



# weekly worker



**Dispelling myths: Ben Lewis introduces his new book on Karl Kautsky's republicanism**

- Letters and debate
- Trump's Afghan deal
- Israel's general election
- Sanders and US left

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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# #SWPT00

1914-2014: a century of war, crisis & revolution

## MARXISM 2014

Alternatives for a world in crisis

**SWP?**  
 NO THANKS!  
 WE DON'T WANT OR NEED  
 RARE APOLOGIST  
 COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY  
 ANTI-FEMINIST  
 PARTIES ON CAMPAIGN!



military repression

## LETTERS



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

## Class-conscious?

James McBarron's letter (February 20) correctly points out that Anne McShane, in her article on the Irish election, had mistakenly reported that the Greens had benefited most from Sinn Féin transfers ('Sinn Féin's success, left's collapse', February 13). In fact it was the reformist-socialist electoral bloc of Solidarity-People Before Profit who benefited much more from Sinn Féin transfers, where they were competing with the Greens.

However, James goes on to describe this as "a class-conscious vote" - which is a very peculiar way to assess this voting pattern. Given that the first preference of these votes was not for a working class party, it is hard to see how it could be called a "class-conscious" vote by working people. Sinn Féin are an openly pro-capitalist party, who are committed to retaining the sweetheart tax deals for the multinationals that dominate the Irish economy (p19 of their election manifesto).

In response to the large vote for Sinn Féin and the potential for them to be part of a government coalition, Irish business leaders were quick to point out they had nothing to fear from Sinn Féin in power. Those who seek to portray them as part of the 'left' might also do well to remember that in September 2008 they voted in favour of the bank guarantee. This bailout of the banking sector resulted in the massive debt which the Irish state is still saddled with. This was a significant contributor to the years of austerity, which have followed for working people and it was justified by Sinn Féin at the time as being "in the national interest" - which any anti-capitalist worth their salt knows is just a code for 'in the interests of maintenance of profits and general stability of the capitalist system'.

What this vote for Sinn Féin really represented was a desire for change away from the two big capitalist parties that have traditionally dominated the electoral landscape in Ireland. This was captured in the calls for a "left government" - in the bourgeois parliamentary sense of the term "left" rather than anything to do with class-based political analysis. Voters sensibly judged that voting first preference for what would be the biggest party in the potential "left government" rather than for the smaller advocates of this bourgeois parliamentary 'leftism', who would have to hope for the transfer votes from Sinn Féin, would make up for the decrease in first-preference votes. The reformist socialists, unlike the Greens, were very vocal advocates of this "left government" approach and so benefited more from the transfers of Sinn Féin voters.

However, this came at a cost, as the Solidarity-People Before Profit bloc suffered in terms of their own first-preference votes - dropping at a national level from 3.9% in 2016 to 2.6% in 2020. This translated to significant drops in specific constituencies - as in the case of Mick Barry in Cork, whose first-preference vote dropped from 15.7% to 7.2%. In Barry's case this did not affect his re-election, as the Sinn Féin transfers made up enough of the difference. However, this was not the case for

Ruth Coppinger in Dublin - the one Solidarity-People Before Profit TD not re-elected - where the Sinn Féin transfers were not sufficient to make up the discrepancy in her own first-preference votes, and transfers from the knocked-out Labour Party candidate gave the 4th constituency seat to the Green Party candidate (see the article, 'Revolutionary Marxism and Ireland's 2020 election', on the *Bolshevik Tendency* website (bolsheviktendency.org) for a pre-election critique of this non-class-based approach to a "left government").

It is both surprising and disappointing to see a long-time Platformist anarchist like James buying into this decidedly non-class-conscious bourgeois parliamentaryism.

Alan Gibson  
Cork, Ireland

## Pathetic

Gerry Downing's pathetic letter claiming that the 'Trotskyist Faction' including myself were 'expelled' from Socialist Fight is pure fraud (February 27). He does not have a majority of full members of SF willing to vote for such a measure. No meeting of members has or will be called to do so. Nor has he been able to exclude our supporters from the international forums of the Liaison Committee for the Fourth International. When he tried to do so, in defiance of the most basic tenets of workers' and party democracy, his actions were repudiated by other comrades internationally and our supporters were reinstated. This 'expulsion' is dead in the water.

It is just about Gerry Downing farting out his denunciations on a stolen website, using a stolen banner. The joke is that a "unanimous vote" in his fantasy version of 'Socialist Fight' is when Gerry Downing, Ella Downing and his race-baiting, Islamophobic, white South African crony, Gareth Martin, each put up both of their hands. Their six hands outvoted all the members of Socialist Fight who failed to vote for Gerry's pro-Zionist statement the last time Socialist Fight had a genuine national vote, in January. And he calls that "unanimous"! That's where Gerry's 'majority' comes from.

His fascist-baiting, mendacious half-quotes are designed to 'prove' that those in Socialist Fight who failed to salute his fascist-baiting attack on Gilad Atzmon are worshippers of the Ku Klux Klan. But I was also accused, somewhat at odds with this, by Downing of being a pro-Muslim communalist for my support of George Galloway's Respect project in the 2000s. So I'm supposed to be a Muslim supremacist and a white supremacist? How are these allegations even compatible with each other? Even slanders should make some sense!

His material on Atzmon being a 'fascist' is ripped off from Dave Rich of the Community Security Thugs (sorry - Trust), who devote their lives to smearing anti-Zionists - particularly Jewish ones - in order to incite violence against them. With his training in mendacity and the deliberate mangling of quotations within Gerry Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party, it is not difficult to imagine Gerry standing up a meeting, Vyshinsky style, and screaming, 'I demand that the dogs gone mad should be shot - every last one of them', as in one of the most notorious incidents of the Moscow trials. Those CPGB comrades and others

who were in the pub the other week after a CPGB meeting, who heard Gerry Downing shouting at our comrades, all of whom are all members of SF, while they were trying to have a quiet and fraternal drink with others, will recognise the syndrome.

I have to say that I want nothing to do with Gareth Martin either, since he racially abused one of our non-white comrades of Turkish-Muslim origin, who lives in London, by accusing him, quite bizarrely, of "justifying someone walking into a synagogue in London or anywhere else and committing murder". There have been no such events in London, and it is a psychotic Islamophobic smear to imply that a Turkish communist would even consider justifying or doing such a thing. He also stated to him that "weaponisation of the holocaust" is an "anti-Semitic trope". This is itself an anti-Arab, anti-Muslim trope, since a supposed threat of another 'Hitler' and another 'holocaust' has been the rallying cry of Israeli wars against the Arab and other Muslim states surrounding it since the Suez attack on Egypt in 1956, if not earlier. He is a pro-Zionist, Islamophobic bigot, who I hold in contempt, and his behaviour amply justifies the things that have been said about him.

In both his case and that of Downing, this is all to do with their Zionist fantasies about the 'evil' of people from the Middle East (or indeed elsewhere) who have some sensitivity to those outraged by the three quarters of a century of genocidal oppression committed by Zionist Jews, allied with 'democratic' US and British imperialism, who evidence some softness on the Allies' defeated imperialist rivals. This has been the case since Gamal Abdul Nasser spoke to attack "the lie of the six million" in 1964. Other Arab and Muslim leaders, such as Abbas, the Assads and Ahmadinejad have publicly doubted or denied the holocaust, or published material that does that, or, as in the case of Hamas, endorsed the Protocols of Zion in their founding charter. If you equate such sentiments - which Atzmon as a Jewish defector to the Palestinian cause reflects in a very diluted manner - with 'fascism', you are in effect saying that the hatred of the victims of Zionism, and their supporters, for their oppressors is racist. This is a racist, Zionist position.

It is this that gives a political opening for elements of the old, non-neocon, western far right to get a hearing among the victims of Zionism and their supporters. Along with the softness and interpenetration of Zionist racism with the western labour movement through 'friends of Israel' and the like, and even the pro-Zionist left, who as often as not reject, or refuse to fight for, the Palestinian right to return. Why should supporters of Israel be allowed to be members of the Labour Party? If they can support Israel, why could Labour Party members not support apartheid South Africa? Or Nazi Germany? There is no difference in principle, as all these have formalised, legally sanctioned racist discrimination and criminality built into the very foundations of the state.

Gerry's slanderous allegation that we demand that "all Jews who support the state of Israel be expelled from the Labour Party" in a way exposes his racism. No, we demand that all individuals who support the state of Israel, whether they are Jewish or non-

Jewish, be declared ineligible. He ascribes his racism to us, but we do not discriminate. His special pleading on behalf of his friend of 30 years who supports the state of Israel because of she lost some of her family in the holocaust and needs a 'refuge' is a blatantly racist argument. For that 'refuge' to exist, the majority of the Arab population had to be expelled.

It means very little to say that you are 'strongly opposed' to what happens to the Palestinians if you support the state that is doing it to them, which took their land by force. If the Labour Party had rules that made support for racist states like Israel incompatible with membership, such people would have to choose between their support, however qualified, for a racist state and their loyalty to the anti-racist ethos of the workers' movement. And, furthermore, those victims of Zionism who see the workers' movement in the west as hostile to them would begin to see our movement as the tribune of the oppressed that it should be, and be drawn towards it, making it far more difficult for rightwingers to get a hearing among them.

Gerry reveals what his fascist-baiting rantings were really about when he finally repudiates my 2014 *Draft theses on the Jews and modern imperialism*, the basic ideas of which he was won to in 2015, and which he defended in front of Andrew Neil and the Jewish Labour Movement's Phil Collins on the *Daily politics* show in March 2016. He is trying to live that down with the ferocity of his denunciation, and to imply that I somehow fooled him or twisted his arm into defending these ideas for close on five years. Not so. He embraced those ideas when he moved leftward under the influence of the general move to the left in the British labour movement that accompanied the rise of Corbyn. Now that Corbynism has been defeated by the ruling class, and politics has moved to the right, Gerry is moving to the right also and making his peace with the Zionist witch-hunters who wrecked the Corbyn project.

Well, we in the Trotskyist Faction don't accept that move to the right

and will fight it to the bitter end. Gerry may have stolen our website, which our subs paid for over the past several years just as much as his did. But we don't accept his common theft - of our website, our publication or our name. The Trotskyist Faction has its own website up and running, on [www.socialistfight.org](http://www.socialistfight.org), or alternatively [trotskyistfaction.org](http://trotskyistfaction.org), and in due course we will have our own publication to replace that which has been stolen. We will continue the politics of the old Socialist Fight. Renegades and capitulators to Zionism will not be allowed to steal our banner.

Ian Donovan

Trotskyist Faction, Socialist Fight

## Royal socialism

As reported by Stan Keable in 'A vision of royal socialism' (February 27), the Labour Left Alliance conference was a significant event in the evolution of the Labour left, which was revitalised by the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader in 2015. Stan reports that 130 delegates at the conference represented about 36 local and national Labour Left groups.

The Labour left in England has long been 'social-monarchist' - or 'old Labour', as it was known under the reign of Tony Blair. Social monarchism is the programme based on the 1945 Labour government, which established a version of state capitalism with a 'welfare state' under the governance of the constitution of the crown-in-parliament, which Stan calls the "constitutional monarchist system".

Corbyn's social-monarchist programme was seen as a move towards 'socialism' by restoring some public ownership, the national health service, the welfare state, council housing and progressive taxation, etc. Social monarchism is the trade unionist politics of the British working class. Its aim is to bargain with the ruling class and the employers for better terms and conditions for the working class. Labour and the trade unions are thus two sides - political and economic - of a better social contract agreed within the

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framework of the constitution of the UK ruling class.

