foremost Marxists and brilliant leader of the Red Army during the civil war) and Stalin; what words we should use to describe the USSR, China, etc, etc.

To those Marxists in the Labour Party Marxists I ask, 'What are you doing? When will the penny drop?' That party should be no home for true Marxists and Communists. Can I say to the editors and contributors to the *Weekly Worker*, and the leadership of the CPGB, please, *look left*. Surely you have far more in common with the other communist groups than you do with the lapdog of imperialism and capitalism, which is the Labour Party.

Paul Jackson
Hull

Satirical

Politically, the last four and a half years have belonged to those who have suffered the most, under all three parties, since the Callaghan government's turn to monetarism in 1977. They made Jeremy Corbyn the Labour leader, they decided the EU referendum for 'leave', they re-elected Corbyn, they deprived Theresa May of her overall majority, they delivered the scale of the Brexit Party's victory at the 2019 European elections, and they gave Boris Johnson an overall majority, because Corbyn had abandoned his 2017 commitment to Brexit. Had he not done so, then Labour would now be the largest party in a hung parliament.

The workers, and not the liberal bourgeoisie, are now the key swing voters. And here, along the old Red Wall, we have not exchanged one one-party state for another. The Conservatives must face the competition in which they profess to believe. Therefore, ours is the 2020 vision of a new political party, a new think tank, a new weekly newspaper, a new monthly cultural review, a new quarterly academic journal, and much else besides - possibly including a new fortnightly satirical magazine.

David Lindsay
Durham

IRAN



A quiet day at the polls

Concealing the truth

The clerical regime cannot be relied on to provide accurate information, writes **Yassamine Mather** - either about Iran's elections or the coronavirus

Usually, when dictatorships face a crisis, they drop any pretence of 'democracy'. Thus the decision of the Council of Guardians to ban the majority of 'reformist' MPs, as well as those conservative delegates and candidates who had dared to criticise the supreme leader (be it on rare occasions), from the February 21 elections. In total some 7,000 candidates were barred.

This marks the end of any notion that Iran's Islamic Republic is different from dictatorships led by a single ruler. It also marks the end of the era of inter-Islamic competition between 'reformists' and 'conservatives' - a period that goes back to the election of the first 'reformist' president, ayatollah Mohammad Khatami, in August 1997. It has echoes of 1975, when the shah forcibly merged the only two legal political parties in Iran - Hezb-e Mardom and the ruling New Iran Party - into the Resurgence Party (Hezb-e Rastakhiz). The shah himself referred to them as the 'Yes Party' and the 'Of Course Party'!

It was no surprise when last Friday's turnout was very low. The government claims that 42% of Iranians eligible to vote did so, but supreme leader Ali Khamenei put the blame for that on the foreign media for all their negative propaganda about 'disease and viruses' - a reference to the rumours about the spread of coronavirus in the country in the two weeks before the election (I will return to this question later). However, even the figure of 42% is disputed by many inside the country. For instance, the official turnout in Tehran, where conservatives loyal to Khamenei won all 30 seats, is given as just 25.4%.

Among those elected is the former Revolutionary Guards commander, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, who came top of the list in the capital. A controversial figure who failed to win the presidency on a number of occasions, Qalibaf was accused by the current president, Hassan Rouhani, of using "dirty money" in his election campaign in 2005. Iranian reformists have also accused Qalibaf of making personal gains from the sale of city properties to insiders at one 10th of their real price.

There are also accusations that he was involved in fuel smuggling in Baluchistan in south-east Iran in the early 2000s, at a time when he was Iran's police chief. According to Morteza Alviri, a member of Tehran city council, in recent months the Iranian judiciary has been investigating

12 corruption cases relating to the council, all dating back to Qalibaf's time as Tehran's mayor. However, as a conservative supporter of Khamenei, he is now presenting himself as an ideal candidate for the next presidential elections, to be held in 2021.

In other seats throughout the country, conservatives made major gains and the Iranian parliament is likely to have some differences with the current president, Hassan Rouhani, and his foreign minister, Javad Zarif.

There is much speculation over why the supreme leader decided to go for a completely conservative parliament. Some argue that, following nationwide demonstrations after general Qasem Soleimani's assassination on January 3, he came to the conclusion that he no longer needs to tolerate the 'reformists' - at a time of crisis a parliament that is fully in line with his wishes is necessary.

But I doubt this was an important factor. It is clear that the Iranian regime now believes Donald Trump is likely to be in power for another five years and that he will continue to exercise maximum pressure - be it in the form of sanctions, support for 'regime change' groups or the occasional threat of military action. Under such circumstances, the supreme leader and his allies believe a military-type government will be in a better position to confront external threats. Despite regular rumours, Rouhani is not resigning yet. However, it is clear that neither he nor his foreign minister will be able to raise the issue of negotiations with the European Union or the United States with a parliament dominated by conservatives.

Of course, we should remember that the conservative grouping has its own divisions and, now that the 'reformists' are no longer a force to be reckoned with, we will hear more of the differences within their own ranks. Some conservatives have criticised Khamenei for his public declarations against the nuclear bomb, for example. Although they do not openly challenge the supreme leader, they are of the opinion that Iran should have developed a nuclear bomb as a deterrent against possible US attacks.

Coronavirus

Before the elections there were, as I have said, widespread rumours that a number of Iranians had been taken ill with the coronavirus and that the government was deliberately concealing the extent of the problem

to avoid an even lower turnout. In fact the interior minister, Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli, stated that there had been only two deaths as a result of the virus (in the religious city of Qom) just two days before the elections.

Since then we know that at least 19 people have died across the country and many more have been infected. On February 25 it became clear that the deputy health minister, Iraj Harirchi, who only a day earlier had been reassuring citizens that everything was under control, had himself contracted the virus. The mayor of one of Tehran's districts, as well as a member of parliament (Islamic Majles), was also diagnosed with the disease. The countries around Iran have closed their borders, while pilgrimage to the holy Shia cities of Qom and Mashhad has been suspended. Schools and universities in some parts of the country have been closed.

Even if we accept the official figures - and most Iranians do not - more people have died in Iran from the virus than anywhere else outside China. Yet it is clear that so far very few precautionary measures have been taken. One official appearing on national television mocked the idea of setting up quarantines, claiming it was an old-fashioned method belonging to the World War I era!

Of course, as always, Iranian leaders are blaming external "enemies". On February 25 Rouhani said they were planning to shut down Iran by creating fears about the virus. According to the president, "This is a conspiracy by our enemies."

For the growing opponents of the regime the lack of reliable information about coronavirus is very pertinent. For instance, there is still no official information about the number of people who died in the anti-government protest of November 2019, and only a few weeks later the government tried to conceal the fact that the Ukrainian civilian plane that crashed on January 8 had been shot down by missiles deployed by the Revolutionary Guards. It is hardly surprising that most Iranians do not trust the country's rulers to provide correct information about the virus. As one blogger put it, we live in an "empire of lies and deceit".

Of course, the situation could become far worse and it is not just a question of the government attempting to hide the truth. There is a real shortage of medicine - a direct and serious consequence of US sanctions ●

ACTION

Kautsky's republic

Sunday March 1, 5pm: Public meeting, Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Speaker Ben Lewis, editor and translator of works by Karl Kautsky, who at that time was the leading theoretician of the German Social Democratic Party.

Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday March 3, 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: 'Planet-repairing freedomways'. Speaker: Nyoeefe Yawa Dake.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Palestine 101: Trump's 'deal of the century'

Friday February 28, 7pm: Public meeting, Tasty's Peri Peri, 21 Manchester Street, Luton LU1. Hazem Jamjoum (Al Shabaka - The Palestine Policy Network) discusses how Trump's scheme continues the historical confiscation of Palestinian land.

Organised by Luton Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.facebook.com/events/258883228428823.

Made in Dagenham

Sunday March 1, 6.30pm: Film screening and UCU strike fundraiser, Odium Room, Richmond Building, Students Union, 105 Queens Road, Bristol BS8. 2010 film about a strike by sewing machinists in a Ford motor factory for gender pay equality.

Organised by Bristol, Cut the Rent: www.facebook.com/events/1584689018338445.

Miners' strike stories

Friday March 6, 7pm: Film premier and public meeting, National Union of Mineworkers, 2 Huddersfield Road, Barnsley S70. Preserving on film the heroic struggles of miners, families, Women Against Pit Closures and other supporters in the 1984-85 Great Strike.

Speakers include Richard Burgon MP. Entrance free. Organised by Orgrave Truth and Justice Campaign: www.facebook.com/events/653823325362615.

Defend the right to strike

Saturday March 7, 2pm: Conference, Friends Meeting House, 1A Ordnance Road, Southampton SO15. Speakers include Steve Hedley (RMT) and Rob Williams (National Shop Stewards Network). Organised by Southampton and SW Hampshire Trades Union Council: www.facebook.com/events/191449231936583.

The real story of Winnie and Nelson Mandela

Sunday March 8, 10.20am: Film screening, Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way, London W1. A critically acclaimed 1986 documentary without the frills, miseducation, whitewashing and misinformation of Hollywood. Followed by *A woman's place*, a 1971 documentary about the women's movement. Entrance £10 (£8) cash only.

Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: socialistfilm.blogspot.com/2020/02.

Settler-colonialism in Kashmir

Monday March 9, 4pm: UCU strike teach-out, on the steps outside SOAS University of London, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Dr Mehroosh Tak asks if the Israeli settler-colonial model is being followed in Kashmir, with an influx of Indian settlers and plans for the ethnic cleansing of Kashmiris.

Organised by Kashmir Solidarity Movement: www.facebook.com/events/533717837268779.

Solidarity with women in Turkey

Wednesday March 11, 7pm: Public meeting, North London Community House, 22 Moorefield Road, London N17. International Women's Day event to highlight attacks on women workers in Turkey. Organised by Solidarity with the People of Turkey: spotturkey.co.uk.

A week in the West Bank

Thursday March 12, 7pm: Bangladesh Centre, Roundhay Road, Leeds LS8 and **Friday March 13, 6.30pm:** Karmand Community Centre, Barkerend Road, Bradford BD3. Public meetings with a report from Palestine. Speakers: Richard Burgon MP and Imran Hussain MP. Organised by Labour Representation Committee: www.facebook.com/events/1501427263367690.

Campaign for Labour Party Democracy

Saturday March 14, 11.30am: AGM, Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1. To reflect on the election defeat and decide CLPD's tactics and strategy for the forthcoming year. Entrance £3 in advance, £5 on the day (£2).

Organised by CLPD: www.clpd.org.uk.

Anti-Semitism and the Labour Party

Wednesday March 18, 7pm: Public meeting, Hallam Students Union Common Room, Paternoster Row, Sheffield S1. Dr Justin Schlosberg speaks on his book *Bad news for Labour* and the weaponisation of anti-Semitism, followed by discussion. Admission by free ticket.

Organised by Sheffield Hallam Palestine Society: www.facebook.com/events/480867776130930.

Silencing dissent: Israel's role

Tuesday March 24, 7pm: Public meeting, Irish Cultural Centre, 5 Black's Road, Hammersmith, London W6. Speaker Chi-Chi Shi, (War on Want) describes Israel's role in the global business of repression, the security state and surveillance. Admission by ticket, £3 (£1).