Momentum was launched as the support group for Corbyn's social-monarchist programme, with Jon Lansman becoming its unelected monarch after his January 10 2017 'bureaucratic coup'. Left social monarchists became increasingly disillusioned with him. This discontent was crystallised after he called for the expulsion of Chris Williamson MP. Over two years later the LLA is a potential alternative Momentum. Around 130 delegates arrived in Sheffield to launch the new organisation.

Left social monarchy has no republican democratic programme. It conceals its 'democratic deficit' by concentrating on or prioritising economic and social reforms. It is 'republican' only in a token way - as a long-term goal, when socialism is won. In the meantime workers should bargain for social improvements and not seek political change.

A classic example of left social monarchy was in the motion from Cheltenham Labour Left, which called for a "socialist UK". This was passed by 63 to 53 votes. It is not just that a socialist kingdom is a contradiction in terms. It shows the blind spot or lack of self-awareness of the English Labour left. There is a complete absence or ignorance of the militant democratic republican politics of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Connolly, MacLean, etc.

Cheltenham Labour Left seems to consider the United Kingdom only as a geographical territory, which can be filled with capitalist or socialist policy content. The UK is a state and law through which the ruling class exercises its control over a given territory. In law it is an undemocratic union state, comprised of different nations. This is not the means through which the working class can socialise the economy.

A combined and uneven, democratic transformation - or democratic revolution - will not leave the current union undisturbed. The 2016 referendum on the European Union has already shown that Ireland and Scotland are on a different trajectory. English left social monarchists haven't noticed this - much less drawn any political conclusions.

It is significant that of the 10 bullet points with which Stan sums up the political achievements of the Sheffield conference, nine were organisational and only one set a strategic political goal. This stated that the LLA stands for the "free movement of people".

It seems that Labour Party Marxists played an important role in supporting the organisation of left social monarchists. Their aim was to win the Labour Party to communism, with the LLA as a vehicle for a united front of communists and left social monarchists. With this in mind the London LLA, under the influence of the Labour Party Marxists, proposed that communism should be the aim.

This is in the resolution from London LLA on aims and principles. This called for "opposition to capitalism, imperialism, racism and militarism and the ecological degradation of the planet ... a commitment to socialism as the rule of the working class". This would move towards full communism as "a stateless, classless, moneyless society", carrying out the communist principle of "From each according to their abilities ... etc".

The communist programme from London LLA was voted down by about two-thirds to one-third of

delegates. The influence of social monarchy runs deep in the Labour left. Stan fails to mention that hidden within the London LLA aims was a democratic republican programme.

This calls for "achieving a democratic republic. The standing army, the monarchy, the House of Lords and the state sponsorship of the Church of England must go. We support a single-chamber parliament, proportional representation and annual elections". Whilst this is supportable, it falls down badly in its implicit acceptance of English nationalism (ie, Anglo-British nationalism).

England is by far the dominant nation in the British union. No revolutionary working class republican would ignore the right of Ireland, Scotland and Wales to self-determination. Neither would militant republicans give any support whatsoever to the anti-democratic Acts of Union. Supporting British unionism is the litmus test of English social chauvinism.

The conclusion from Sheffield must be that the Labour left is disorientated by Corbyn's defeat, but is still following the political programme of social monarchy. Counterposing the communist maximum programme to this simply lets Labour left reformism off the hook. The immediate task is not about communism, but taking the only road towards it through consistent working class democracy - which means winning the working class to the minimum republican programme.

**Steve Freeman**  
London

## Sense of humour

I welcome the recent influx of new correspondents to the *Weekly Worker* letters page. As Lenin famously wrote in his pamphlet, 'Where to begin', the revolutionary paper is like the scaffolding around a building under construction. The *Weekly Worker* is more like the scaffolding around the planet, with its recent correspondents located in faraway places such as India and the USA, as well as closer to home in Hull and Durham.

I remember reading the biography of John Peck: *Persistence: the story of a British communist*. In the 1950s John was a CPGB area organiser in Yorkshire. The former CPGB MP, Phil Piratin, advised him to write to his local newspaper as often as he could - it didn't matter what the subject was. Whilst John Peck eventually became a CPGB councillor for Bulwell in Nottingham in the 1980s and subsequently joined the Green Party, there is much communists can learn from the advice given by Phil Piratin for communists to write to their local newspapers as often as they can.

I recently read an article in *The Guardian* about 68-year-old Bernie Correll, who has been writing a letter six days a week to the *Liverpool Echo* for the last 40 years. Personally I've been writing letters to my weekly *Fenland Citizen*, giving a socialist point of view every fortnight or so for the last 25 years. Bernie is now my hero and role model.

Whilst I have serious misgivings about the CPGB's current emphasis on work within the Labour Party, I do agree with its Marxist unity project, aiming to build a mass communist party in Britain and across Europe. As seems very likely, Sir Keir Starmer is a shoo-in, when it comes to being elected new Labour leader. Whilst the Labour Party on paper has more than 500,000 members, most of these people are middle class liberals, not socialists - hence the mass support within Labour for Starmer.

I agree with Elijah Traven and Ian Birchall that a sense of humour is essential for all serious revolutionaries. My experience of the far left has taught me to be wary of so-called revolutionaries who seem to think that only by looking as though one has just drunk a pint of vinegar is it possible to be a hardened comrade. As someone who has Asperger's syndrome, I'm sadly lacking a sense of humour, but, when I was a member of the Militant Tendency, its guru, Ted Grant, was very fond of telling younger comrades that a revolutionary needed two things: a sense of humour and a sense of proportion - a sense of humour being the most important.

**John Smithee**  
Cambridgeshire

## Fighting fund

# Through the barrier

**W**e did it! Thanks to the sterling efforts of several comrades, we smashed through the £2,000 fighting fund barrier once again in February.

Star of the show was JS, with his £80 bank transfer, but close behind were JT, with his monthly £50 standing order, and DB, who has increased his own monthly PayPal donation from £7 to £50! Then there was £40 from JC, £35 from SK and £25 from AM, a comrade in Ireland. Another PayPal contributor was MD, who donated £15, and finally there was AR, who came up with his usual two end-of-the-month gifts - £10 via standing order and £5 via PayPal.

All that came to £310 in just three days, which took our total for February up to £2,114. Thanks very much to everyone who chipped in.

And we've got off to another good start in March - thanks mainly to SK with his brilliant £275. Maybe it was meant for

the February fund, but he just missed the deadline, I'm afraid, before the weekend came along. But not to worry - it's helped us well on our way towards our latest £2,000 target. There were 17 other standing orders or bank transfers since March 1, ranging from £5 to £50 (thank you, AC, for that one), while other more than generous donations came from EW (£40), CG and ST (£30 each) and MS (£20). Finally MM donated a tenner via PayPal.

All that came to £581 in just four days - not bad at all! But now we need to ensure we keep up the momentum for the rest of the month and make sure we get there again. Please do what you can to help ●

**Robbie Rix**

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

# ACTION

## London Communist Forum

**Sunday March 8, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group: study of Abram Leon's *The Jewish question - a Marxist interpretation*. This meeting: chapter 3, 'Relations of the Jews with other sections in society', part B - 'The nobility and the Jews'. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk) and Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk).

## Radical Anthropology Group

**Tuesday March 10, 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: 'An Amazonian myth: what went wrong when patriarchy arrived'. Speaker: Chris Knight. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [radicalanthropologygroup.org](http://radicalanthropologygroup.org).

## The legitimisation of Israeli apartheid

**Friday March 6, 6pm:** Annual lecture, Brunei Gallery lecture theatre, SOAS University of London, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Speaker: Haneen Zoabi, former Knesset member. Trump's 'deal' is an apartheid plan imposed on the Palestinians and points to the total domination of the Zionist narrative. Register online for free admission - ID required for entry. Organised by Centre for Palestine Studies: [www.facebook.com/events/500673793980773](http://www.facebook.com/events/500673793980773).

## 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 Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign: [www.facebook.com/events/653823325362615](http://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](http://www.facebook.com/events/191449231936583).

## Women, resistance and revolution

**Saturday March 7, 3.30pm:** International Women's Day public meeting, Bloomsbury Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2. Speakers include Laura Miles, author of *Transgender resistance*. Organised by Socialist Workers Party: [www.facebook.com/events/627754501316396](http://www.facebook.com/events/627754501316396).

## 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](http://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](http://www.facebook.com/events/533717837268779).

## East London rally for democracy in Labour

**Tuesday March 10, 7.30pm:** Rally, Durning Hall, Earlham Grove, Forest Gate, London E7. Hear two of the unfairly suspended candidates for the Labour Party NEC, Mehmood Mirza and Graham Durham. Organised by Newham Momentum: [www.facebook.com/momentumnewham](http://www.facebook.com/momentumnewham).

## Women's rights 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: [www.facebook.com/spotturkey](http://www.facebook.com/spotturkey).

## 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 the 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](http://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](http://www.facebook.com/events/480867776130930).

## What technology reveals

**Thursday March 19, 6pm:** *Capital* study session, Jack Jones House, 2 Churchill Way, Liverpool L3. Organised by Merseyside Socialist Theory Study Group: [study4socialism@outlook.com](mailto:study4socialism@outlook.com).

## 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.

**SWP**

# Still in denial

It is all very well for the SWP to condemn Weinstein, writes Paul Demarty, but what about the legacy of its own rape scandal?

**T**he conviction of Harvey Weinstein on one count each of sexual assault and rape has given rise to no end of punditry on the question of sexual harassment and violence, unsurprisingly.

Among those mining the crimes of the disgraced film baron are the comrades of the Socialist Workers Party, and not for the first time the sexism of the *haute bourgeoisie* has made the front page of *Socialist Worker*. 'After Weinstein guilty verdict - fight sexism everywhere', ran the headline over an article by one Sarah Bates.

The first half of her article could have appeared in *The Guardian*, politically speaking, although the deliberately dumbed-down prose of the *Socialist Worker* house style would have stuck out. We read that this is a "watershed moment for the #MeToo movement"; there is praise for the courage of the women who spoke out against Weinstein. No less a r-r-revolutionary source than Cyrus Vance Jr., the Manhattan district attorney, is quoted approvingly to the effect that "this is the new landscape for survivors of sexual assault in America and this is a new day".

Towards the end, the politics of the SWP starts to tell a little more:



Pointing the finger at Hollywood is easy: but what about the organised left itself?

Although this week's court ruling was important, the battle against sexist oppression has to continue on the streets, in the trade unions, in the staff room - everywhere. Every sexist has to be made to feel uncomfortable. This lies in challenging each individual instance of oppressive language or behaviour. But it also means coming together - men and women - to robustly take on women's oppression. The Women's Marches and protests against rape in Chile are important collective responses to sexual harassment.

So, although the Weinstein verdict is important, it is also essential to remember that

sexual violence flows from our violent class society, where women are treated as sexual objects ... Women's oppression is structured into capitalism and class society - so the battle also needs to be waged for revolutionary transformation.<sup>1</sup>

Bates's article - which is not even credited to her on the web version, appearing under the editorial 'What we think' by-line - has almost nothing remarkable in it, at least for regular readers of the paper. What *is* remarkable is what is left out. The absence is most marked in one of the sentences we quoted. "The battle against sexist oppression has to continue on the streets, in the trade unions, in the staff room" - indeed so. But what about our political parties and organisations? Such places are discreetly filed under the catch-all 'everywhere', along with takeaway queues, football terraces and bothies in the outer Hebrides - which seems rather to understate the relative importance of *political* organisations to what is a *political* fight.

## Comrade Delta

Few enough will be the readers who think this an accidental oversight. For it was not *that* long ago that the SWP itself was thrown into crisis by rape allegations it catastrophically mishandled.

It is worth revisiting this territory once more for a couple of reasons. One is merely a matter of setting the record straight. Dozens of #MeToo themed articles have appeared in *Socialist Worker*, without so much as a passing mention of the SWP's own vulnerability to similar charges. This exposes either a contempt for its readers, too stupid to notice that the fifth Google search result for 'socialist workers party' is, to this day, a *Guardian* article covering the rape scandal; or an even more disturbing level of self-delusion that it has all blown over and nobody will ever challenge them on it. The second is to expose the wider left's failure to adequately respond to the question, for all the energy the SWP's crisis generated.

The story of that crisis in brief: at the end of 2012, four SWP members were expelled for daring to caucus together in a Facebook chat (this was the sin of 'secret factionalism'). Their cause: bringing to the attention of the upcoming 2013 SWP conference the fact that rape allegations against Martin Smith - a central committee member who had for a time been the group's *de facto* leader - had been dismissed by some ludicrous proceedings of the SWP's disputes committee. In the end, the issue did come to conference floor, with the DC's report accepted on a knife-edge vote after a bitter debate. Someone present recorded the arguments, transcribed them, and leaked them to various outlets, including the *Weekly Worker* and ex-SWPer Andy Newman's *Socialist Unity* blog.

At this point, the situation exploded. The 'comrade Delta' scandal, as many participants in the debate warned, rapidly spread from the likes of little old us to the mainstream press. Prominent SWP intellectuals - most notably the author China Miéville and his long-time factional ally, Richard Seymour - broke cover to denounce publicly the actions of the SWP leadership. The latter, for its part, resolved to crush the rebellion at any cost, declaring that the sin of leaking internal materials to the press and openly factionalising

far outweighed that of asking a small group of no doubt well-meaning but totally incompetent comrades, many of whom were personally close to the accused, to decide on an allegation of rape. The series of conferences and factional battles that ensued lost the SWP the majority of its student cohort and half or so of its active membership (the group's total mendacity as regards its membership rolls makes this hard to judge accurately).

It is now a couple of years since the SWP was again in the news over this - as late as 2017, certainly, various student unions would bring motions to ban its student group and suchlike. (There is little doubt that they would still be vulnerable today on any given campus that considered such a proposal.) The fact that the wounds have scarred over does not mean that the damage has been repaired, however. The concrete effect of the SWP's crisis was to reduce it to near total sterility and risk-aversion. It also gave further momentum to the shift in the political centre of gravity of the far left to the 'radical' wing of identity politics, by giving - apparently - the clearest possible evidence for the notion that the old-school Marxist left groups were too 'pale, male and stale' to be any use any more; indeed to be anything other than a *threat* that needed to be dealt with.

In reality, that critique only really stuck because it was congruent with the wider shift from class to identity politics. On the basis of the bare facts of the case, male domination seems not to be the main cause of the SWP's failings. The disputes committee that acquitted Smith was majority-female; the two comrades on it who had the courage and decency to protest at the decision reached were both men. The leading defender of Smith turned out to be the not-at-all-male Amy Leather. SWP leaders repeatedly pointed out how *seriously* they took sexism, with their historic campaigns against 'raunch culture' and the like; and all of that stuff is *true* up to a point.

On the other side, it is hardly clear that the identitarians really offered

an alternative to SWP politics. A flurry of attempts to found explicitly intersectional left organisations have tended to devolve into rather academic affairs, with the notable exception of the International Socialist Network, which regrouped the more militant wing of the SWP opposition, and notoriously suffered a split over a postmodern sculpture on its way to the gentle embrace of oblivion. *In practice*, intersectionality turned out to be a *sectional* ideology that lives within other organisations, and tended to reinforce bureaucratic control, as evidenced by the alliance of Blairite creeps and supposedly radical intersectional feminists in banning the SWP on various university campuses, witch-hunting SWPers in unions and so on. It manufactured excuses for the arbitrary exercise of power.

## Class analysis

Which, oddly, brings us back to Harvey Weinstein. His repellent treatment of the women over whom he had direct power - a Hollywood version of *droit de seigneur* - was tolerated for decades by an immediate surrounding culture that would have considered itself liberal and indeed feminist. Weinstein's defence of Roman Polanski, fugitive from American justice since he was charged with sodomising an inebriated 13-year-old, stands out as off-message in a career which saw him cultivate close links with the liberal wing of the political elite. His appetites were well-known, and even satirised (a character in *30 Rock* boasts that she resisted his advances "on three out of five occasions"), but he was not seriously challenged, and he continued to enjoy impeccable liberal credentials - until, suddenly, he did not.

Weinstein's need to exploit and humiliate women certainly exemplifies some unsavoury features of male sexual socialisation. It does not very well explain how so many young and beautiful women came to be in his power: for that, we certainly do need, as comrade Bates says, class analysis. Capitalism's tendency towards centralisation gives us the centralisation

of cultural production in a few hands, and consequently the hyper-fame of a few stars, and in turn the willingness of people to do almost anything to be stars - even being talked into keeping quiet about having been raped. All that plus the corresponding ideology of the heroic *entrepreneur* gives us Weinstein.

That is no doubt too crude an account of the issues at play here; but cruder still are accounts of the affair that ignore the class dimension altogether. But feminist accounts *tend* to, because feminist accounts *tend* to subordinate the concerns of working class women to middle class professional women. Though there is no *moral* equivalence between middle class feminism and old-fashioned male chauvinism and 'old boy's clubs', they do compete in the same space, as rubrics to control access to the professions. That leaves feminists peculiarly prone to drastic disappointments - not only surrounded by clay-footed male 'allies', but also women compromised by their economic entanglements with the latter. Weinstein, an especially powerful 'liberal' predator, is an extreme example of allegations and grievances piling up until the dam bursts.

The trouble for the SWP is that the same is quite true of bureaucratic sects like itself. Its obsession with spontaneous mass action, and its insistence on viewing political argument within organisations as demoralising and demobilising, means that it must set itself up as an *unaccountable* influence on the wider movement (the habit of trade union militants who are SWP members to simply never mention the fact that this is what they are is a case in point).

But that also applies within the group. The SWP long ago devolved into a permanent and fixed separation between thinkers and doers; though the capital under SWP control is obviously trivial, compared to Weinstein's slice of the Disney empire, access to leadership roles is the *property* of a nearly unchanging caste (there has been no meaningful shake-up since the 2013-14 crisis, and only one other since the death of founding leader Tony Cliff 20 years ago). The relationship between leaders and led must become coercive eventually, if there is no meaningful possibility of challenging the leadership; in times of scandal, it is all but unavoidable that the leadership will close ranks and the membership will either drink the Kool-aid or be alienated entirely. Given the wider social context of women's oppression, it is surely also unavoidable that scandals will sometimes involve the maltreatment of women comrades by men.

So, if feminism, intersectionality and friends do not add up to a viable alternative to SWP politics, exactly the reverse is also true. For the SWP to respond adequately *in the face of revived identity politics* to the Weinstein revelations and all that came to light subsequently would mean learning the lessons of 2013-14, which in turn would mean a wholesale transformation of its basic political and organisational methods. It does not look terribly likely at the moment. ●

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## Notes

1. <https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/49669/After+Weinstein+guilty+verdict+fight+sexism+everywhere>.

# AFGHANISTAN



# The war is set to continue

Trump's agreement with the Taliban shows that the United States has comprehensively failed in achieving its stated objectives, argues **Yassamine Mather**

**O**n February 29 United States and Taliban representatives signed an agreement following months of negotiations in Doha, Qatar's capital. The deal - not involving the 'elected' Afghan government - is supposed to end one of the longest wars the USA has been involved in (begun in 2001) and pave the way for the withdrawal of all its troops from Afghanistan. It was signed in the presence of leaders from Pakistan, Qatar, Turkey, India, Indonesia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, who all backed the secret negotiations.

Like all the other Trump 'peace deals' - North Korea, the 'deal of the century', etc - this latest, much heralded agreement did not last long before it was breached. Less than five days later the US launched an air strike against Taliban fighters. On Twitter, Colonel Sonny Leggett, who acts as spokesperson for US forces in Afghanistan, claimed it was a "defensive strike" to disrupt an attack on an Afghan National Security Forces checkpoint.

This occurred only hours after US media reported a phone conversation between Donald Trump and a senior Taliban official, whom the president mistakenly called "leader of the Taliban". According to *The Guardian*, the call between Washington and Doha lasted 35 minutes and it is reported that Trump told Abdul Ghani Baradar:

You are a tough people and have a great country and I understand that you are fighting for your homeland. We have been there for 19 years and that is a very long time and withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan now is in the interest of everyone.<sup>1</sup>

Trump told reporters: "We had actually a very good talk with the leader of the Taliban." He later told a meeting that the "Taliban are great fighters - they

fought the Soviet Union". Of course, we cannot expect the US president to know too much history, but, for those who might be confused, it was not the Taliban, but the Mujahedeen (along with foreign volunteers such as al Qa'eda) who fought the Soviets, with the backing of the CIA and the Saudis.

The Taliban only came into prominence in 1994, at least three years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as one of the factions of the post-Soviet Afghan civil war. As their name indicates, they were mainly seminary students (*talib*) in traditional Islamic schools, from the east and south of Afghanistan.

## The deal

The latter stages of the negotiations included arguments about the US demand for a ceasefire before anything was signed. But the deal itself stipulates:

a timeline of 14 months for the withdrawal of all US and Nato troops from Afghanistan; a Taliban guarantee that Afghan soil will not be used as a launchpad that would threaten the security of the US; the launch of intra-Afghan negotiations by March 10; and a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire.<sup>2</sup>

The withdrawal of US forces will start immediately, with American troops (and proportionate numbers of allied troops) reduced to 8,600 within 135 days. The remainder of US and allied forces will leave within 14 months - down from 14,000 US troops and around 17,000 from 39 Nato countries, many in what was supposed to be non-combatant roles.

The Taliban have made a commitment to stop "its members or members of al Qa'eda using Afghan soil to threaten American national security". However, in the text of the

deal there is no sign of how this would be verified or how the enforcement of this policy would be monitored.

Taliban leaders have made it clear they will continue targeting Afghan military forces in what has been a relentless campaign of planting bombs in major cities. By March 2 the Taliban had already resumed their attacks on the Afghan 'National Security and Defence Forces' despite the peace deal. In response the Afghan president, Ashraf Ghani, announced that he will not now release Taliban prisoners - although the Taliban claim they only launched their attack on Afghan forces after that statement.

In the meantime, one of the important sponsors of the deal, Pakistan, has accused the Afghan leaders of jeopardising the next phase of the deal. Foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi told the press that Washington must be wary of those seeking to derail the 'peace process':

People want peace. Now it is time to see what the [Afghan] leadership does. Do they prioritise Afghanistan's interests, or do they give their own personal benefits more importance? This is a very big decision.<sup>3</sup>

I have lost count of the number of bombs detonated by the Taliban in Kabul alone, but for most of the last few years dozens of Afghan civilians have died every week in car bombings and attacks on hotels, restaurants, etc. Yet the leader of the 'free world' is now happy to speak positively about his conversations with Taliban leaders. Clearly there are 'good terrorists' and 'bad terrorists' and after 19 years the Taliban, who were once said to be the worst of the lot, have become allies.