Organised by West London Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.facebook.com/events/491486041513305.

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

Vote lesser of three evils

Use the ballot

David Shearer of Labour Party Marxists urges a tactical vote for Rebecca Long-Bailey - despite her monarchism, vague politics and accommodation with the right

With voting now underway in the contest to elect a new Labour leader, it is essential that we intervene and take sides. We in Labour Party Marxists are clear that, despite the resignation of Jeremy Corbyn and the clear move to the right in the party, the space for the left to operate and argue in can be defended. This means voting for Rebecca Long-Bailey for leader and Richard Burgon for deputy - but vote with your eyes open. Expect nothing from an RBL leadership - except betrayal and further moves to appease.

In order to understand the context, let me quote from an article that appeared in *The Independent* a couple of weeks ago: "Up to 40 MPs are understood to be considering their futures in the party if Ms Long-Bailey is named as the next leader, which could see some sit as independents or some leave politics." While we do not take this threat seriously, it is absolutely clear that a Long-Bailey victory would be seen as a setback by the Labour right.

Nevertheless, in the unlikely event that she emerged victorious, the right would have a degree of confidence in their ability to 'limit the damage' in view of the politics she has come out with since the campaign began. First, there was Israel and Zionism. Along with the other candidates, she agreed to attend the hustings organised by two Zionist groupings, Labour Friends of Israel and the Jewish Labour Movement, on February 13. The candidates were asked whether they agreed it was "anti-Semitic" to "describe Israel, its policies or the circumstances around its foundation as racist". But they were not told that those were the very words used by Corbyn in 2018, when he stated that such views should *not* be regarded as anti-Semitic, because of the "discriminatory impact" on Palestinians of Israel's foundation.

This is obviously correct. If the intention is not only to colonise an inhabited land, but drive out a huge number of inhabitants because they are *not* Jews, how can it be "anti-Semitic" to describe such a policy as "racist"? But, like the other candidates, Long-Bailey

agreed that it was. So the JLM *et al* were right all along about Corbyn being an 'anti-Semite', were they, even though RLB has said she gave him "10 out of 10" as Labour leader?

But that was not all. Long-Bailey said she supported separate Palestinian and Israeli states, "so I suppose that makes me a Zionist, because I agree with Israel's right to exist". Would she have argued in support of *apartheid* South Africa's right to exist? Surely not. So let me point out the difference between supporting the right to exist of the current *Zionist* colonial-settler state and a democratic state, in which all people have equal rights. Israel defines itself as the nation-state of all Jews and treats its Arab population as second-class citizens. Israel keeps the West Bank under asphyxiating military occupation. There are, moreover, plans afoot to annex big chunks of the West Bank into Israel - a move which must involve another round of massive ethnic cleansing. Greater Israel cannot have a roughly equal population of Jews and Arabs: that would run counter to the whole Zionist project. We, of course, favour the voluntary unity of Israel's population within some kind of pan-Arabic socialist state.

Then there was the February 17 Channel 4 TV hustings, when candidates were asked how they would vote in a referendum on keeping the monarchy. Lisa Nandy replied: "I'm a democrat, so I would vote to scrap it", although she did not think it was "the priority as a country" to do so. And even the expected leadership victor, Keir Starmer, said he would "downsize" the monarchy. But on this Long-Bailey was more reactionary than the two candidates to her right. She stated categorically: "I wouldn't vote to abolish the monarchy" - after all, there were "more important things" to be done.

As if to accentuate this position, on February 23 the *Sunday Mirror* ran a story (accompanied by a touching photograph) about how in 1988 Long-Bailey, when she was just nine, had presented a bouquet on behalf of her school to the late princess, Diana Windsor.² The tone of the article was

entirely sympathetic, and it read as though the *Mirror* had dug up this information completely independently. But the *Daily Mail's* subsequent online headline began: "Labour hopeful Rebecca Long-Bailey *reveals* photo of her meeting Diana" (my emphasis).³

I suspect that is accurate. Long-Bailey is trying to appeal to the Labour right and wants to show just how 'respectable' she is.

Manifesto

However, in her election leaflet, sent to all Labour members, she demonstrates that she is also well aware that the majority of the membership remains leftwing. True, following the general election defeat, many now believe that the party must proceed 'more cautiously' and ensure that Labour is seen as a 'responsible party of government' in order to be elected. Nevertheless, despite this greater willingness to accommodate the Labour right, their desire for more radical policies remains intact.

RLB's election leaflet, headed 'Our path to power', certainly takes that into account. It focuses on four points, each with promising-sounding headings: 'Aspirational socialism', 'A green industrial revolution', 'Empower our movement' and 'A democratic revolution'. But all of this is completely vague. For example, how does she define "aspirational socialism"? She writes: "To win, we have to understand that people want a better life for their children - that's aspiration - but we can only secure that together - that's socialism." So "socialism" merely means a "better life" - to be achieved by people working "together".

Her "green industrial revolution" is equally vague: it will be "the aspirational socialist project, around which we build a winning majority for change". It will bring "social justice" and "good, green jobs to every community". As for concrete proposals, forget it.

Under 'Empower our movement', Long-Bailey specifies that this movement is "for working people", which means placing "trade unions at the heart of everything we do". This is followed by a call to "actively develop

leaders in every community and workplace to rebuild our movement and fight the Tories on the ground." Vague, but correct. However, she does declare her "support for open selections" within Labour. This is more than supportable. The right fears "open selection" like the plague. The left needs to ensure that, if elected, RLB keeps to her word.

In 'A democratic revolution', she says the aim must be to "take power away from offshore bank accounts and distant Westminster committee rooms and return it to the people". When did the people have "control"? Control, if it is going to be meaningful, has to be control over the means of production - something the people have never had. That is why there needs to be a *real* democratic revolution, which leads to the emergence of a democratic *republic*.

She says she wants to "replace the House of Lords with an elected Senate outside London" and "empower a constitutional convention to explore proportional representation and more devolution". Of course, it is essential to demand the abolition of the House of Lords - or, to be more precise, the *second chamber*. Whatever its form (and whether it is situated inside or "outside London"), its role will always be to ensure that there are 'checks and balances' in place *against democracy*. The demand must be for a single-chamber parliament elected by PR.

Another witch-hunt?

Of course, RLB adheres absolutely to political correctness and so will quickly sign up to each and every call to end discrimination against minorities - without, it seems, bothering too much about the detail of what some are proposing.

So, along with Emily Thornberry and Lisa Nandy, Long-Bailey has signed up to a statement drawn up by the Labour Campaign for Trans Rights, which labels organisations like Woman's Place UK "trans-exclusionist hate groups" for their insistence that there are only two biological sexes. According to the LCTR, such an insistence is "transphobic" and Labour members who support it should be expelled.

The LCTR declares that transphobia has "gained ground" within the party, which has simply "failed to act". Just like over anti-Semitism, presumably. For its part, Woman's Place UK totally rejects accusations that it is transphobic or "trans-exclusionist". Its aim is merely to "ensure that women's voices are heard and our sex-based rights upheld".

Clearly there is a clash of rights and a proposed solution needs calm, reasoned debate. Shutting down contrary voices and demonising the other side is not the right way to proceed. More expulsions are the last thing we need (no doubt using Labour's new, 'efficient' disciplinary process, which tramples over the rights of the accused).

In fact the 'anti-Semitism' witch-hunt is continuing, with two more left candidates in the national executive committee by-election having just been suspended. Graham Durham and Mehmood Mirza now face spurious 'anti-Semitism' allegations, it seems, along with the previously suspended Mo Azam and Keith Hussein, and so cannot contest the vacant NEC seats.

Apparently Mirza posted a cartoon on Facebook, which depicted a man displaying a 'Free Palestine' sign and wearing a gag marked 'Anti-Semitism'. So it is 'anti-Semitic' just to complain about the false allegations made against campaigners for Palestinian rights, is it?

It is essential that those claiming to be on the left - not least Rebecca Long-Bailey herself - should renounce this witch-hunt (along with any new one relating to 'transphobia'). However, even in the absence of such a renunciation, it is essential, as I have stated, to remain focused on the central battle over the nature of the Labour Party itself: the aim must be to transform it into a united front of the entire working class, free of all pro-capitalist elements •

Notes

1. www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/labour-leadership-rebecca-long-bailey-election-corbbyn-keir-starmer-a9326391.html.
2. www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/rebecca-long-bailey-princess-dianas-21555851.
3. www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8033671/Rebecca-Long-Bailey-reveals-photo-meeting-Princess-Diana-aged-nine.html.

A vision of royal socialism

Stan Keable of Labour Party Marxists was among the London delegates at the Labour Left Alliance launch conference in Sheffield

Nowhere in the constitution of the Labour Left Alliance, adopted at its February 22 launch conference, do the words 'socialism', 'working class' or 'capitalism' appear.¹ That despite the fact that the founding objective of the Labour Party was *working class representation*, and socialism was incorporated into its constitution as long ago as 1918.²

Nor is there any reference to the climate-change emergency. Ecological crisis threatens the planet, which can only be confronted by social-system change - by overthrowing capitalism worldwide. Instead, Lincolnshire LLA's utopian 'motherhood and apple pie' motion - for "climate justice" without mentioning capitalism - was blithely voted through: a Green New Deal, "which can be the winning vision, which takes Labour back to power". No, comrades, another Labour government running capitalism will only lead subsequently to another Tory government. To be "effective" (a pious wish in paragraph 1 of the constitution) we need to raise our sights to *working class socialism*.

All of this was voted down, when the 'Our aims and principles' section of London LLA's proposed constitution was rejected by about three to one on a show of hands. London had proposed "Opposition to capitalism, imperialism, racism, militarism and the ecological degradation of the planet through the ruinous cycle of production for the sake of production"³ and "a commitment to socialism as the rule of the working class", moving towards "a stateless, classless, moneyless society that embodies the principle, 'From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs'" - Marx's succinct characterisation of a future communist society.

Background

This first conference of the LLA marked a long overdue, but still very confused, response to the wholesale destruction of democracy within Momentum, following Jon Lansman's January 10 2017 bureaucratic coup⁴ - with the blessing, please remember, of the left's holy trinity: Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and Diane Abbott. They evidently wanted a tame, uncritical support group, which would not embarrass; a fan club that could be controlled, that could be marched up to the top of the hill and marched down again: ie, one with neutered democracy. They did not want an organised, democratic left that might endanger their not-so-clever electoral strategy of keeping quiet about controversial issues, in the vain hope of delivering a 'better capitalism' for the battered working class to endure, without tackling the way we are ruled - the constitutional monarchy system employed by the capitalist class in the United Kingdom. And look what a success that strategy has been.

Despite the organisational capacity of Momentum to mobilise numbers in election campaigns, discontent with its misleadership grew - peaking in July 2019, when its owner directly participated in the establishment's 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' smear campaign. Lansman called for the expulsion of Chris Williamson, the only MP to stand up against the anti-socialist witch-hunt. In an "infamous tweet" (long since deleted) he demanded Williamson's



Jo Bird: justice but we need to go beyond the platitudes

expulsion: "He has to go."⁵ That was the final straw for many, of course, in Momentum's treacherous downhill slide after Lansman organised the prompt removal of vice-chair Jackie Walker as soon as she came under Zionist attack. Solidarity - the watchword of working class strength - was not among Momentum's 'values'.

That level of treachery at the top of the Corbynite camp brought about a spasm of individual resignations and the withdrawal of local groups from Momentum - and a positive response from the Labour Representation Committee leadership to Labour Against the Witchhunt's overtures for a joint initiative by existing left organisations. Two and a half years after Momentum was 'reduced to a corpse', the Appeal for a Labour Left Alliance was published in the name of LAW and the LRC - Jewish Voice for Labour and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy could not be persuaded to come on board. Representatives from LAW and the LRC formed the LLA Organising Group (OG) - which then grew, with the addition of a delegate from each local Momentum or Labour left group that affiliated.

By the end of October 2019 (when the LRC executive committee got cold feet and withdrew⁶), the LLA was already up and running, with some 1,600 signatories (there are now nearly 2,000), 20 local groups (now 39) and preparations for its launch conference well under way.⁷

Sheffield

Around 130 delegates attended the Sheffield conference, representing 36 local and national Labour Left groups. Given that the prescribed delegate/signatory ratio was 1:3, the "nearly 2,000" signatories to the appeal were very much underrepresented. The pre-conference local meetings were generally attended by only a small

minority of signatories, and there was little or no competition for delegate places. Nevertheless, the keenest activists turned up and set the new organisation in motion.

Thankfully, conference was not overloaded with top-table speakers, but we did welcome witch-hunt target and Labour expellee Jackie Walker, along with the newly reinstated 'repeat non-offender', NEC candidate Jo Bird. Jackie spoke of the "time of defeat" through which the left is living, and the "moral crusade to purge Labour of socialists", which is a "cover for rightwing authoritarianism". Jo Bird declared her allegiance to "freedom, justice and equality", her support for the open selection of parliamentary candidates, and her adherence to members-led policy decided at sovereign Labour Party conferences.

London delegate John Bridge's early point of order, that the constitutional options should be the first item of business, was (as the official report puts it) "well taken", but "it was felt that at such short notice the conference agenda could not be so drastically re-ordered, and the original running order, with single-issue motions from individual LLA groups taken before lunch, was retained."⁸

This meant the cart was put before the horse. The pinched time for debate also saw some very strange, often highly contradictory, positions adopted. The LLA will focus on "internal reforms" to the Labour Party. The LLA will focus "outwards". The LLA wants to "convince" people of the "merits of Labour's socialist credentials". The LLA is committed to the restoration of the old, state-capitalist, clause four. The LLA is committed to the communist principle of "From each according to their ability, to each according to their need". Such eclecticism aside, the LLA sees

Brexit as a welcome liberation from the restrictive laws and regulations of the European Union. Its perspective now must be "a socialist vision of the UK" outside the EU. That's right: not only 'socialism in one country', but royal socialism to boot! The motion proposing this from Cheltenham Labour Left was passed by 63 votes to 53 (there were five abstentions).

London was allowed five minutes to move our proposed constitution, but (like the proposals from Tees Valley and Dulwich) it was *not debated as a coherent whole*, as London wished. Instead, it was dealt with piecemeal, after conference voted overwhelmingly to adopt the procedural motion moved by the conference arrangement committee (CAC). This is how the official report describes the process:

Conference decided on what we believe is a very democratic (and unusual) way to decide our structures: the conference arrangements committee had prepared a composite constitution, which featured the 'common ground' of all four proposals and then presented the key differences in clearly defined 'options' that delegates could vote on ... the proposers of the original four draft constitutions got ample opportunity to present the case for their particular vision and proposals for the LLA.

Not so. An amendment (which fell) to the CAC's procedural motion, from Alan Pearson *et al*, argued, sensibly, that motions should not be composited without the consent of the movers - a complaint often levelled at Labour Party conference, when unwanted points are quietly removed under the veil of compositing. In the present case, parts of the London constitution were omitted and, in the so-called "common ground", words were put

into our mouth. For example: "Other political parties and their members/supporters are not eligible to become signatories to the LLA." Those words, attributed to London LLA, appear nowhere in the London proposal, and lean in the opposite direction to our paragraph 1.6: "We support Labour as the federal party of the working class. All trade unions, cooperatives, socialist societies and leftwing groups and parties should be brought together in the Labour Party. Unity brings strength." Just one instance of an issue which should be debated, not composited away.

Bad news, good news

A leading committee will not be elected at conference, so conference is not sovereign: LLA has a bifurcated authority. The collective leadership will owe its authority not to conference, but to the organising group (OG), which meets quarterly and is made up of delegates from affiliated local, regional and national groups. This is likely to have a conservative influence on the organisation's initiatives.⁹

But there was some good news.

- Another conference is to be convened in six months time, when things can be changed.
- LLA's democracy is not tainted by restrictions of gender balance or representation of special groups. Comrades should be selected for their politics.
- The representation of individual members is not trumped by the representation of large affiliated organisations like trade unions. Motion 4.2B (Dulwich), which proposed giving five conference delegates to affiliates with over 2,000 members, and prohibiting trade union branches from affiliating if their region or national office did so, was rejected.
- LLA stands for the "free movement of people" (LAW and Sheffield).
- LLA welcomes, "on all levels of the organisation, those who have been unfairly or unjustly suspended or expelled from the Labour Party" (common ground).
- "Decisions on all levels are made by consensus where possible and by simple majority where necessary (not counting abstentions)" (common ground).
- Defining the LLA as "broad left" and restricting affiliation to "bona fide" groups was rejected (Dulwich).
- Election of officers at conference, recallable only by a two-thirds majority of the OG, was also rejected (Brighton).
- As was the election of a steering committee by electronic ballot: ie, atomised voting without discussion (Tees Valley) ●

Notes

1. <https://labourleft.org/about-us/constitution>.
2. That was, of course, the anti-Marxist, Fabian clause-four version of state socialism, worked up by rightwinger Sidney Webb - under pressure from the rank and file following the Russian Revolution.
3. The London amendment had removed the additional words "or profit" from its own motion.
4. See "Reduced to a corpse" *Weekly Worker* January 12 2017.
5. "Bitter fruit of appeasement" *Weekly Worker* July 4 2019.
6. <https://labourrep.com/blog/2019/10/30/the-lrc-and-the-labour-left-alliance>.
7. "Recoiling from the challenge" *Weekly Worker* October 31 2019.
8. <https://labourleft.org/uncategorized/report-back-from-our-launch-conference>.
9. The OG annually elects officers, who constitute a steering group "in permanent session" by email, etc. The OG can recall and replace officers.

USA

Bernie Sanders: a thoroughly moderate social democrat who calls himself a socialist

‘Socialist’ frontrunner causes panic

America’s ‘ideologically pure’ presidential candidate actually fights back against the anti-Semitism smears, Paul Demarty reports

Those readers not living in a cave in the Tora Bora mountains will no doubt have noticed that US presidential primary season is shaping up to be a real treat.

Bernie Sanders’ crushing victory in Nevada confirms what the left already knew, and indeed the Democratic right must also have known, assuming they had ever heard of Jeremy Corbyn: putting a gormless crew of machine-politicians up against a left candidate with at least the reputation for playing with a straight bat, in competition for the votes of people who still remember how well the last machine candidate turned out, is a really effective way of getting spanked.

We could say that Sanders should divide and conquer, but that would imply that he actually has to *do* it, rather than waiting for his opponents’ egos to do it for him. Astonishingly, the field is about to get *larger*, as the billionaire former mayor of New York, Michael Bloomberg, finally starts actually contesting state primaries (though he formally entered the race late last year). The sheer volume of money he is firehosing into the contest means he cannot be ruled out; but there does not seem to be an electorate in the mood to swing behind a desiccated ex-Republican centrist, whose only selling point is that he is a very rich and successful New York businessman (remind us of anyone ... ?).

With their backs against the wall, it is inevitable that the kid gloves will come off and the hysterical smears will multiply. The elite-liberal approach to the contest up until Iowa, at least, was to simply operate a media blackout against Sanders and insist, in the face of all the evidence, that questions like Amy Klobuchar’s polling numbers among African-Americans were the most important matters arising. Now it is time to sharpen the knives.

Much of the anti-Sanders propaganda is focused on his electability - the problem supposedly posed by a self-styled socialist’s lack of appeal to ‘moderates’; and also now on the fact that his name is likely to hinder efforts to make gains in Congress (the so-called down-ballot problem), since unlucky ‘moderate’ congressional candidates will be smeared by association with the man in the main race. There is also a lot of foolish yammering about ‘ideological purity’, which - as an ideological

purist - I find quite offensive. The confused social democratic shopping list of Sanders’s programme does not meet my standards of ‘purity’, certainly; but it tells us a lot about the right that they consider the idea that people ought not to be bankrupted because they broke their leg or got the wrong disease a marker of Pol Pot-style, Year Zero fanaticism. Are these people even *human*?

Aipac

One such line of attack will sound very familiar to readers on these shores - the allegation that Sanders is anti-Semitic, on account of his recent and welcome retreat from his historic left Zionism. The accusation has arisen repeatedly in recent months, by some of the usual suspects, like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (Aipac), but maybe most notoriously in an article in the rightwing *Washington Examiner* by Tiana Lowe, which motors through various examples of insignificant cranks supposedly within his movement, before repeating bald-faced lies about the right’s Congressional *bêtes noires*. Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib. Lowe, of course, is very proud of her grandfather, who was a member of the anti-Semitic wartime collaborationist outfit, the Chetniks, in Yugoslavia. Funny old world!

Of course, the plausibility of such accusations is hardly the main point. Hunter S Thompson’s retelling of a famous story about Lyndon Johnson comes to mind:

The race was close and Johnson was getting worried. Finally he told his campaign manager to start a massive rumour campaign about his opponent’s life-long habit of enjoying carnal knowledge of his own barnyard sows. “Christ, we can’t get away calling him a pig-fucker,” the campaign manager protested. “Nobody’s going to believe a thing like that.” “I know,” Johnson replied. “But let’s make the sonofabitch deny it.”

It seems, on the face of it, absurd for a Jewish man to be accused of anti-Semitism by predominantly non-Jewish, pro-Israel ideologues; the idea, according to this school of ‘dirty tricks’, is merely to have the accusation hang around long enough to impart some of its stink. The

heartening thing is that it does not seem to have worked. The blackmailers do not confront a man afraid of his own shadow, as Jeremy Corbyn was in his endless shameful retreats, but a man finally coming to his senses and acknowledging that his former pro-Israel positions (he was married in a kibbutz, for heaven’s sake) are not morally tenable, and who refuses to throw his comrades Tlaib and Omar, to the wolves. He excoriates Trump’s ‘deal of the century’; though he remains wedded to the chimera of a negotiated two-state settlement, the direction of travel is clear. He is also free to counter-attack.