Sections of the US press are already expressing cynicism about the deal. As always with Donald Trump, this has

more to do with spin than reality. *Time* magazine tells us:

There is a difference between peace and retreat. The Trump administration's agreement with the Taliban represents a full retreat ...

Let's begin with the elephant in the room. There is no meaningful argument that the fate of Afghanistan is somehow irrelevant to our national security. The war in Afghanistan was no 'war of choice'. On 9/11 our nation suffered its worst attack since Pearl Harbor. It suffered its worst attack on an American city since the British burned Washington DC on August 24 1814, and the Taliban were intimately involved. That attack came from an enemy operating with the permission and under the protection of the same Taliban the Trump administration deals with today.<sup>4</sup>

## Trump's history

Almost 20 years after the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan - which was supposed to bring regime change, women's liberation, a democratic civil society - the very fact that the world's hegemon power is signing a deal with the group that helped to facilitate 9/11 says as much about the current state of the United States as it does about the sorry saga of two decades of war and devastation in Afghanistan itself.

The US 'war on terror', that has so far devastated an entire region and led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands, started in September 2001, immediately after the 9/11 attack, with the aim of removing the Taliban from power. They were accused of aiding al Qa'eda. No doubt the Taliban did have close relations with al Qa'eda, as well as its offshoot, Islamic State, but the perpetrators of the terror attacks that

took place in New York and Virginia were Saudi citizens. No-one in their right mind had any doubts about al Qa'eda's origins and its financial connections with Saudi Arabia (and indeed in an earlier period with the CIA). Yet there was no mention of the kingdom's role in all this: not only did it escape the wrath of the US and its allies in the 'war on terror': western governments continued to supply Saudi Arabia with all manner of advanced military equipment. During the 'war on terror', Saudi Arabia remained an ally, while Iran which, according to the US's own admission was fighting these Salafi groups, was labelled a 'terrorist' country, faced sanctions and threats of war.

Under such circumstances how can anyone take US governments seriously on such questions? However, although the US president appears ill informed, stumbling from one 'deal' to yet another conflict, we should not forget that sections of US capital are now openly rejecting all claims of 'nation building', 'adherence to international law', and are complicit in the normalisation of political assassination and even the destruction of an entire region for the sake of maintaining and advancing US superiority.

All this is a sign of the dangerous times we live in. For all the jokes about Trump's ignorance, the actual consequences of his policies could be devastating in the long term ●

## Notes

1. [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/03/trump-reportedly-tells-taliban-official-you-are-tough-people-amid-peace-deal-row](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/03/trump-reportedly-tells-taliban-official-you-are-tough-people-amid-peace-deal-row).
2. [www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/afghanistan-taliban-sign-deal-america-longest-war-200213063412531.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/afghanistan-taliban-sign-deal-america-longest-war-200213063412531.html).
3. [www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/pakistan-warns-spoilers-taliban-deal-afghanistan-200302093650382.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/pakistan-warns-spoilers-taliban-deal-afghanistan-200302093650382.html).
4. <https://time.com/5794643/trumps-disgraceful-peace-deal-taliban>.

## OUR HISTORY

# Dispelling the Kautsky myths

Ben Lewis introduces his recently published *Karl Kautsky on democracy and republicanism*. This article is based on a talk he gave to the March 1 London Communist Forum

First of all, I would like to thank the London Communist Forum for inviting me to speak on my book.<sup>1</sup> Its 350-odd pages represent a fair chunk of my time and effort and I am delighted to see it in print as part of the *Historical Materialism* book series.

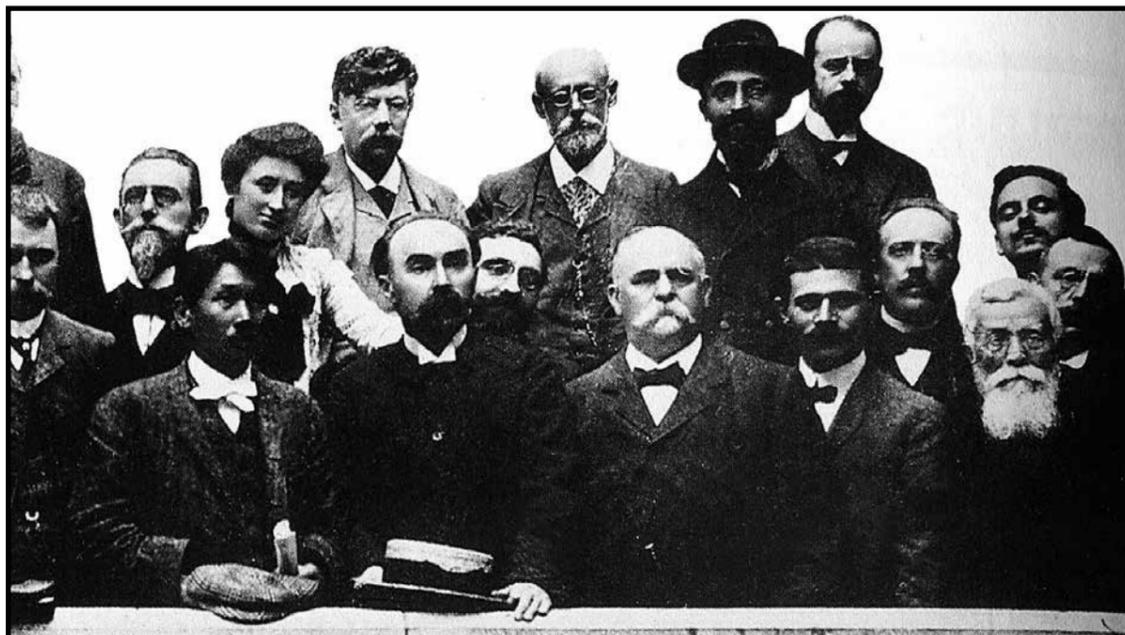
While I submitted the book to the publisher in 2016, I actually first started working on the core of its material as far back as 2011. This, you might recall, was the year of the royal wedding between Prince William and Kate Middleton. Slightly annoyed, to put it mildly, by the flood of royal propaganda, I started to do some reading around Marxism and republicanism to see what I could find - not only for my own sanity, but perhaps for the benefit of the *Weekly Worker's* readership.

One of the sillier leftwing takes on republicanism, which perhaps due to its absurdity has never left my mind, was something I came across when reading through older debates within the Socialist Alliance. There, the concept of republicanism was rejected by one comrade - I think from the Socialist Workers Party - who argued that republican agitation in the SA should be rejected because "we don't want to be like France or the USA". Indeed we don't, comrade, and Karl Kautsky - once the leading theoretician of the Second International - had something to say on this very issue, as we will soon establish.

It was around the spring of 2011 then that in my explorations I came across a 2009 *Historical Materialism* paper by the historian, Lars T Lih, entitled 'The book that didn't bark: Karl Kautsky's "Republic and social democracy in France"'. This discussed a relatively unknown but truly fascinating series of seven articles, published by Kautsky in 1905 in *Die Neue Zeit*. This was German social democracy's weekly theoretical journal that Kautsky edited until the party had him removed from the post in 1917 due to his opposition to the SPD's role in World War I (Lenin had a complete collection of this journal, which is still on display in his study today). 'Republic and social democracy in France' discussed the attitude that Marxists should take towards the question of republics and republicanism. To my knowledge, this series is a rare extended discussion of republicanism in the Marxist canon, so I was keen to crack on with translating it for the *Weekly Worker*: my own little wedding gift for the newly-eloped royals.

Interestingly, Lars used the 'Republic' series as a foil to question some of Lenin's assertions about Kautsky in *State and revolution* in 1917, as we will see below. I proceeded to translate some of the articles for the *Weekly Worker*, and Lars contributed an introduction to the abridged series. It did not produce much of a reaction, unfortunately, but I was really pleased with the overall product.

In 2014 I began to study, and translate, Kautsky's *Parliamentarism*, *direct legislation by the people and social democracy*, first published in 1893 and reissued in 1911. This text exerted a huge impact on Lenin in the late 1890s, so I wanted to take a closer look. My book contains the first English translation of this text, which Lenin and others quickly arranged to be translated into Russian. Readers of the *Weekly Worker* may actually be familiar with some of its content: I have spoken on it at Communist University over the years and its arguments have been critically drawn on by me and various



**Amsterdam congress August 1904: left to right: Olav Kringen (Norway) Edouard Vaillant (France) František Soukup (Czechoslovakia) Sen Katayama (Japan) Rosa Luxemburg (Poland) Georgy Plekhanov (Russia) Victor Adler (Austria) Alexandre-Marie Bracke-Desrousseaux (France) Karl Kautsky (Germany) Peter Knudsen (Denmark) Maksymilian Walecki (Poland) Morris Hillquit (USA) Emile Vandervilde (Belgium) Achille Cambier (Argentina) Dadabhai Naoroji (India) Edward Anseel (Belgium) Jean Longuet (France) Amilcare Cipriani (France)**

other writers in the *Weekly Worker* to highlight Kautsky's arguments on the weaknesses of direct democracy and referenda from the perspective of the class struggle. For an excellent and critical overview of this text, I would point readers to Mike Macnair's recent discussion of it in the *Weekly Worker*, as I do not wish to dwell on *Parliamentarism* here.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to this translation work, my book offers an extended introduction - my MA thesis completed in 2015 at Sheffield University - that discusses Kautsky's life and work, his disputed legacy and the potential enduring significance of his democratic republicanism, as expressed in both 'Republic' and *Parliamentarism*. Moreover, the book contains a translation of Kautsky's autobiographical article, 'The development of a Marxist', written in 1924, and a synoptic overview of the various drafts of the SPD's Erfurt programme of 1891. This programme was emulated by revolutionaries in Russia and formed the basis of the programme of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. These drafts are perhaps a more 'specialist' resource, but I think that comrades will find them useful, because they underline the seriousness with which this organisation went about its strategic ideas and allows us to trace, with some exactitude, the precise contributions to the programme made by figures such as Engels, Bebel and Kautsky, as well as the differences between them.

At this stage, the book is extortionately priced, but it has recently come to my attention that the paperback edition, which will appear on October 13 this year, can already be pre-ordered on Amazon for the much more reasonable price of £20.<sup>3</sup> I hope that it can take its place alongside other studies of the strategic thought of the Second International, although I am fearful that the book itself will become one that 'doesn't bark' - I have arranged for review copies to be sent to various leftwing organisations and publications, but, with the notable exception of the *Weekly Worker*, I have not yet heard as much as a whimper. Maybe the paperback version will give the book's ideas more traction.

Now that I have provided an

overview of the publication and how it came about, in this article I would like to focus on what I believe are the its two most important contributions. First, its rediscovery of the significance of Kautsky "when he was a Marxist" - freed from the overwhelmingly negative consensus that has surrounded the ideas of this erstwhile "honorary Bolshevik". Second, the revolutionary significance of Kautsky's republicanism as a key, if now unfortunately almost entirely forgotten, pillar of Marxist political strategy. Finally, I wish to make some tentative suggestions about the potential importance of future work both for historians and, most importantly, for the development of Marxist politics and perspectives today. These are obviously huge topics, but let us now do our best to outline them succinctly.

### Three schools

When it comes to Kautsky's legacy, there is one term, more than any other, that has stuck to his name: *renegade*. Historians, specialists in German thought and history, and, sadly, many leftwing activists know him, if at all, as the 'renegade' in Lenin's *The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky*. This pamphlet pillories Kautsky for his wavering stance in opposing World War I and his outright hostility to the Russian October 1917 revolution (Kautsky welcomed the February revolution and wrote a brilliant article on its significance<sup>4</sup>).