Whoever advised Corbyn to capitulate ought to pay close attention to the fact that Sanders has barely suffered at all. This is in spite of, if anything, *worse* conditions for pro-Palestinian politics in America. The alliance between foreign policy hawks and Israeli diplomatic and intelligence agencies is stronger in Washington than in Britain (which retains a vestigial Arabist appendix in the foreign office) - a state of affairs rather dramatically illustrated by *Al Jazeera*’s US sequel to its documentary, ‘The lobby’. The US film, of course, was cancelled after a great hue and cry was directed at the Qatari regime by the various groupings exposed by it, though it is now viewable thanks to *Electronic Intifada* and French and Lebanese collaborators.¹

Standing up to these slanders turns out to draw their sting. It refocuses moral attention on the accusers, not the accused. It is notable that a Zionist ‘political action committee’ (PAC), Democratic Majority for Israel (DMFI), spent \$800,000 on anti-Sanders ads in Nevada, *which did not mention Israel at all*, nor anti-Semitism; they focused entirely on the electability issues, as well as the candidate’s physical robustness (Sanders suffered a minor heart attack on the campaign trail recently). What clearer admission can we ask for that ordinary Democrats are in no mood to be lied to by these scumbags?

Class politics

The indications are that Israel, like other markers of Democratic sensibleness and good governance, is losing its sheen. It seems that the political veteran, Sanders, has reached much the same conclusion as

many of his young followers; though older Jewish Americans remain predominantly pro-Israel, the younger generation are very much alienated from the idea that this self-proclaimed Jewish state has anything in common with their, on average, progressive values. The symbiotic relationship between Netanyahu and Trump is obvious to all, as is the racism and blood-thirst of Netanyahu’s government. Nor is the idea that a state with a large nuclear arsenal and lavish military support from the US is seriously under threat from ‘terrorists’ credible on its own terms.

So much for the left; on the right, pro-Israel sentiment is very much (if you’ll forgive me) a shibboleth. Yet Lowe is not the only person to combine opprobrious rhetoric against ‘anti-Semites’ with flirtations with anti-Semitism. It does not seem to bother many mainstream Republicans that they share their support for the far-right politics of the current administration with overt anti-Semites like David Duke and Richard Spencer (though Duke for a time criticised Trump for his pro-Israel bent). More seriously, there is the phenomenon of conservative evangelical Christians who believe that the lamb of God is due for his homecoming soonish, that this will take place in the ‘Holy Land’ and that ‘the Jews’ shall be gathered there to be converted, as promised in the apocalypse of John. This is not some tiny, marginal idea: indeed, it may be the case that, should Donald Trump suffer some terminal misfortune in the near future, the president of the USA will be of this opinion (it is hard to tie down Mike Pence to any particular sect, but his background is certainly of this general type).

This situation itself, of course, is highly problematic for pro-Israel liberal lobby groups like DMFI: suddenly the company they keep begs a lot of questions. As Pence’s saviour tells us, we know the tree by its fruit; and what a bitter crop the Democratic ‘moderates’ yield in this connection ...

It does not seem likely that the election this year will line up on this issue. Assuming Sanders does win the primaries, is not shafted at the Democratic national convention and is not sabotaged by a ‘moderate’, third-party candidate - several big ifs - the fight will be between ‘socialism’ and Trumpism. That is certainly the fight

Trump wants to have. “Every single one of the Democratic candidates has embraced a radical socialist agenda,” Donald Trump junior told a New Hampshire rally, warming the crowd up for his old man; indeed, such rhetoric rather suggests that there is no candidate ‘moderate’ enough to escape the charge of ‘socialism’. Every concession to Sanders’ agenda will be treated like a citation of *What is to be done?*

And - as is made clear by the threadbare jeremiads about ‘ideological purity’ from the wonk candidates, on the one hand, and the Bloomberg cash offensive on the other - this is not a concern only shared by the demagogues of the right. The singular achievement of the American political architecture since the end of World War I is the ruthless exclusion of all ideas of ‘socialism’ from the political mainstream; Sanders’ success on the campaign trail, but also the humiliation of the most establishment candidate in recent political history by a half-daft demagogue, have breached the leftward and rightward defences of this edifice. It will not be surrendered easily, however; and we know, in the end, that Trump is more acceptable to the screaming homunculi of the American political mainstream than Sanders.

Time will tell whether the Sanders moment achieves what is objectively the greatest service it could render the American and indeed global working class - the sundering of the Democratic Party on class lines. It has happened before in America, when free-soil Whigs finally broke away to form the Republican Party in the mid-1850s, setting in train what turned out to be the revolutionary destruction of the southern slave society. That depends a lot on how the Sandernistas cope with defeat - or, worse in many ways, the paralysis that would result from *victory* over Trump in the autumn, with a likely hostile congress and supreme court to deal with. It is to be hoped that strong and permanent roots are laid, that can last for enough political cycles to once more revolutionise the American body politic ●

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Notes

1. <https://electronicintifada.net/content/watch-film-israel-lobby-didnt-want-you-to-see/25876>.

Subordinate to the bourgeoisie

It is true that Sanders is mobilising the working class, writes Daniel Lazare. But for what?

Thanks to Bernie Sanders' stunning win in last week's Nevada primary, there is suddenly a faint whiff of revolution in the air. The corporate press had previously written Sanders off as appealing mainly to college kids and 60s veterans, but, post-Nevada, it is clear his support is much broader.

Not only did he win a majority of Latino voters, but he did better than expected among blacks - supposedly his weak spot. He prevailed in all age categories other than those over 65, drew non-college voters, as well as the college-educated, and did well in both union and non-union households. As the results rolled in, a flustered Pete Buttigieg appealed to Democrats to "take a sober look at what's at stake" before "we rush to nominate Senator Sanders". His choice of words was revealing: a rush to nominate Sanders is precisely what is now underway.

This could change, of course. But at a time when social democrats are on the ropes from Britain to Italy, a country that is supposedly immune to socialism is taking the lead. The dumbstruck expressions on TV talking heads have been a delight to see.

But social democracy performs a double function by mobilising workers, on the one hand, but doing so, on the other, in order to subordinate them all the more effectively to the bourgeoisie. What that means became clear before Nevadans even started to vote when the *Washington Post* ran a story saying that "Russia is attempting to help [Sanders'] presidential campaign as part of an effort to interfere with the Democratic contest."¹

The article was vague and evidence-free. "It is not clear what form that Russian assistance has taken," it confessed, while the only sources it cited were "people familiar with the matter ... speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive intelligence". If the *Post* tells readers who such people are, evidently, it will have to shoot every last one of them before they tell anyone else.

It was pure nonsense, in other words, which is why it could have been Bernie's moment to shine by calling the newspaper's bluff. But instead he did the opposite, declaring that he believes in the Russian threat just as fervently and castigating Trump for not doing the same: "My message to Putin is clear," Sanders said:

Stay out of American elections, and as president I will make sure that you do. Unlike Donald Trump, I do not consider Vladimir Putin a good friend. He is an autocratic thug, who is attempting to destroy democracy and crush dissent in Russia.

Take that, Vladimir! While castigating "the billionaire class" at every turn, Sanders apparently agrees with Jeff Bezos, the *Washington Post's* owner and the richest single individual on earth, that Russia is even worse. That is what subordinating the working class means: ie, subordinating it to an imperial agenda.

For or against?

This is not the first time Sanders has gone off against Russia. Two days earlier, he speculated during a Democratic debate that "Bernie Bros" may not be to blame for "ugly remarks" on Twitter and other social media that riled Elizabeth Warren and others, and that the Kremlin may be responsible instead. He was even more emphatic in July 2018 following a Trump-Putin



The Sanders rank and file must be organised into a party

summit conference in Helsinki, when he sailed into the president for not taking the intelligence agencies at their word regarding Russian electoral interference.

Trump's performance in the face of hostile questioning in Helsinki was a classic. Over the course of a joint 45-minute press conference, he denied conspiring with Russia to throw the election, denounced special prosecutor Robert Mueller's collusion investigation as "a disaster for our country" and repeatedly asked why the FBI had never inspected Democratic National Committee (DNC) computers first-hand to determine if a hack had even occurred: "Why haven't they taken the server? Why was the FBI told to leave the office of the Democratic National Committee? I've been wondering that. I've been asking that for months and months."

Then, with Putin at his side, he committed the cardinal sin of refusing to take the word of the US intelligence agencies over that of Russia. "My people came to me, [director of national intelligence] Dan Coats came to me, and some others," he told reporters:

They said they think it's Russia. I have president Putin, he just said it's not Russia. I will say this: I don't see any reason why it would be ... I have confidence in both parties ... I have great confidence in my intelligence people, but I will tell you that president Putin was extremely strong and powerful in his denial today.²

It was an awkward attempt at even-handedness that roused Democrats to a fury. Since they took collusion as a given, Democrats would not be satisfied unless Trump confessed there and then that it was all true, that his election was a sham, and that Russia had helped him at every step of the way. When he refused, they took it as further evidence that he was guilty as charged.

So did Sanders. In an attempt to

embarrass Republicans, he introduced a resolution a few days later calling on the Senate to endorse the US intelligence community's verdict on Russian interference. His speech introducing the resolution was also a classic - a classic example of the fundamentally rightwing nature of the Democratic assault.³ He began:

At the Helsinki summit on Monday, president Trump embarrassed our country, undermined American values, and openly sided with Russia's authoritarian leader, Vladimir Putin, against the United States intelligence community's unanimous assessment that Russia interfered in the 2016 presidential election. Senator John McCain is right when he said it was "one of the most disgraceful performances by an American president in memory. The damage inflicted by president Trump's naivety, egotism, false equivalence and sympathy for autocrats is difficult to calculate, but it's clear that the summit in Helsinki was a tragic mistake."

"That's not Bernie Sanders talking," he continued. "That is former Republican presidential candidate Senator John McCain."

Indeed, it was. McCain - an ex-Vietnam prisoner-of-war, whose idea of a joke was to sing "Bomb, bomb, bomb Iran" to a Beach Boys tune - was one of the fiercest hawks ever to set foot on Capitol Hill; and someone who clashed repeatedly with Trump, because he was not hawkish enough. He backed the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, declared Iraq to be "a clear and present danger to the United States of America" in supporting "shock and awe" in 2003, and suggested that Nato should intervene in support of Georgia in its war with Russia in 2008.⁴

He enthusiastically backed Nato intervention in Libya and called for direct military action in Syria to overthrow Bashar al-Assad. In 2013, he made a secret trip to Syria, where

he posed for photos with a rebel leader, who a year earlier had kidnapped nine Lebanese Shi'ite pilgrims and was still holding them for ransom. In the wake of the 2014 Euromaidan uprising, he did the same thing in the Ukraine, posing for a photo with Oleh Tyahnybok, leader of the neo-fascist Svoboda Party.⁵

This was the neo-cold warrior whom the supposed peacenik, Sanders, now looked to for support. He went on:

Today we face an unprecedented situation of a president who, for whatever reason, refuses to acknowledge the full scope of the threat to American democracy ... Russia has been interfering not only in US elections, but in the elections of other democracies, the United Kingdom, France, Germany ... Russia's goal is to advance its own interest by weakening the transatlantic alliance of democracies that arose after World War II, while also inflaming internal divisions in our country, as well as other countries.

And so on for another 600 or 700 words. Yet nearly all of it was untrue. Trump's refusal to take the word of the intelligence agencies was eminently justified, given that Mueller would soon conclude that collusion did not occur.

Threat?

The same goes for his refusal "to acknowledge the full scope of the threat to American democracy", since Russian interference has been grossly exaggerated, assuming it even took place at all. (As Trump pointed out in Helsinki, the FBI never determined on its own whether Russia hacked the DNC and instead relied on the word of a private cyber-security company with ties to a vehemently anti-Russian Washington think tank known as the Atlantic Council.) As for Russian meddling in Britain, France and Germany, Sanders neglected to mention that intelligence agencies in all three countries concluded that no

electoral interference had occurred.⁶

Then there is the charge of "weakening the transatlantic alliance of democracies" - a phrase that any real socialist should be too embarrassed to utter. While such language goes down well with Washington's endlessly bellicose foreign-policy establishment, it turns reality on its head, since it is Nato's post-1989 expansion to the east that has clearly been aimed at weakening Russia. Indeed, if Putin had not annexed the Crimea, the new nationalist government in Kiev that the US helped install would almost certainly have terminated Russia's long-term lease on its Sevastopol naval base - depriving it of its chief naval outlet to the Black Sea. With Ukraine and Georgia posed to join the Atlantic alliance, encirclement would have been complete.

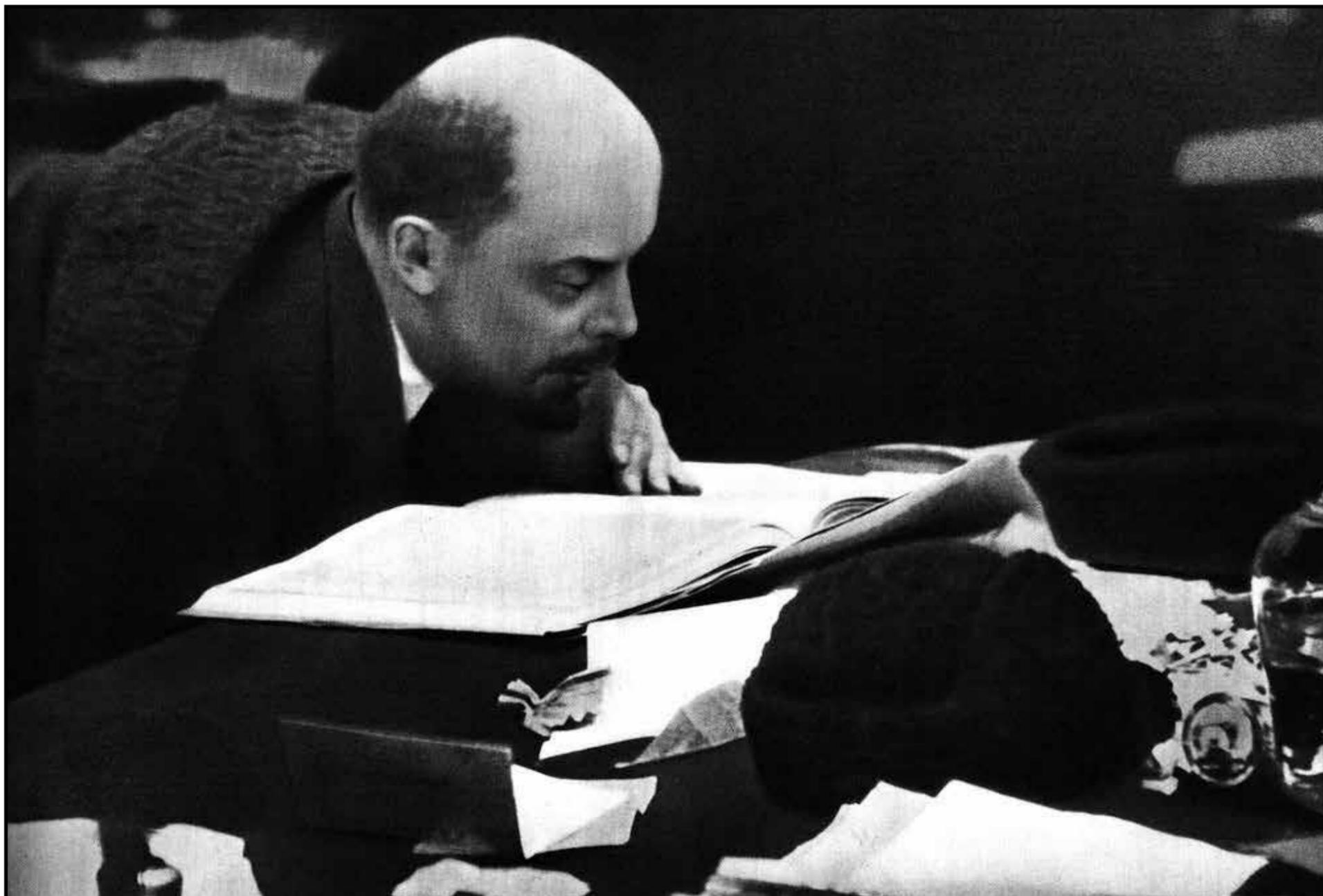
So, yes, Putin is unquestionably an authoritarian, who is trying to hold a "shockingly ramshackle" post-Soviet Russia together.⁷ Yes, he has moved increasingly to the right after declaring - correctly - in 2005 that "the break-up of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century". But, no, he is not guilty of mounting an anti-Nato offensive. With an economy barely a fifth the size of America's, Russia's actions must be seen, rather, as primarily defensive, which is to say that of a mid-sized power doing its best to fend off an imperialist onslaught. Socialists should be the first to point this out, yet Sanders does the opposite.

This is not nit-picking, and neither is it an attempt to rain on Bernie supporters' parade in the name of Marxist purity. To the contrary, Russia is one of the defining questions of the epoch. What passes for political debate in Washington is a purely strategic argument between two war parties over which country constitutes the greater threat: China and Iran, on the one hand, versus Russia, on the other. Impeachment, in which Democrats accused Trump of undermining national security by failing to arm Ukraine against pro-Russian insurgents, was one battle in the ongoing struggle. To the degree that Sanders continues to attack Trump for being soft on Russia, the presidential election is shaping up as another.

After accusing Trump of benefiting from Russian interference, Sanders now finds himself the target of the same baseless charges. So he tried to recover by burnishing his anti-Russian credentials. But, the more he does, the more he will find himself ensnared in a CIA trap. This story is not going to end well ●

Notes

1. S Harris, E Nakashima, M Scherer and S Sullivan "Bernie Sanders briefed by US officials that Russia is trying to help his presidential campaign" *Washington Post* February 21 2020.
2. For the full press conference, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwXqOolyWm0. The quote starts at 39:40.
3. Sanders's remarks are available at www.sanders.senate.gov/newsroom/video-audio/sanders-introduces-resolution-to-protect-american-democracy-from-russian-meddling.
4. M Ames "Getting Georgia's war on" *The Nation* August 8 2008.
5. "US senator McCain pictured with Syrian rebel kidnapper: paper", Reuters, May 30 2013; A Taylor, "John McCain went to Ukraine and stood on stage with a man accused of being an anti-Semitic neo-Nazi" *Business Insider* December 16 2013.
6. PD Shinkman "British say election was free of Russian meddling" *US News* June 16 2017; "The latest: France says no trace of Russia hacking Macron", Associated Press, June 1 2017; E King, "German intelligence finds no evidence of Russian meddling" *Politico* February 7 2017.
7. A Higgins "How powerful is Vladimir Putin really?" *The New York Times* March 23 2019.

CENTENARY

Lenin: his 'Leftwing' communism proved to be a powerful weapon for those who wanted to affiliate to the Labour Party

The supreme issue

As we have seen, the main bugbear that held up progress towards the bulk of the far left of the British political scene uniting in a Communist Party was the pivotal issue of the Labour Party. Should any newly launched CPGB offer electoral support or apply for affiliation to Labour or not?

In particular, the bulk of the membership of the Socialist Labour Party - the second most important potential component of the new party after the British Socialist Party - were implacably opposed in these early stages of the negotiations to any dealings with Labour other than consistent hostility.

The rationale for this stance was outlined in the report of a militant intervention by their general secretary Tom Mitchell, the Socialist Labour Party delegate to the Unity Conference (March 13 1920).¹ He informed the gathering that the SLP - as indicated by internal consultations in the organisation - had given him a

"most emphatic" mandate for "opposition to affiliation to the Labour Party": his organisation could "concede nothing" on this point of supposed 'principle'.

He added that Labour affiliation - and, by implication, individual membership - was sufficient, in itself, to render "All bodies ... responsible for the crimes the Labour Party had perpetrated against the workers, and the SLP realised that the Labour Party was as great an enemy to the working class, if not greater, than the capitalists themselves. Until such time as the question of the Labour Party was settled there could be no unity ..."

Or, to summarise, he gave the assembled comrades an object lesson in the sterile 'politics of purity'.

The Amsterdam sub-bureau of the Communist International, headed by SJ Rutgers, lent its authority to this stubborn intransigence. Its communication, addressed to "the communists of Great Britain", denounced any

communist activity in the Labour Party. Naturally, this was eagerly reproduced in the Socialist Labour Party's publication, *The Socialist*, on May 6 1920 - and two days later in the *Workers' Dreadnought*, the paper of the Workers' Socialist Federation, led by the talented, but politically erratic, Sylvia Pankhurst.

As befitted the gravity of the issue, the BSP's reply was printed only after being "given careful consideration" by its executive committee. As Labour Party affiliation was "purely tactical", the BSP was prepared to refer the issue to the membership of a united Communist Party to decide. For it, communist unity was the pressing issue and hence the intervention of the Amsterdam sub-bureau was "entirely gratuitous and mischievous" - a view that that was powerfully reinforced by the coinciding announcement from the executive committee of the Communist International in Moscow. It "unanimously

decided to annul the mandate of the Amsterdam sub-bureau", because of its leftism.

This authoritative endorsement of its tactics helped the BSP to parry the intervention from Amsterdam and powerfully reinforced its call for an emphasis on "the supreme issue" - a united Communist Party in Britain. Further ammunition was to arrive in June, when Lenin's '*Leftwing' communism: an infantile disorder* was published.

In this, he famously argued that an important attribute of any communist was a strong stomach. As he reminded his readers, "the entire history of Bolshevism, both before and after the October revolution, is full of instances of changes of tack, conciliatory tactics and compromises with other parties, including bourgeois parties!" And in that spirit he advised communists in Britain to overcome their leftist scruples against engaging with the Labour Party: "It is true that the Hendersons, the

Clyneses, the MacDonalds and the Snowdens are hopelessly reactionary."² Lenin freely admitted. And "when they are in power they will certainly behave like the Scheidemanns and Noskes."³ All that is true. But it does not at all follow that to support them means treachery to the revolution; what does follow is that, in the interests of the revolution, working class revolutionaries should give these gentlemen a certain amount of parliamentary support"⁴ ●

William Sarsfield

Notes

1. *The Socialist* March 25 1920.
2. Labour Party leaders.
3. Philipp Scheidemann (1865-1939) - a leader of the German Social Democratic Party who voted for war credits in 1914. In 1918, Scheidemann unilaterally proclaimed the republic from a balcony in the Reichstag building in order to upstage the proclamation of a "workers' republic" by the communists led by Karl Liebknecht, which indeed followed a couple hours later. Gustav Noske (1868-1946) was defence minister in 1919-20. He unleashed the infamous Freikorps (paramilitary organisations of ex-soldiers), who were responsible for the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.
4. VI Lenin *CW* Moscow 1977, p81.