Moreover, the relatively few specialists who are familiar with his work tend to have a rather negative view of it. Even scholars who consider themselves Marxists or sympathetic to Marxism, such as Stephen Eric Bronner, often reject much of Kautsky's thought. Thus Bronner asserts that "Kautsky's Marxism was never dialectical, [but] always mechanistic" and that this thought prevented him "from calling the bourgeois state and the existing modes of socio-political organisation into question".<sup>5</sup> Kautsky's authority as a Marxist theoretician has been seriously in doubt ever since Lenin's angered accusations. Indeed, anecdote has it that not only Lenin's critique of Kautsky, but also the very title of his anti-Kautsky pamphlet, has moulded historical consciousness. The Kautsky scholar, Hans-Josef Steinberg,

for instance, recalls - or claims to recall - hearing from his colleague, Georges Haupt, that at various history conferences across the globe in the 1970s and 1980s Haupt had met students and academics who actually thought that Kautsky's forename was 'Renegade'. Kautsky's grandson, John, mentions similar reactions at being introduced to others at conferences and receptions.<sup>6</sup>

Be that as it may, Lenin's choice of the term 'renegade' is worth bearing in mind, when considering the representation of Kautsky's legacy. For to call somebody a renegade is to assert that this somebody, for whatever reason, has *reneged* on, or turned away from, what he once held dear, not that everything he once held dear was useless from the outset. Seen in this light, Lenin's charge against Kautsky is *not* that he had always been a traitor to the cause of socialism, but that at a certain point he had flinched back from the perspectives he had formulated earlier. Indeed, following the outbreak of World War I, Lenin recommended to a comrade that he should "Obtain without fail and reread (or ask to have it translated for you) *Road to power* by Kautsky [and see] what he writes there about the revolution of our time! And now, how he acts the toady and disavows all that".<sup>7</sup> Lenin tried to explain Kautsky's renegacy in the realm of *politics*. Clara Zetkin, a close friend of the Kautsky family in Stuttgart, took the same position. In 1920, she wrote:

Nobody disputes Kautsky's great and enduring service of teaching the most advanced workers the ABC of scientific socialism, of historical materialism. Nor does anybody dispute that he fought to shed further light on Marx's world of thought, to develop this thought and to make a cadre of advanced proletarian fighters feel at home within it. But it is precisely this which makes his 'fall from grace' all the more inexcusable.<sup>8</sup>

For Lenin and Zetkin, then, it was *Kautsky* who fell from grace, who failed to achieve the heights to which he had once pointed. It was Kautsky who broke with Kautsky, who broke with the revolutionary Marxism that

inspired the fundamental views of Lenin and Zetkin on the revolution of their time. However, three schools of 20th century thought, for various reasons and in various ways, sought either to downplay the connection between Bolshevism and the leading thinker of the Second International, or to increase the gulf between Kautsky "when he was a Marxist" and the theory and practice of Bolshevism. These three schools are neo-Hegelianism,<sup>9</sup> Stalinism and western cold war historiography. As we will see, there are commonalities and overlaps between them, but they are three distinct trends in their own right.

For the neo-Hegelian approach, Kautsky's thought was essentially useless from the standpoint of revolutionary strategy from the outset, either because he failed to understand the dialectic or because he was a determinist - or even a mechanistic Darwinist who thought that societies followed unchanging laws of development from lower forms to higher, more advanced ones. He thus - or so it is claimed - looked forward to the orderly transition to socialism from the comfort of his armchair. Note that this school predominantly locates the break between Lenin and Kautsky as lying in the realm of *philosophy*, not politics or *programme*. This has led to claims by various thinkers that it was actually Lenin who had to renege on the Kautskyan outlook he himself once held dear by locking himself away in Swiss libraries, rereading Hegel and overhauling the non-dialectical diet of Second International Marxism he had lived off until that point.

This is not to say that philosophy or the dialectic is of secondary importance to the understanding of revolutionary politics, but far too much has been made of Lenin's library time in Switzerland as holding the key to an understanding of his political development. It does a disservice to the stature of Lenin as a thinker by claiming that there is a fundamental rupture in his thought and thus that most of what he wrote before that should be disregarded. More to the point, this claim warps what Lenin was actually saying about Kautsky: Lenin was simply seeking to uphold the revolutionary perspectives on Russia that Kautsky once upheld, not to break with so-called Second International evolutionism.

The neo-Hegelian approach has enjoyed wide purchase in academia, the 'new left' and also on the Trotskyist left, as expressed in the ideas of thinkers like John Rees.<sup>10</sup> But we shall see below just how misplaced it is to think that Kautsky envisaged the transition to socialism as some kind of objective evolutionary necessity. On the contrary, what ultimately mattered for him was the subjective factor: state politics, party and programme.

The rise of Stalinism represents the most significant distortion of the intellectual relationship between the SPD 'centre' around Kautsky, on the one hand, and Bolshevism, on the other. This is particularly prominent in the notion of Bolshevism as a 'party of a new type'. As Stalin himself put it in his notorious *Short course* of 1939, "*The party strengthens itself by purging its ranks of opportunist elements* - that is one of the maxims of the Bolshevik Party, which is a party of a new type fundamentally different from the social democratic parties of the Second International."<sup>11</sup>

This statement entails a complete fabrication of history. For one, in early Soviet Russia, Kautsky's pre-1914 writings were extensively

used as educational tools for new party cadres. In this sense, Zetkin's emphasis on Kautsky's role in propagating the "ABCs" of Marxism was applied rather literally: Bukharin and Preobrazhensky's *The ABC of communism: a popular exposition of the programme of the Communist Party of Russia* (1919) abounds with Kautsky texts in the 'recommended reading' at the end of each chapter. For another, the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow initially planned an edition of Kautsky's *Collected works*. By 1923 a few volumes had been published, but plans were shelved in - note the date - 1930. Trotsky's obituary of Kautsky points to the Stalinist skulduggery this entailed:

The attempts of the present historiography of the Comintern to present things as if Lenin, almost in his youth, had seen in Kautsky an opportunist and had declared war against him, are radically false. Almost up to the time of the world war, Lenin considered Kautsky as the genuine continuator of the cause of Marx and Engels.<sup>12</sup>

Nonetheless, here Trotsky also implies that the young Lenin was led astray by Kautsky's rhetoric. Not only does this also involve a misrepresentation of the real relationship: it is slightly hypocritical, for the young Trotsky was just as much of a Kautsky fanboy as Lenin, as expressed in Trotsky's fawning correspondence, written in German, to the 'pope of Marxism'.

The third major school in the distortion and marginalisation of Kautsky's legacy was cold war historiography in the west. This school echoed the Stalinist consensus on the fundamental difference between Kautsky and Lenin, but put plus-signs where the Stalinists put minus-signs and vice versa. There is no time to go into this now, but in this consensus a key role was played by Menshevik exiles in Germany, as well as by some of Kautsky's family, such as his son, Benedikt, who was an Austrian Social Democrat MP, and his grandson, John, who wrote a book on his grandfather, claiming that it was Lenin who broke with the more moderate Kautsky. Kautsky may have been a determinist, John reasoned, but at least he was not a bloodthirsty voluntarist like Lenin.

During the cold war, then, a peculiar consensus emerged. From different angles, and for different reasons, the three main schools we have identified tend to suggest that Kautsky's views of democracy, organisation and revolutionary change had little or nothing to do with the political practice of Russian Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution of 1917.

These schools of thought continue to dominate the reception of Kautsky and his work today, but thankfully some scholars are reassessing his work and challenging this *communis opinio* - often by looking at the original source materials in German or Russian instead of merely relying on second-hand accounts. The thawing of the 20th century consensus on Kautsky has also, albeit in a most limited and disappointing way, become evident in the recent upturn in discussions of Kautsky and the recent 'Kautsky wars' among the US left. I will not comment on those here, but will merely note that most of these writers seem to have 'discovered' a rather *Bersteinised* Kautsky: either as a projection of their own reformism onto the past, or as a projection attempting to uphold the misleading views on him outlined above.

A rather different image of Kautsky emerges when we consider in more detail his work "when he was a Marxist" as one of the most central influences on the politics of Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution. Unfortunately, these texts receive scant attention from today's left. Here we arrive at 'Republic

and social democracy in France' and the fundamental strategic principle it defends - one upheld by Kautsky and Lenin alike, before Kautsky reneged on it - that socialist parties should not participate in bourgeois coalition governments and should instead gain majority support for what Marx and Engels called the commune state, the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is working class rule, with - paraphrasing Marx - 'the working class not simply laying hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wielding it for its own purposes'.

It is often claimed - most famously by Lenin in *State and revolution* - that Kautsky's political thought was unaffected by the revolutionary spirit of Marx and Engels in their assessment of the Paris Commune of 1871. But this, as we will now see, is misleading. Let us now take a closer look at the 'Republic' series to see why this is the case.

## Republicanism

The backdrop to Kautsky's *Neue Zeit* series in 1905 is the debate in the Second International over the experience of Millerandism - a trend named after Alexandre Millerand, who was eventually kicked out of the international for accepting a post as minister of commerce in a French government, with Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau, butcher of the Paris commune, at its head. Kautsky himself drafted the resolution condemning socialist participation in bourgeois governments, which was adopted at the Paris Congress of the international in 1900.

Interestingly, however, the resolution contained a key weakness. For, although it unequivocally condemned socialist coalitionism in 'normal' circumstances', it left the door open to such participation in extreme or catastrophic situations - such as perhaps during an invasion or occupation. This caveat came to the delight of the 'revisionist' right wing of social democracy, who generally had as their aim the participation of socialists assuming office in the bourgeois state. Equally, it earned the condemnation of the *Iskra* editorial board, which referred to it not as the 'Kautsky resolution', but the 'rubber resolution' - a malleable and thus opportunist statement.

By the time of the SPD Congress in Dresden in 1903, however, Kautsky drafted a resolution on government participation that was free of all ambiguity and removed all references to extreme situations. Did he ever account for his change of heart and his move away from open opportunism here? Thanks to comrade Mike Taber, I have been able to locate Kautsky's speech to the Dresden Congress in 1903. He says:

It is notable that all the revisionists have spoken out in favour of Millerand. Now [Ignaz] Auer has attempted to point out a contradiction in my thought on this and claimed that I too stood up for Millerand. He, Auer, had defended my resolution back then and says I had expressed my full support for his speech.

I think Auer's memory is playing tricks on him. My recognition of his speech can only have applied to the skill with which he delivered it, because it was excellent. But my remarks did not apply to the content, because his speech avoided the crux of the matter. Nonetheless, back then I did look to formulate the resolution in a way that turned against Millerand in principle, but which presented his behaviour as a mistake, not as a crime. I wanted to preserve the principled standpoint and yet pave the way for unity amongst the French (heckle: "That's opportunist!") [Because this time the Dresden resolution to which he is speaking is not formulated in this way - BLJ]. My latter efforts were

in vain. And this has also happened to others too.<sup>13</sup>

Kautsky's efforts at preserving the unity of the socialist French movement on this question were thus in vain, and he shifted his position accordingly. When the question of government participation was placed on the agenda of the international's Amsterdam Congress in 1904, a fierce clash ensued. In the one corner were some of the French socialists, headed by Jean Jaurès, who rejected the vehemence of the Dresden resolution. In the other was the SPD majority headed by August Bebel, who defended it.