BSP replies to Amsterdam

The Call May 13 1020

Dear comrade SJ Rutgers
You state (point 1):

In accordance with the resolution

passed at the February conference in Amsterdam we are of the opinion that communists should not be affiliated either directly or indirectly to political organisations

that accept the principles of the Second International. For England such an organisation is no doubt the Labour Party.

This statement entirely fails to express the situation, as it exists in this country. If the Labour Party were a political party in the ordinary sense of the word,

composed solely or even largely of individual membership, the question of affiliation to the Labour Party could not possibly arise. But it is not.¹ The Labour

Party is a federation of trade unions and socialist bodies; its individual membership is infinitesimal in comparison with its total affiliated membership; it is the expression, in the political field, of the activities of the working class through their trade unions.

By reason of this fact all shades of working class political opinion are counted in its membership. Above all is included that vast nebulous mass of thought - indefinite, inconsistent, inchoate - which is the real psychological expression of the working class in Britain in its present stage of development ... We are as actively opposed to the present reactionary leaders as you are yourselves. Moreover, we do not conceive the Labour Party to be the sole field of our activities: it is one avenue only, through which to obtain access to the organised working class.

You see in this policy two grave dangers. One, that the leaders of the Labour Party, if successful, will betray the workers in the same way that Ebert² and Noske betrayed them in Germany. The other, that the coming to power of a Labour government will lead to a catastrophe, which will render it impossible to unite the workers under the banner of communism; whereas you appear to think that, if we isolate ourselves now, to detach ourselves from the workers in their struggle and to content ourselves merely with warning them in advance will help to unite them.

We are under no illusions with respect to the present reactionary leaders of the Labour Party. Nevertheless, it is by no means certain that events here will necessarily take the same course as in Germany, any more than events in Germany have followed the same course as in Russia. In any case, you may be sure that our Noskes would find no more strong and bitter opponents than in the rank and file of that very Labour Party from which you would exclude us. Shall we abdicate our leadership in advance in favour of others who would be more in touch with realities than ourselves, but would not be communists? ...

Our staying outside the Labour Party would not prevent the arrival of the Noskes, but it would effectively undermine one source of communist influence, which could be used against them at a critical moment.

The second danger you mention takes for granted the coming to power of the Labour Party at an early date. Certainly the signs point in that direction, but here again we warn you that it is quite unsafe to build a British analogy on a German precedent. And, even if the expected happens and a Labour government takes office, there will be no catastrophe, as you suppose. No failure of the Labour Party, however complete, will involve us, for we have defined our position too clearly. The ... resolution, carried unanimously at our Easter conference ... prove[s] this ...

Moreover, you presuppose a swing to the right by the workers as a result of the failure of a Labour government. We, on the contrary, believe a swing to the left far more likely, and we feel we should be false to all our principles if we allowed such a movement to proceed without being both in it and of it.

You seek to turn what is purely a question of tactics into a question of principle. In point 4 you say:

Since we agree with those communists in England that object to participation in the Labour Party, we are of opinion they should not give up their attitude on a plea of unity. Much as we would like to see a united Communist Party in England, it may be better to postpone this ideal than to compromise on important issues.

In reply to communication asking for his views on the movement towards communist unity in this country, comrade Lenin declared: "The Communist Party is the supreme issue; all other questions are secondary to that." Not so the executive committee of the Amsterdam sub-bureau. You would prefer the indefinite postponement of communist unity rather than the acceptance of a particular attitude on a minor point of tactics. From that view we most emphatically dissent. For the BSP the question of the Communist Party is the supreme issue, now as heretofore.

In its desire to achieve unity the BSP has made concession after concession, finally giving up the question of Labour Party affiliation entirely, provided that non-affiliation was not imposed upon the Communist Party in advance, as



BSP: main force for unification

a fixed basis to be adhered to at all times and under all circumstances. In doing so we were not abandoning any of our beliefs, for we felt convinced that the necessities of a revolutionary movement would compel the Communist Party eventually to share the views we hold. We felt, too, that the appeal of the Third International for communist unity was not lightly to be disregarded, and were prepared to surrender much that we thought important in order to attain that end.

The obstacle to communist unity in Britain is not the view held by the BSP regarding affiliation to the Labour Party; it is the determination of other sections to deprive the members of the Communist Party of any share in fashioning its tactics by deliberately and definitely tying the hands of the party before it is formed. To such a course the BSP cannot, under any circumstances, agree.

You do not view the situation in this country in its right perspective. You visualise a Britain that does not exist. You imagine workers' committees springing up everywhere, with thousands of members - all communists and led by communists - only awaiting the word to take the organisation of the workers out of the nerveless hands of the trade union bureaucracy. You see the political initiative, in similar fashion, being taken away from the Labour Party. Regretfully, we inform you that you have been misinformed and misled. The British working class will move - have no fear of that. But it will move through its

own institutions, and impelled by the accumulated experience of its own historic past.

We propose to be with it in all its struggles, even to share with it the consequences of its mistakes. For, being revolutionists, we are also realists. Your theories might lead to an ineffective 'left wing of the left wing', but nothing more. Let those who will follow that path. For ourselves we shall continue to be with the masses of the workers wherever they are - even in the Labour Party, helping them in their struggles, pointing out their mistakes, opposing the influence of their opportunist leaders and seeking always to inspire them with our communist ideals.

Having thus stated the position of the BSP, we wish, in conclusion, to protest against the intervention of the Amsterdam sub-bureau in a matter that lies altogether outside the mandate conferred upon it by the Third International. The function of the sub-bureau is to assist the communist parties in western Europe by the systematic distribution of literature and information, not to lay down rules and regulations regarding policy or to give instructions as to the particular tactics the communist parties shall apply.

The February conference at Amsterdam was altogether unrepresentative and, as the official report of the proceedings published in the *Bulletin* (No2) distinctly states, "The theses and resolutions voted can only have a provisory character." Nevertheless, those same

theses and resolutions (adopted in some cases by the aid of the votes of the representatives of a German section that has since been excluded from the Third International) are advanced as presenting "the attitude of the bureau towards affiliation of communist groups and parties to the British Labour Party".

The good service the bureau might have rendered the organisations of the Third International in this country, had it confined itself within the limits of its mandate, are being nullified by its gratuitous intervention in a matter of party tactics, over which it has no jurisdiction and regarding which its knowledge of local conditions is necessarily incomplete. Against such unwarranted interference we desire most emphatically to protest. Yours fraternally ●

Executive committee of the BSP: JAS Crossley, JF Hodgson, H Hinshelwood, C Martin, G Roberts, Fred Shaw, AA Watts, Albert Inkpin (secretary), Fred Willis (BSP delegate to Amsterdam conference)

Notes

1. Before 1918 Labour had no individual membership.
2. Friedrich Ebert (1871-1925) was leader of the Germany Social Democratic Party after the death of August Bebel. He led the parliamentary fraction of the party to vote almost unanimously in favour of war credits in August 1914. In October 1918, when he and other national chauvinist SPD leaders were included in a new government formed by Prince Maximilian of Baden to stop Germany following the example of Russia, Ebert confessed that he "hated revolution like sin".

Fighting fund

£196 needed

With just three days to go before the end of our February fighting fund, we need another £196 to reach our monthly target of £2,000.

As usual, the largest proportion of the £580 received over the last week came in the shape of standing orders - just five comrades provided no less than £420 between them (thank you, SK, PM, DG, SS and GT). Then there was a one-off bank transfer from comrade JS, who writes that he was just "doing my bit".

As for PayPal, US comrade and former subscriber EG donated an excellent £50, while, nearer to home, GS added £40 to his annual subscription cheque. Finally, comrade Hassan (a regular donor who doesn't believe in the use of initials!) came up with his usual tenner, which he handed to one of our comrades.

Well, that £580 wasn't bad, especially as there were so few comrades contributing, but now we need a few more to do the necessary by Saturday February 29. But that means using one of two methods - either PayPal (click on the button on our website) or (even better, because there's no charge) follow the example of JS and make an online bank transfer (our account number is 00744310 and sort code is 30-99-64). But for that to reach us on time it has to be done by 5pm on Friday.

So, in effect, you need to make your contribution as soon as you read this, if we're not going to end up with a deficit, however small. I know you can do it! ●

Robbie Rix

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

ECONOMY

Coronavirus and the G20

Global capital is at a loss on how to prevent another slump, argues Michael Roberts

The finance ministers and central bankers of the top 20 economies in the world met last weekend in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The G20 finance summit had a lot to ponder. First, there was the coronavirus epidemic (Covid-19). Would it turn into a pandemic? Would the impact on global growth, trade and investment be so severe as to tip the world economy into recession in 2020? Also, what is to be done about curbing and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, with the world's temperatures continuing to rise towards an increase above that set by the last international climate change agreement? Finally, is there nothing to be done about high and rising inequality of wealth and income, and the continued shift of profits by multinationals and rich oligarchs into 'tax havens'?

The Saudi Arabia G20 communiqué provided no answers to any of these questions. At Riyadh, International Monetary Fund managing director Kristalina Georgieva, having previously announced a reduction in IMF forecasts for global growth to just 2.9%, now added a further reduction due to Covid-19. She reckoned that the epidemic will likely cut 0.1% from global economic growth to 2.8% - the lowest rate since the end of the great recession over 10 years ago. And it would drag down growth for China's economy to 5.6% this year from the 6.0% previously forecast. According to Georgieva,

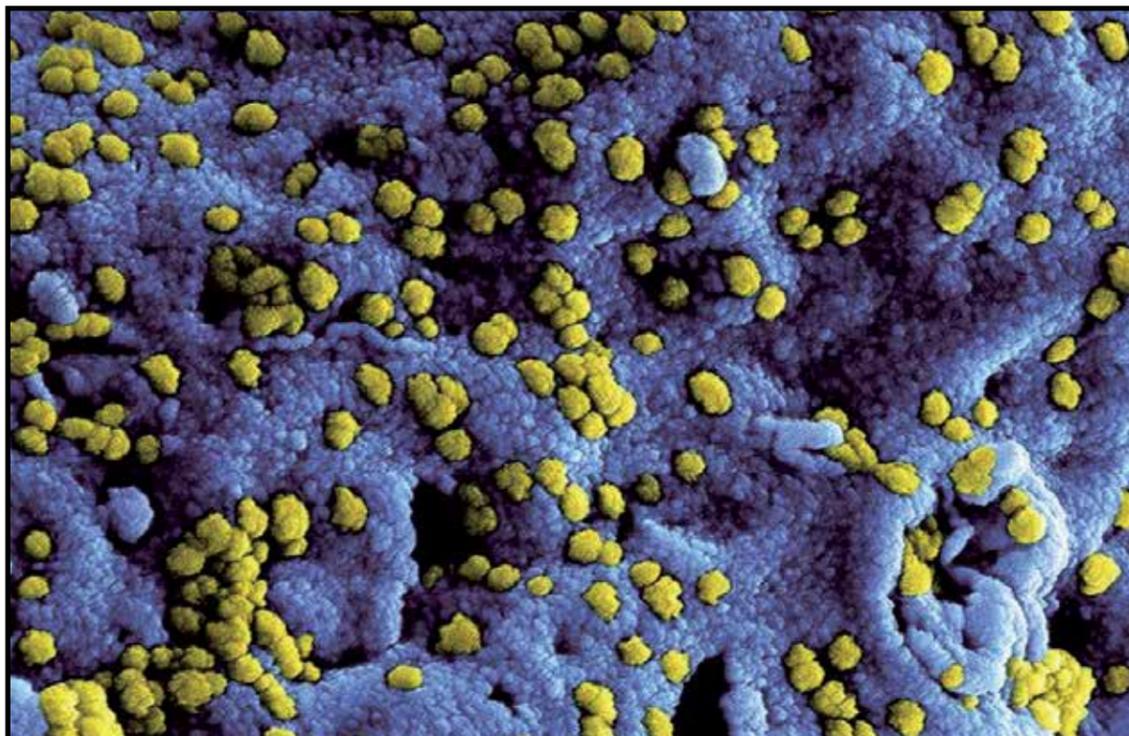
In our current baseline scenario, announced policies are implemented and China's economy would return to normal in the second quarter. As a result, the impact on the world economy would be relatively minor and short-lived. But we are also looking at more dire scenarios, where the spread of the virus continues for longer and more globally, and the growth consequences are more protracted.