Besides the typical revisionist dismissal of the SPD as consisting of impotent, dogmatic oppositionists (a criticism unconsciously echoed by many on the left today), Jaurès accused the Germans - who lived under an imperial monarch, of course - of being indifferent to the significance of the republic and republicanism. After all, for some French reformist socialists, if the French republic was under threat, as it was from the right at this time, then it might be necessary, and thus politically permissible, not only to bloc with bourgeois forces to defend it, but to join them in government. This would be a necessary price to pay to retain such an historic achievement of the French people.

After the Amsterdam congress, Kautsky feels compelled to pick up his pen to defend Bebel and what Kautsky sees as Marxist republicanism more broadly. He too believes that the Third Republic must be defended, but that the best way of doing so is by exposing what he calls its "monarchical means of rule" in the church, state bureaucracy, elections, army and so on.

Kautsky rejects the logic of Jaurès and co. Just as Engels once argued that the French Third Republic amounts to an "empire without the emperor" and contrasts it with a genuinely democratic republic,<sup>14</sup> Kautsky identifies two types of republicanism: a bourgeois variety embodied in the French Third Republic, and the kind of radical, proletarian republic along the lines of the Paris Commune. Depending on their particular content, republics can thus form the basis of what Kautsky terms "the class rule" of the bourgeoisie or the proletariat:

Thus, the same republic which forms the basis for the emancipation of the proletariat can at the same time become the basis for the class domination of the bourgeoisie. This is a contradiction, but one which is no stranger than the contradictory role played by the machine in capitalist society: the machine is both the indispensable precondition of the liberation of the proletariat and at the same time the means of its degradation and enslavement.<sup>15</sup>

Following on from this, Kautsky underlines how Marxist-republican agitation should not cease with the formal removal or abdication of a monarch. In other words, the French socialists still need to conduct republican agitation. A different kind to that in Germany, admittedly, but republican agitation all the same. He refers to those socialists in America and France who fail to see the need for this as suffering from "republican superstitions" that must be destroyed forthwith, if the working class movement is to progress in those countries. He argues that this agitation must continue until the conditions have been created for the working class to take power.

Such conditions are a far throw from those in the *Troisième République* in France and amount to a state form, in which the minimum demands of the Erfurt programme have been realised, as we will discuss below. Perhaps "republican superstitions" might be less debilitating than much of the British

left's past and present 'monarchical superstitions', but that is, of course, another matter.

## Democracy

But what did Kautsky understand by what he calls the "ideal of the democratic republic", which "the Parisian proletariat of 1871 would seek to form into an instrument of its emancipation"?

After describing the course of events which led to the formation of the Paris Commune, Kautsky extensively quotes from Marx's *The civil war in France* (1871) in order to highlight what he - following Marx - views as the political features of the Commune that distinguish it as a revolutionary government (and which, it should be stressed, find reflection in the minimum demands of the Erfurt programme): the replacement of the standing army by a people's militia; universal suffrage; the disestablishment of the church and a secular state; the election of judges on short terms of service, self-government in the localities and public servants working for an average worker's wage (the latter was the only one that did not feature in the Erfurt demands: a significant omission).

In other words, in Kautsky's work there is a clear reference to Marx's criteria for working class government and the conclusion Marx drew from the experience of 1871 - that the existing state machinery must be completely overhauled, not given a socialist gloss (the very points that Lenin raised in 1917 ... against Kautsky). In 'Republic', Kautsky is quite explicit on this matter and, paraphrasing Marx, pinpoints the central pillars of the state machinery that must be overhauled by a working class government:

The conquest of state power by the proletariat therefore does not simply mean the conquest of the government ministries, which then, without further ado, administers the previous means of rule - an established state church, the bureaucracy and the officer corps - in a 'socialist' manner. Rather, it means the dissolution of these institutions. As long as the proletariat is not strong enough to abolish these institutions of power, then taking over individual government departments and entire governments will be to no avail. A socialist ministry can at best exist temporarily. It will be worn down in the futile struggle against these institutions of power, without being able to create anything permanent.<sup>16</sup>

This bold, anti-revisionist statement on one of the core features of Marxist political strategy is one that much of today's left - with its calls for 'Labour/Syriza/Sinn Féin, etc to power' - should take note of. It is an example of some of Kautsky's clearest Marxist writing and it is understandable why Lenin held it in such high esteem.

The defeat and suppression of the Commune, continues Kautsky, entailed the overthrow of its (genuinely) republican form of rule, so that the republic became "a tool of bourgeois class rule".<sup>17</sup> It forced the bourgeoisie to reign over the proletariat itself - an unpleasant task, which the bourgeoisie had previously left to the monarchy. For Kautsky there are, therefore, republics and republics - republicanism and republicanism. The significant feature of Marxist republicanism is precisely that it seeks to create a republican state form that, following Engels, is "the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat",<sup>18</sup> or - as Marx put it - "the political form at last discovered, under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour".<sup>19</sup>

By uncovering these texts and by presenting them - with all their faults and historical limitations, of course - to a modern audience, this book is further able to shed light on how the republican Kautsky of 1905 has clearly morphed

into something else by the time of the German Revolution of 1918. By then he has, if you excuse the phrase, become a 'renegade republican' and embraced some of the very ideas he fought against in the Socialist International in the early 1900s. He embraces the SPD's participation in the so-called Weimar coalition as 'socialism' and soft-pedals Weimar's 'Reich-republicanism' - the content of which was much closer to the Third Republic than the proletarian republican Paris Commune.

But this is not the end of the story, for there is a lot more work to be done on Kautsky. Many of the existing English-language translations are abridged, often employ archaic language and are generally a little clunky to read. I do think that an accessible reissue of his core strategic writings - most crucially the (still incomplete!) translation of his commentary on the Erfurt programme - should be made available, precisely because they are such useful introductions to what Zetkin calls the ABCs of Marxism for newer and or younger comrades.

His writings as a 'renegade', I believe, should also be taken more seriously - not only for the 'negative' (ie, the lengths to which Kautsky would go to defend participation in a bourgeois government in a text such as his 1922 *The proletarian revolution and its programme*), but also in some of the doubtless important insights he provides in his later works.

In concluding, I will just state that to argue, as comrade Jim Creegan recently did in the *Weekly Worker*, that "the overall curve of [Kautsky's] political career can only serve as a negative example"<sup>20</sup>, overlooks both the positive political content in many of his earlier works and, more importantly, the enormous impact that his ideas exerted on the strategy of Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution. In short, to dismiss Kautsky's career as "overwhelmingly negative" is to dismiss the experience of Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution as negative - even if, as with comrade Creegan and others, it is done in a well-meaning attempt to uphold staunch loyalty to the term 'Bolshevism'.

As I have hopefully shown here, and do in more detail in the book itself, such a view remains lost within the mystification and distortion of Kautsky's legacy in the 20th century ●

## Notes

1. B Lewis *Karl Kautsky on democracy and republicanism* Leiden 2019, pp366, £121.
2. M Macnair, 'Democracy and republic' *Weekly Worker* February 13 2020..
3. This is the dedicated Amazon page: [www.amazon.co.uk/Karl-Kautsky-Democracy-Republicanism/dp/1642593370](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Karl-Kautsky-Democracy-Republicanism/dp/1642593370).
4. K Kautsky, 'Prospects of the Russian Revolution' *Weekly Worker* January 14 2010.
5. SE Bronner, 'Karl Kautsky and the twilight of orthodoxy' *Political Theory* November 1982, p596.
6. J Rojahn, T Schelz-Brandenburg and H-J Steinberg (eds) *Marxismus und Demokratie. Karl Kautskys Bedeutung in der sozialistischen Arbeiterbewegung* Frankfurt am Main 1992, p19. As the Russian language does not use the definite article ('the'), the original title of Lenin's pamphlet was *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia i renegat Kautskii*.
7. LT Lih, 'True to revolutionary social democracy' *Weekly Worker* November 13 2014.
8. C Zetkin *Der Weg nach Moskau* Hamburg 1920, pp9-10.
9. A term first coined by Jules Townshend in 'Reassessing Kautsky's Marxism' (*Political Studies*, Vol 37, pp 659-64).
10. J Rees *The algebra of revolution: the dialectic and the classical Marxist tradition* London 1998.
11. J Stalin *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)* Moscow 1939.
12. L Trotsky, 'Karl Kautsky' *New Internationalist* Vol 5, no.2, 1938, pp50-51.
13. SPD *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitag der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands abgehalten zu Dresden vom 13 bis 20 Berlin 1903*, p384.
14. F Engels, 'A critique of the draft Social-Democratic program of 1891' (<https://marxists.catbull.com/archive/marx/works/1891/06/29.htm>).
15. B Lewis (ed) *Karl Kautsky on democracy and republicanism* Leiden 2019, p159.
16. *Ibid* p177.
17. *Ibid* p184.
18. F Engels *op cit*.
19. K Marx *The civil war in France* ([www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/) 1871), chapter 5.
20. J Creegan, 'Commitment to orderly progress' *Weekly Worker* May 9 2019.

**USA****Bernie Sanders: his base is to his left**

# Primary contradictions

**Jim Creegan** assesses the battle for the Democratic nomination. The left has a real opportunity

In the most extraordinary electoral season in living memory, the time-tested, vacuous political formulas that bourgeois politicians have employed to lull and distract the electorate are losing traction.

Shortly after the 2016 election, I predicted in these pages that Donald Trump, for all his flouting of niceties and norms, would be forced by institutional constraints to govern in a more conventional way. I now realise that I vastly overestimated his learning capacity. In the intervening four years, Trump has ruled as the consummate narcissist and borderline gangster he has always been. He has trampled underfoot all notions of policy and statecraft, all sacrosanct codes of conduct, conventions and even laws in dispensing personal favours and pursuing short-term personal gain.

And yet, to the shock of many a formerly complacent worshipper of the status quo, Trump is getting away with it - at least for now. Through the ordeal of investigation and impeachment, he has maintained the steadfast loyalty of party leaders, in and out of Congress. His success is due in turn to the devotion of a majority of those who voted for him last time around. Thus, despite his grotesqueries (or maybe because of them), Trump could be carving out the only viable future for his party in the post-2008 twilight of

neoliberalism and its cult of the (capitalist) individual.

The party now faces an unfavourable demographic trendline, combined with a new assertiveness by women. The US is projected to have a non-white majority by mid-century. With little to offer overwhelmingly working class black and Hispanic populations, whose voting members will surely continue to support the Democrats by big margins, and female voters repulsed by Trump's boasting of sexual assault, the Republicans have almost no prospect of enlarging their electoral base. They therefore have little choice but to follow the president in attempting to weld together a solid voting bloc of all those who wish to keep the US a white man's country. This racist-chauvinist bloc can only continue to win elections by restricting the franchise as much as possible to exclude the young and voters of colour - an effort that has been underway for years. The party can also hope to sell this strategy to the ruling class with the methods they have always employed, and that Trump has taken to new depths: massive tax breaks for corporations and the rich, accompanied by ever-bolder attacks on the federal regime of environmental and business regulation.

The Democrats have responded in two ways. The elected officials

and party apparatus are appealing to the laws and political/diplomatic norms that Trump is savaging, and advocate a return to normality. Sanders and his supporters, on the other hand, appear to have latched on to a reality that Trump has grasped: that normality does not command the approbation it once did, and that politics are becoming increasingly polarised. They have put forward slogans and proposals aimed to excite the enthusiasm of growing constituencies, who find themselves on the wrong side of the status quo - some of whom voted for Trump in 2016. The Democratic efforts designed to mobilise indignation over Trump's contempt for institutional sanctities - the Mueller investigation and the impeachment trial - failed miserably to grip the popular imagination. Most of the campaign rhetoric of 'moderate' Democratic presidential contenders has stressed the need to 'bring people together' and adopt 'realistic and pragmatic solutions' - what one pundit aptly termed Democratic 'elevator music'.

It is, of course, no surprise that the Republican (and Democratic) right seek to disparage the measures Sanders advocates - Medicare (government health insurance) for all, free education at public universities, a hike in corporate taxes, a tax on financial transactions and a rise in the federal minimum wage - by branding

them as 'socialism', as they have reflexively done at least since the time of Franklin Roosevelt and the 'new deal'. But what puzzles many is the fact that Sanders embraces the socialist label, even though the kind of welfare-state measures he champions have been accepted state policy in many western European countries for decades without anyone having noticed a socialist revolution. (As Keynesian economist Paul Krugman pointed out in the headline of a recent column defending the Vermont senator, "Bernie Sanders isn't a socialist".) One might reasonably conclude that Sanders is simply remaining faithful, at least in name, to the cause he embraced, when, as a Vermont schoolteacher in the 1970s, he toted an amateurish documentary he had made about Eugene Debs from classroom to classroom.

But it is also possible that his retention of the socialist brand - along with his call for a 'political revolution' - may involve a certain element of calculation. The 'progressive' logo has been adopted by so many Democrats - from Barack Obama to most of Sanders' rivals - as to make it well-nigh meaningless. Sanders wishes to send the signal that his platform represents a decisive break from the Democratic Party's recent neoliberal past, and its upholders in the primaries. The

words 'socialist' and 'revolution' are admirably suited to underscore the difference.

## **Billionaire failure**

And, as Sanders borrows catchwords from the past, his rivals borrow ideas from him. The power of his appeal is evident in the fact that most of the centrists have put forward watered-down versions of his proposals. Pete Buttigieg (who has now quit the race) and Joe Biden, for instance, advocate a government-run medical care scheme alongside, rather than in place of, private health insurance (the 'public option') - a proposal along Sanders' lines, but a little less 'extreme' and more business-friendly. They too declare themselves in favour of raising corporate taxes - just not by quite as much. It is clearly Sanders who has set the tone for the debate. The change in the wind is unmistakable.

Even Michael Bloomberg said he wants to rescind Trump's tax cuts for the rich and impose a version of the 'Tobin tax' on financial transactions. Bloomberg announced his candidacy in November and did not participate in the early caucuses and primaries. He billed himself as the party's great centrist hope. He is the ninth richest man in the US, with a net worth of over \$60 billion, accumulated as CEO of a mass-media company that invented a software for real-time reporting

of financial data and the placing of trades. Bloomberg thrice held office as mayor of New York City, winning the first term as a Republican, and only rejoining the Democratic Party (to which he earlier adhered) in 2018, after 11 years as an independent.

His tenure as mayor was notable for the 'stop and frisk' policies under which police targeted five million black and Hispanic youths for harassment (his apologies for which, made just a month before he entered the race, have a decidedly inauthentic ring). He also refused for five years to sign contracts with municipal unions, demanding, and winning, extensive givebacks from the teachers' union. He led a crackdown on leftwing demonstrators that resulted in mass arrests during the Republican convention in 2004, when he supported George W Bush for president. Until he became a candidate, Bloomberg consistently opposed higher corporate and wealth taxes, rises in the minimum wage and attempts to regulate Wall Street. He has called for reductions in Medicare and social security (government retirement pensions), which he called a "Ponzi scheme".

Bloomberg, however, sought to offset his plutocratic reputation by becoming a cash cow for many liberal organisations, on which the Democrats lean for support. These groups mostly advocate class-neutral causes, such as gun control, action on climate change and public health. Bloomberg also donates to his favoured candidates for public office throughout the country (which in the past included Republicans - like Lindsey Graham, the dogged Trump-supporting senator from South Carolina, and senator Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, an anti-abortion fanatic). *The New York Times* recently ran an exposé under the headline, "In Bloomberg, liberals see a wallet too big to offend". It details how the recipients of his largesse are often too frightened of losing their funding to say or do anything that might rub him the wrong way.

Bloomberg spent half a billion of his own fortune - he asked for no donations - to blanket the airwaves with adverts presenting him as a competent, technocratic manager; one who knows 'how to get things done'. But all of his billions and networks of influence could not endow Bloomberg with the charisma he so decidedly lacks, and did not prevent him from stuttering and freezing up on the debate stage in Las Vegas on the eve of the Nevada caucuses, when the other candidates accused him of trying to buy the election, and pummeled him for his record on race relations, multiple accusations of sexual harassment from women who worked for him, and his not-so-distant Republican past.

On Super Tuesday Bloomberg managed to win in American Samoa and secure 44 delegates. A bitter disappointment, not to say humiliation, that saw him almost instantly pulling his campaign.

## Panic mounts

Sanders' tie with Buttigieg in the Iowa caucuses, his narrow victory in the New Hampshire primaries and his strong win in Nevada made him begin to look like the party's frontrunner. His main rival on the left - Massachusetts senator Elizabeth Warren - has fallen far behind. Only Joe Biden has gathered enough delegates to the Democratic nominating convention to rival Sanders.

Biden's wide support among the donor class, his backing, as a senator from Delaware, for the war against Iraq and his opposition to bussing to achieve racial integration in state schools are well known. Less publicised by opponents is Biden's role as a shill for the credit card industry, which uses Delaware as a tax haven.

In 2005, Biden was the main sponsor of a bill that made it immeasurably harder for credit card holders to get out from under their debts by filing for bankruptcy. At the same time as this bill eliminated protections against landlord repossession of seniors' homes and a debt payment exemption to buy children Christmas presents, it made it easier for the rich to avoid debt payments by putting their money in trust funds, and exempted their second homes from bankruptcy seizure. This bill is considered one of the reasons for the explosion of student and medical debt. And, while Biden was pushing this legislation through, his son, Hunter - the same one Trump has accused of shady dealings in Ukraine - was working for one of the biggest credit firms in Delaware, and afterward received hundreds of thousands in consulting fees from the same company.

The Democratic establishment went into panic mode after Sanders' Nevada victory. One news show host - Chris Matthews of MSNBC, the Democratic mainstream's television outlet - worried on air that a president Sanders might have him shot in New York's Central Park, in the same way as Castro executed the henchmen of Fulgencio Batista, the Cuban strongman he overthrew in 1959; he also compared Sanders' rise to the fall of France to the Germans in 1940. (Matthews' outbursts were so over the top that he has since had to resign his position at the network, but one suspects his sentiments were not too far from those of many middle-of-the-road pundits.) The centrists are haunted by Trump's capture of the Republican nomination in 2016, despite all the smug assurances that such an outlier could never prevail, and shudder at the thought that a parallel upset may now be unfolding on the Democratic side.

Unable to mount a full-on attack on Sanders' proposals, because a majority of Democrats, and even many Republicans, have supported them in poll after poll, the centrists argue that Sanders can never win the general election because he cannot capture the votes of ostensible legions, the middle-of-the-road suburban voters, although numerous opinion polls have shown him beating Trump by a comfortable margin. To these are added dire warnings that his Medicare-for-all proposal would be so expensive as to require drastic middle class tax hikes. Such admonitions conceal a fear that cannot speak its name: that a Sanders candidacy might come between the centrists and the corporate and wealthy-donor troughs from which they feed.

## Put to the test

One test of Sanders is how he has responded, and will respond, to the inevitable red baiting that has recently swelled from a trickle to a flood. Republicans and mainstream Democrats alike are dredging up his youthful membership in the left-Shachtmanite Young People's Socialist League in

the early 60s; his endorsement of a Socialist Workers Party presidential candidate in the 80s; his 'honeymoon' in Moscow (where he travelled with his current wife after their marriage); his visits to Cuba and Nicaragua in the same decade; his warm words for the Sandinistas and his observation that Castro did Cubans some good by teaching them to read. And they point to his being told in a recent government intelligence briefing that he is the preferred Russian candidate to run against Trump, who supposedly is the Republican candidate the Russians favour.

Will Sanders repudiate the attacks or attempt to distance himself from his past and demonstrate his 'patriotism'? So far the signals have been mixed.

In a welcome counterpoint to the uncritical Bernie worship now sweeping the Democratic Socialists of America and the American left in general, Daniel Lazare pointed in the last issue of the *Weekly Worker* to Sanders' opportunism regarding the campaign to impeach Trump - conducted entirely on the terms of the 'deep state', especially its foreign policy and intelligence arms ("Socialist" frontrunner causes panic", February 27). Sanders made no attempt to distance himself from exaggerated allegations of Russian interference in US elections, or the patently spurious narrative about the conflict in Ukraine, which paints Russia as the aggressor. One might understand Sanders' reluctance to open a new campaign front on an issue the electorate cares little about, but he also failed to avail himself of what Jacques Chirac once called "an excellent opportunity to shut up". Sanders' has instead loudly seconded mainstream Democratic efforts to portray Trump as a Russian stooge - accusations of which he now finds himself on the receiving end. He also accused the president from the floor of Congress of undermining the Nato alliance.

But there is another side to the ledger. Sanders proudly recalls his vote against the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and castigates Biden for supporting it. He has, beginning as early as 2016, edged cautiously away from his even-handed approach on Israel/Palestine to put greater emphasis on Palestinian rights. In the middle of the present campaign, he pointedly declined to attend the annual conference of the country's principal pro-Zionist lobby, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (Aipac) - in the past a ritual for all ambitious politicians. And, when confronted about his decades-old Cuba remarks at the latest Democratic candidates' debate, Sanders replied:

... occasionally it might be a good idea to be honest about American foreign policy, and that includes the fact that America has overthrown governments

all over the world: in Chile, in Guatemala, in Iran. And, when dictatorships, whether it is the Chinese or the Cubans, do something good, you acknowledge that. But you don't have to trade love letters with them [as Trump did with Kim Jong-un - JC].

Sanders must have been aware that remarks such as these could cost him many votes in the important election state of Florida, home to many rightwing Cuban refugees. And such pronouncements are still far enough afield of the 'Washington consensus' to disqualify Sanders as a reliable ruling class foreign-policy custodian.

But one should be mindful of context. The social democrat of today plays a different role to that of the social democrat of half a century ago. When capitalism was confronted by a non-capitalist great-power rival, the Soviet Union, and a strong union movement, social democrats were often welcomed into the fold in exchange for fealty to the global anti-communist crusade. Talk of extensive reforms was legitimate - and real reforms were sometimes undertaken - to burnish the system's progressive credentials.

However, with its main adversaries vanquished at home and abroad, capitalism, even in its tarnished post-2008 condition, no longer has any use for 'socialist' collaborators. The very words 'socialism', 'class struggle' and 'revolution' - even if devoid of their original meaning - conjure up to the bourgeois mind nightmarish apparitions long thought to have been banished. Strong welfare-state measures are now deemed beyond the pale. The ruling class no longer has any use for token 'socialists'.

## Last-minute moves

Super Tuesday is the biggest single primary day in the country. On March 3, Democrats in 14 states - including Virginia, Massachusetts, Texas and California - voted for a presidential nominee. On the eve of this vote, the Democratic leadership went into a 'stop Sanders' frenzy. Buoyed by Biden's landslide victory in South Carolina the previous Saturday, the party's major power-brokers decided to put their cards on Obama's vice-president.