French finance minister Bruno Le Maire said in Riyadh: "The question remains open whether it will be a V-shape with a quick recovery of the world economy, or whether it would lead to an L-shape with a persistent slowdown in world growth." He said the V-shaped scenario was more likely.

China and Japan

As the ministers met, the latest data on Covid-19 suggested that China was getting the epidemic under control. It reported a sharp fall in new deaths and cases of the coronavirus, but world health officials warned it was too early to make predictions about the outbreak, as new infections continued to rise in other countries. "Our biggest concern continues to be the potential for Covid-19 to spread in countries with weaker health systems," said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the director-general of the World Health Organisation. This United Nations agency is calling for \$675 million to support most vulnerable countries, he said, adding that 13 countries in Africa are seen as a priority because of their links to China.

However, the Chinese authorities put on an optimistic air. Chen Yulu, a deputy governor of the People's Bank of China, said policymakers had plenty of tools to support the economy, and were confident of winning the war against the epidemic: "We believe that after this epidemic is over, pent-up demand for



The virus could bring about more than an economic slowdown

consumption and investment will be fully released, and China's economy will rebound swiftly," Chen told state TV.

Other commentators are less convinced that China can recover quickly from shutting down industry, stopping tourism and keeping millions at home. Zhu Min, a former IMF deputy managing director, reckoned that Covid-19 could slash \$185 billion off China's economy in January and February. Dips in tourism and consumer spending could reduce first-quarter growth by three or four percentage points, according to Zhu Min, while online spending - particularly on education and entertainment services - would offset some of the losses, the total drain on the economy over the period could be as much as 1.38 trillion yuan, said Zhu. Based on figures from China's National Bureau of Statistics, that would represent about 3.3% of the country's total retail sales in 2019.

Car sales fell by 20.5% year on year in January (their largest monthly dip in 15 years), according to figures from the China Passenger Car Association. And sales in the first two weeks of February fell 92% from the same period of 2019, mainly due to showroom closures. Over the whole of 2020, the coronavirus epidemic could cost China one million car sales, or about 5% of its annual total, the industry group said. "The falling consumption in the first quarter could knock down growth by three or four percentage points," Zhu said. "We need a strong rebound, and that needs 10 times as much effort."

Chen Wenling, chief economist at the China Centre for International Economic Exchanges, a Beijing-based think tank, said this week that even if national production returned to 80% by the end of February, first-quarter growth would still be less than 4.5%. By comparison, China's economy grew by 6.4% in the first three months of 2019.

What to do? At Riyadh, Japan's answer was to call for increased government spending. Finance minister Taro Aso called on G20 countries with 'fiscal space' (like Germany) to ramp up spending to help the global economy: "I told the G20 ministers that the spread of the coronavirus epidemic ... could

have a serious effect on the global economy." Aso pointed out that Japan has deployed fiscal spending quite a bit, so he wants other countries with fiscal room to do the same. This is ironic, since Japan's permanent annual budget deficits do not appear to have saved the economy from dropping into recession, even before the effects of Covid-19 epidemic hit.¹ But don't worry: Aso claimed that Japan was continuing its moderate recovery, as a tight job market and rising household income offset some of the weaknesses in exports and output. "At this stage, I don't think risks to Japan's economy have suddenly heightened sharply." That is wishful thinking.

Negligible

As I have argued before, fiscal stimulus is likely to have a negligible effect on achieving economic recovery, once a slump sets in and the capitalist sector stops investing and consumers stop spending (as much).² That is because government spending outside of welfare transfers accounts for no more than 10% of most economies' gross domestic product, and government investment (as opposed to spending on public services) is no more than 3% of GDP, compared to the 15%-20% invested by the capitalist sector. It would take a huge increase in government investment to have the necessary effect.³

Moreover, the ability and willingness of governments to resort to such huge fiscal injections are limited. Gavyn Davies in the *Financial Times* is sceptical:

... the next global recession may result in a merging of what has traditionally been viewed as the two separate wings of macro policy: fiscal and monetary. It is a difficult question of political economy whether the central bank or the treasury is better placed to lead the design of an effective policy response in this environment. Japan has been in this position for several years and has so far failed to cut the Gordian knot. Policymakers in the US and Europe should be thinking well in advance about how they can cooperate both internationally and domestically to produce a better

outcome. There is no sign of this happening yet.

Perhaps only one country is capable of doing that. Given the size of the state sector and government control in China, a fiscal boost can have much more effect - as it did during the 2008-09 great recession, when China continued to grow, while virtually every other economy went into a slump or slowed drastically.⁴ The Chinese government is ready to spend and invest big time to turn things round, once the virus epidemic fades.

Even so, if China's growth slows sharply for a couple of quarters, that will only add to the woes of the major economies. The latest economic activity indexes for the major advanced capitalist economies make sombre reading. Japan's business activity indexes in February showed a significant fall below the stasis level of 50. The purchasing managers index (PMI) for Japan's manufacturing dropped to 47.6 in February 2020, from 48.8 in the previous month. The latest reading was the steepest pace of contraction in the manufacturing sector since December 2012. And the services PMI declined to 46.7 in February from 51.0 in the previous month. This was the steepest contraction in the service sector since April 2014. So the overall index fell to 47.0 from 50.1 in January. Again, this was the steepest contraction in private-sector activity since April 2014. Japan is clearly in a slump.

Euro-zone private-sector activity showed a slight improvement in February. The overall 'composite' PMI in the euro area increased to 51.6 in February, from 51.3 in January. This slight improvement was due mainly to German manufacturing, which is still contracting - but at a slower pace. The euro zone is still growing, but at a snail's pace.

The UK's manufacturing activity in February jumped into mildly positive territory - up to 51.9, from 50.0 in January. This was a 10-month high, which is not saying much, as the index was over 55 three years ago. The services sector index weakened a little in February, but still showed modest growth at 53.3. So the overall 'composite' index was unchanged at 53.3. That means the UK economy is growing, albeit very modestly, in the first quarter of 2020.

But the big shocker was the US. The US economic activity indicator went below 50 - signalling a contraction in the economy for the first time since the PMI survey began in 2014. The overall 'composite' indicator fell to 49.6 in February, from 53.3 in January. The manufacturing index also fell to 50.8, from 51.5 in January. But the real bad news was the fall in the larger-services sector, which dropped to 49.4 from 53.4. It seems that the US is joining Japan and the euro zone in stagnating or even contracting in the first quarter of 2020 - and China has yet to report on the full economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak.

Other G20 economies are also on the cusp. Australia's index was below 50 in February; South Africa too. We await data on the others.

New slump?

I previously commented on the nature and impact of Covid-19:

it could be a trigger for a new economic slump, because the world capitalist economy has slowed to near 'stall speed'. The US is growing at just 2% a year, Europe and Japan at just 1%; and the major so-called emerging economies of Brazil, Mexico, Turkey, Argentina, South Africa, and Russia are basically static. The huge economies of India and China have also slowed significantly in the last year and, if China takes an economic hit from the disruption caused by 2019-nCoV, that could be a tipping point.⁵

Up to now, the world's stock markets seem to expect the epidemic to dissipate by the end of this current quarter, so that 'business as usual' can be resumed. But, with the outbreak picking up outside China and the likely slow economic recovery within the country, the stock fantasists may be overoptimistic. And remember, global corporate profits are stagnant, along with business investment - the main cause of the global slowdown.⁶

As for the other issues discussed by the G20 ministers - climate change, inequality and tax havens - forget it. Nothing was agreed. For the first time, the final G20 communiqué⁷ included a reference to climate change: it was necessary to "examine the implications of climate change on financial stability". So it was OK to worry about the impact on financial assets and stock markets, but the US vetoed any mention of the impact on the world economy and people.⁸ And nothing happened on inequality, because the European countries could not agree on a common tax strategy on global tax avoidance ●

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

Notes

1. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2020/02/19/japan-abenomics-revisited>.
2. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2019/10/22/corporate-debt-fiscal-stimulus-and-the-next-recession>.
3. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2019/08/19/recessions-monetary-easing-and-fiscal-stimulus>.
4. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2018/08/06/chinas-keynesian-policies>.
5. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2020/01/31/coronavirus-nature-fights-back>.
6. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2019/05/11/productivity-investment-and-profitability>.
7. <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-g20-communiqué/climate-change-gets-first-mention-in-g20-finance-communiqué-of-trump-era-idUKKCN20H08J>.
8. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2020/02/11/the-climate-and-the-fat-tail-risk>.

REVIEW

Rubbish tip of a world

Bong Joon-ho (director) *Parasite* 2019, general release

You can imagine why some people would call this film a satire or a farce, but I would call it a family comedy - one that, however savage at times, brings you surprisingly closer to the characters. The premise is partly inspired by a French crime scandal that also influenced Jean Genet's play *The maids* (1947) and, like a Renaissance tragicomedy, it mixes 'high' and 'low' characters and has an ending neither happy nor unhappy.

We start with a family of entrepreneurs - though not ones that have been to Harvard or Lord Sugar. These are the Kim family in the city of Seoul, who have passed through shopkeeping and chauffeuring to their current home labour of folding pizza boxes and coming up with 'get rich' plans. These people do not lack effort or intelligence: they lack jobs.

Their son, Ki-woo (Choi Woo-shik) - several times a graduate - is offered the position of tutor to a rich teenage girl by a friend. Ki-woo (or 'Kevin', as he renames himself) is assured by his more educated buddy that he can pass as a private tutor. Ki-woo does manage to get this position with the Park family and the house he enters is a comfortable, modernist construction, where the smooth front lawn looks swish in both brilliant sunshine and driving rain. Ki's own family, on the other hand, live in a cramped basement flat at the end of a urine-stained alley. It lies at the bottom of several flights of steps, where each level seems to acquire more rubbish.

Mr Kim soon comes up with a plan that the Park house must require even more servants from the Kim family and the quartet goes into action. The story is brisk, but not gripping, until all the Kims have conned their way into the Park household: Mr Kim as driver, his wife as a cook and housekeeper, and daughter, Ki-jung (Park So-dam), as 'art therapist' to the Parks' little boy. Then the humour and suspense take off with a story twist and people start turning up to scare and put to flight those who thought they were secure.

Unlike most straight horror films,



The Kim family

you do not feel that the characters are being punished for being careless or egotistical. Pain comes from being in the wrong place at the wrong time or getting caught in the way of understandable revenge. As in recent TV fare like *Breaking bad* or *Fleabag*, these people are not born evil: they are desperate, and driven to often comic extremes. This may also be the first time that I can recollect where a cellphone is used as a weapon of deterrence. And not since George Orwell made his famous comment about how one class stinks has there been so much concern over the way people smell.

Ki's father, played by Song Kang-ho, is a great one for schemes and his face alternates eager optimism with silent resentment and wily terror. Ki's mother, played by Chang Hye-jin, is a versatile cook, but not above

a little panic. Her employer, Mrs Park, played by Cho Yeo-jeong, is mother-anxious for her children and the most gullible of the company. But we need not resent her for it - as Dad says, those born to wealth "have no creases". If anything, we pity her for being so clueless. When she relaxes on the sofa with her husband (Lee Sun-kyun), we get a hint of turn-on fantasies which sound true to character and the usual way of exciting up a posh life.

Related to neither family is the Parks' previous housekeeper, Moon-gwang (Lee Jung-eun), who can equally well play degradation and aggression, depending on the switch of circumstances. Ki's sister, Ki-jung, is wily, witty and the smoothest of the lot, but there is a moment of aching pathos when she sits among the debris of an ultimate disaster.

Insecure

The novelist, Hwang Sok-yong, defined the reality of Korea as a "nationwide state of homelessness". Koreans have had an insecure home life, to say the least, their homeland occupied by colonisers (Japanese since 1910 and then the Americans), continuing under indigenous military rule, punctuated by popular uprisings, and in the South many lives, especially the young, being deprived of independence by the current capitalist elite's 'economic miracle' - plus a devotion, even more pervasive than in the UK, to diverting technology and culture (see 'K-Pop').

Major influences in east Asian life, like Confucianism and Taoism, reckon the world as ultimately a harmonious whole (which for Confucius required a hierarchy of human roles), while alternating yin and yang, negative/positive, receptive/active. The best approach is to be 'philosophical', calm and aloof almost to the point of doing nothing new. For who knows which state the cosmos ('heaven') will bless?

To be a Korean artist of the post-1945 period, however, is to be born into a condition that promotes suspicion as well as longing, a desire for unity, but an acknowledgement of division, an attitude hard and soft, active and receptive. But how far this

goes towards pointed criticism and inspiring alternatives is still open.

Afterwards, outside the cinema (Curzon, West End), I noted what feeling the film left me with. It was sombre despite the laughs I had inside. I looked at the various passers-by. How many would end up in an emergency, their plans and dreams disordered, their life battered by loss of home or a loved one? Money does indeed make a difference, but who will escape the turn of luck in today's competitive scramble?

However, the troubles of the Kim family as employees do not exactly amount to an attack on exploitation itself. Though class divisions are emphasised, a 'get rich' ethic goes not so much unquestioned as shown to lead to *everyone* suffering equally. This may be part of the reason for the film's popularity with Oscar voters, despite being subtitled and from an Asian culture most westerners know little of.

It is swift and witty, but not facile, and has many touching images: it is ultimately concerned with underdogs - a favourite attraction for Academy voters. It reminded me at times of John Ford's *Grapes of wrath* - winner of two Academy Awards in 1941. Critics have called writer-director Bong Joon-ho Shakespearean, for me, his movie has a touch of Dickens (*Oliver Twist*) and Brecht (*Mother Courage*): here too is a family group on a journey of survival, filled with cunning, but finding trouble. There is hope, but more as projection than fulfilment. The struggle continues.

While a Korean filmmaker like Kim Ki-duk (*Bad guy, Pietà*) focuses on stories of predatory relationships, especially criminal and sexual, in which some get hurt more than others, Bong Joon-ho presents us with characters that all end up in the same (leaky) boat. How satisfactory you think this is in evoking today's competitive rubbish tip of a world will influence how close you feel to the vision of this movie ●

Mike Belbin

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

**Syriza
should serve
as an object
lesson**

Illusions of the left

There should be no talk of participation in a bourgeois government, argues James Harvey

In the endless round of talks and negotiations following Ireland's recent general election, calls for a 'left government' have been heard from sections of the Irish left. The surge in electoral support for Sinn Féin and the serious electoral setback for the two establishment parties, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, has seemingly strengthened arguments that there has been a seismic shift in Irish politics.

Thus, the People Before Profit Alliance (PBPA) has called for a government made up of Sinn Féin, the Greens, Social Democrats and other 'left' independents to follow through on "the electoral mandate they have been given". They go on to argue that such a minority government "would meet with tremendous opposition from the rich and privileged", but that this putative left administration could act as rallying point for the working class, which could be brought onto the streets to defend 'their' government against the attacks of Irish and international capitalism.¹

As the informal talks and soundings between the various parties have continued, the possibility of such a 'left government' has receded. Whilst Sinn Féin and its leader, Mary Lou McDonald, have continued to bask in the limelight and keep the electoral momentum going with a series of rallies to promote its claim to lead the new administration, the real action seems to be going elsewhere. Although the exact shape of the new coalition remains uncertain, an increasingly likely outcome now seems to be a minority Fianna Fáil government, kept in office thanks to a 'confidence and supply' agreement with Fine Gael - the mirror of the arrangement that kept Leo Varadkar in office before the election.²

Despite milking its electoral success for all its worth and loudly proclaiming that it constitutes the actual radical left alternative to the 'civil war parties', Sinn Féin has not adopted the more 'revolutionary' stance of some of its prospective coalition partners on the Irish left. Answering a question from a member of PBPA at a public rally, McDonald said that Sinn Féin would not be taking part in a protest organised by left groups on March 7 against a government of the "civil war parties" - although she wished those taking part in it well. Mary Lou thinks that, now she is playing in the big league, such street politics are a distraction to the real struggle - to get into government. Thus, whilst continuing to burnish her anti-establishment credentials, her real focus is "now on negotiations with other parties. The reality is, the numbers will either stand or fall within the Dáil."³

In truth, the electoral arithmetic and the composition of such a 'left government' always made such an outcome extremely unlikely. The numbers were never really there, even for a minority Sinn Féin government with issue-by-issue support from an unstable and contradictory 'coalition' of supporters. These range from



Mary Lou McDonald: will serve capitalism

formally Trotskyist groups through to conventional Social Democrats and Greens, leavened with a smattering of idiosyncratic, maverick, left independent TDs. However, before we turn away from these electoral alarms and excursions to await the arrival of some variant of the governments that have dominated the Irish state since partition, let us consider some wider aspects of the Irish left's strategy and its attitude towards participation in a bourgeois government.

The mistaken strategy of the PBPA/Solidarity was not simply based on its illusions in Sinn Féin's radical rhetoric or even belief that a motley coalition of non-"civil war parties" could be cobbled together as a 'left

government'. The issue is a deeper one, which touches on fundamental questions of revolutionary strategy extending far beyond the electoral politics of the Irish left. At its core, the demand for a left government, which PBPA/Solidarity, Rise and others raised during the election was essentially a call that ignored the international nature of capitalism and confined the struggles of the Irish working class to the 26-county state. The experience of the Irish state during the bail-out, and the nature of Irish capitalism's relationships with the European Union and British bourgeoisie shows that, especially for a small state like Ireland, a programme of 'socialism in one country' is beyond utopian.

Likewise the PBPA's perspective of mobilising the working class to defend a left government from attacks by the bourgeoisie, and its flirtation with a Syriza-style heroic last stand against capitalism, seems to be building castles in the air. The expectation (or is it merely wishful thinking?) that from such a crisis the revolutionary consciousness and militant combativity of the Irish working class can be forged and strengthened has not been borne out by historical experience. That of Syriza and its disastrous defeat - far from teaching our movement about the nature of the capitalist state and the need for a revolutionary transformation that enables the working class to take power - only sowed the seeds of disillusion and further set back the cause of the working class in Greece and internationally. A Sinn Féin-led left government in Ireland, if such a thing was even numerically possible, would not only be subject to the same sort of pressure as Syriza's, but it would not even have the modicum of socialist principle that Tsipras and co used to cover their retreat and 'explain' their eventual defeat.

The politics of the Irish left do not arise from ignorance about Syriza or indeed the long, painful historical experience of 'socialist' governments taking office with anti-establishment rhetoric and promises of 'real change'. The comrades of PBPA/Solidarity, Rise and the Socialist Party apparently do not need to be told about how reformist parties begin in government by attempting to manage capitalism in the interests of 'the many' - before going on to become abject servants of the bourgeois state, who attack the working class. These comrades constantly rail against such reformist betrayals and argue that their own politics provide the only revolutionary alternative to such reformism and capitulation to the bourgeoisie. So if, as they tell us, they 'understand' the treachery of reformism and the failures of social democracy, why do they rush to join in the bourgeois game of parliamentary politics - not only in Ireland, but internationally - when the chance presents itself?

Beneath the Irish left's calls for a left government - or the similar demand of groups like Socialist Appeal in Britain for 'Labour to power on a socialist programme' - lies a limited conception of the potential revolutionary consciousness

of the working class. The strategies of many on the 'revolutionary left' are based upon the idea of the rapid transformation of consciousness during political and economic crises, which will apparently not only expose the true nature of reformism and capitalism itself, but also open the minds of the masses to a revolutionary alternative offered by the hitherto marginal forces of revolutionary socialism. In this totally inadequate form of politics, transitional demands - as advocated by Trotsky in the late 1930s and advanced in various forms by the contemporary variants of the Trotskyist left - act as a bridge to lead the working from a reformist understanding towards a revolutionary consciousness.

As in the contemporary Irish case, this 'shock therapy', to put it mildly, underplays the revolutionary potential of the working class. The process of transforming society seems beyond the working class: it must be led gradually by the revolutionary left through the crisis and educated through the politics of transitional stages for its historical role in overthrowing capitalism. These politics not only negate the basic Marxist idea of the self-emancipation and independent self-organisation of the working class: they also act as a brake on the revolutionary consciousness that groups like PBPA/Solidarity ostensibly aim to develop. Like the focus amongst the Labour left in Britain that the absolute alpha and omega of socialist politics lie in the election of a Labour government, the current emphasis by the Irish left on a left government will similarly result in disorientation and disillusion amongst the advanced and militant layers of the Irish working class.

Revolutionaries in Ireland need to debate how they can create a real force for socialist transformation: one that does not begin with illusions in Sinn Féin and participation in bourgeois governments, but acts instead as a revolutionary tribune of the working class and a thorough-going party of extreme opposition to Irish and international capitalism ●

Notes

1. See 'Sinn Féin's success, left's collapse' *Weekly Worker* February 13.
2. www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/varadkar-declines-to-negotiate-with-fianna-fail-on-forming-government-1.4184868.
3. www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/coalition-of-civil-war-parties-would-not-benefit-ordinary-people-says-sf-leader-1.4184919.

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