With unparalleled suddenness, two leading centrist candidates, Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar, dropped out of the race and threw their support behind Biden, appearing at his rallies. Their move was followed by endorsements from a roster of Democratic notables, including a primary candidate who resigned from the contest early on, former Texas congressman Beto O'Rourke, and former Senate majority leader Harry Reid. Although he has made no official endorsement, Obama is rumoured to have been active behind the scenes on Biden's behalf.

This gambit appears to have borne fruit. Only a few days ago, Biden was being written off as yesterday's man. But at the time of writing he is being touted as the victor of Super Tuesday. He has been declared the winner in the delegate-rich states of North Carolina, Texas and Massachusetts. Sanders won, though, not only in Colorado, Utah and in his home state of Vermont. He won in California, which has more delegates than all the other Super Tuesday states combined (at the time of writing Biden has 453 delegates and Sanders 382).

**Joe Biden: has most delegates - at the moment. And he has the entire Democratic establishment behind him. They will do everything they can to block Bernie Sanders**

While other states will vote in coming months, the party seems headed in the direction of a two-man contest at the July nominating convention in Milwaukee. Such a match-up would tend to favour Biden, especially as Bloomberg has thrown himself - and his billions - behind Biden.

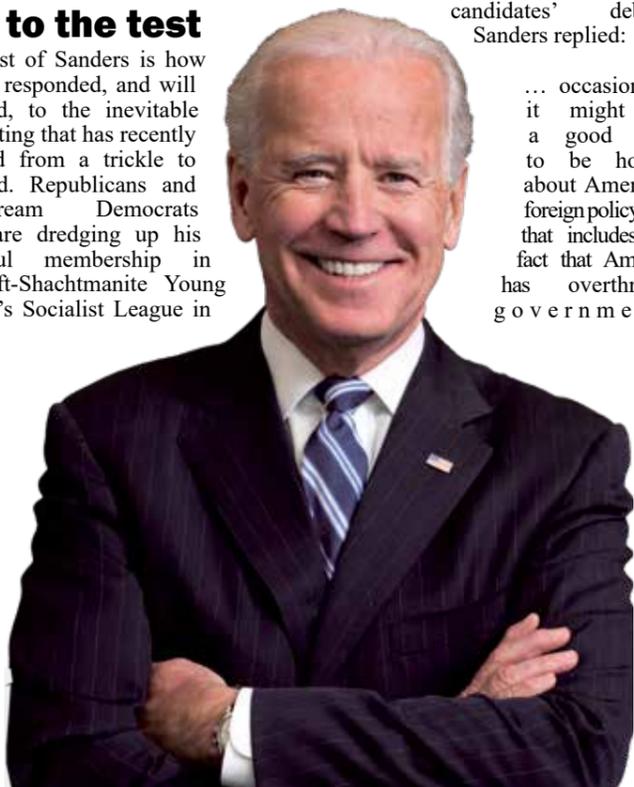
If no single candidate arrives in Milwaukee with a delegate majority - all the lesser candidates not having dropped out - and there is no winner on the first ballot, a second round of voting will take place (candidates receiving less than 15% of the vote in a given state get no delegates; those with over 15% are apportioned delegates according to their percentage of the vote).

Party rules allow 771 superdelegates to vote in a second round. Comprising just under 15% of the delegate total, the superdelegates are elected officials, party functionaries and activists chosen by the Democratic apparatus and unpledged to any candidate. They can nearly all be counted upon to support more 'moderate' presidential hopefuls. All but nine of 93 superdelegates sampled by *The New York Times* said they would not vote for Sanders, even if he had a delegate plurality, and would rather risk splitting the party than see him nominated. Moreover, if no candidate is selected in the first round, most pledged delegates become free to vote for their preferences rather than for the candidates they were chosen to represent. Other centrists can therefore combine to support a single candidate. The odds of a Sanders victory seem at this point to be diminishing.

But his defeat could lead to unintended consequences. Sanders, it is true, has pledged in advance to endorse the Democratic candidate in the general election, whoever s/he may be. But he has run on a more explicit class platform, and put together a more highly disciplined and fervent band of campaign shock troops, than any other presidential aspirant in recent memory. As Jim Kavanaugh remarked in *Counterpunch*, many of them believe in Bernie more than he believes in himself. Among them, there is an anger against the Democratic establishment unknown in previous 'progressive' campaigns, such as those of Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition in 1984 and 1988. There is also an ability to see through lesser-evilmism - the well-worn appeal of corporate Democratic candidates to vote for them because their Republican opponent is so much worse.

Many Sanders supporters will be little inclined to follow their leader into the cul-de-sac of party politics as usual. Already in 2016, a vocal group of them walked out of the Democratic convention and threatened to leave the party when Hillary Clinton was nominated. They are likely to be doubly determined not to be cheated of victory this year by last-minute manoeuvres. The celebrity pro-Sanders New York congresswoman, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez (AOC), remarked that, in any other country she and Joe Biden would not be in the same party. The same applies, *a fortiori*, to Bernie Sanders and Michael Bloomberg. AOC has already set up a political action committee independent of the Democratic apparatus to fund her efforts and the campaigns of other 'progressives'.

Thus, what most Democrats would regard as a disastrous split may present an opportunity for the formation of the closest thing to a Labour Party that the US has seen in recent history. All too often, Marxists who ritually call for such a party seldom give a thought to how one might actually come about. Might this just be one way? Could a Sanders defeat signal a new beginning? ●



**ISRAEL**

# Decline of secular Zionism

Despite indictments for corruption, Netanyahu has come out on top, writes **Tony Greenstein**



Israel's third general election in a year has shown a decisive shift to the Zionist right, but whether it will be sufficient to enable Binyamin Netanyahu to cobble together a coalition is doubtful. According to the latest count, Netanyahu's Likud is predicted to gain 37 seats. However, the bloc with the religious parties - United Torah Judaism, Shas and the religious settler party, Yamina - will fall two short of an overall majority.

These results are, however, provisional, until the final tally is announced on March 10 and a Likud-led bloc may - to a large extent thanks to the votes of soldiers - increase its seats by one, whilst still falling tantalisingly short. If exit polls are correct, then Netanyahu - even if he does not get his 'get out of jail free' card in the form of immunity from prosecution - has faced down the challenge of the 'generals' party', Blue and White (Kahol Lavan), led by former chief of staff Benny Gantz.

This election not only marks the final death of 'two states', as both Likud and Blue and White are committed to annexing the settlement blocs, but both parties campaigned on the basis of who was most hostile to the Arabs. From the perspective of the Palestinians, there is virtually nothing to separate Gantz and Netanyahu.

Unless Likud and Blue and White form a grand alliance, then Israel is stuck in a political quagmire. However, appearances can be deceptive. What is clear is that the political wind is blowing

towards Zionist religious orthodoxy and against secularism - which is what Blue and White represents.

Historically Zionism saw itself as a secular movement and indeed it was a political reaction to anti-Semitism, albeit of a special kind. The early Zionist leaders were atheists, but secular Zionism, with its focus on Palestine as the land of colonisation (although Theodor Herzl had suggested Argentina as an alternative), had its Achilles heel. These atheistic Zionists - Ben Gurion, Golda Meir, Moshe Sharett, etc - all justified their claim to Palestine through using the biblical declaration that god had given the land to the Jews. In other words, they based their right to colonise Palestine on the god whose existence they denied!

It is a contradiction that has woven a thread through all the lies and dissimulations of Zionism's propagandists about the Jewish 'right of return' to Palestine. To them the Old Testament was not so much a religious tract as a historical document. The myth of the Jewish 'return' to Palestine served as Zionism's land deeds. To the religious, however, the *Bible* was much more than mere myth: it was a guide to how a Jewish state might be constructed.

## Secularists v theocrats

Labour Zionism from its very beginning had struck up a Faustian pact with its religious counterparts. Israel today is paying the price in the

**Celebrating at Likud's HQ. There is no difference between Likud and Blue and White when it comes to the Palestinians. They are unwanted occupants of the land supposedly given to the Jews by god himself**

growth of Jewish messianism, the ideology that underpins settlement on the West Bank. With the capture of the occupied territories, Jewish messianism became a major political factor in Israeli and Zionist politics - the ideology of the settler right together with the movement to rebuild the third temple, animal sacrifices and all. Zionism contains within it the seeds of its own destruction. To Zionists of all parties, right or left, the Palestinians are a problem to be overcome, preferably by their 'transfer' out of the 'Jewish' state.

Ben Gurion was fond of quoting the *Bible* as providing a mandate for his desire to conquer the whole of Palestine. He was fond of referring to places by their biblical names. In 1967 it was the militarist wing of labour Zionism which gave support to Gush Emunim, the Bloc of the Faithful, which pressed the case for settling the occupied territories and creating a Greater Israel. Yitzhak Tabenkin, Yisrael Galili and Labor deputy prime minister Yigal Allon all supported the settlement of the occupied territories.

Today we are seeing the unfolding of this historic tendency. There is no difference worthy of the name between Blue and White and Likud in terms of their attitude to the Palestinians. Gantz, who was responsible, as chief of staff, for the bombing of Gaza in 2014, is a major war criminal in his own right. Moshe Ya'alon, one of its leaders, is a former Likud defence minister. He threatened to bomb

Lebanon out of existence and spoke of the Palestinians as a "cancerous manifestation". Gabi Ashkenazi was the chief of staff before Gantz, while the fourth leader is former TV presenter Yair Lapid, leader of the 'centrist' (in Israeli terms) Yesh Atid.

During the April 2019 election campaign, Gantz distributed a video which boasted that "parts of Gaza were sent back to the Stone Age" - a reference to "Black Friday" in 2014, when the Israel Defense Forces implemented the 'Hannibal protocol', in which it simply razed to the ground whole districts.

What Blue and White represents is that section of Israeli Jews which considers itself secular: ie, they do not want to be told that they cannot shop or travel by public transport on Saturday or that women should sit separately from men on a bus. They have no problem with the occupation or discrimination against Israel's own Palestinians, but resent religious interference in their own lives. To secular Israelis being Jewish is a national/racial affiliation, not a question of religion.

The problem for Israel's secular racists is that, if a 'Jewish state' is to mean anything, then someone has to define who is part of the settler population, the *Herrenvolk*, and who is part of the colonised, the *Untermenschen*. For this purpose you need a rabbinical caste to give their *hechsher*, their kosher stamp of approval. To have a Jewish state you

# What we fight for

have to be sure of who is a Jew, and only the rabbis can guarantee that the state remains racially and ethnically pure. Historically this has meant that all 'personal' matters - ie, who is Jewish - has been left to the Israeli rabbinate.

The question of who constitutes the *Herrenvolk* is a problem for all racially supremacist societies. Nazi Germany agonised over who is a Jew. It had a 'mixed-race' category of *Mischlinge* (half- and quarter-Jews), which caused it all sorts of agonies. To the end it could not decide what to do with them (as a result most survived). South Africa also had similar problems in deciding who was and was not white.

The rule of the rabbis has presented a dilemma for Yisrael Beiteinu - the party that represents the one million Russian Jews who came to Israel in the 1980s. Hundreds of thousands of them are of dubious Jewish origin. They did not practise Judaism in Russia and many of them married non-Jews. Although they qualified as Jewish when it came to immigration, where the definition of being a Jew includes the partner of a Jew or their siblings, the criteria set by the rabbis is much stricter. Your mother has to be Jewish. Converts other than those who become orthodox are not recognised as Jews, which is why Israel has a large 'mixed race' category of half-Jews. Without the approval of the rabbis you cannot get married or be buried in consecrated ground. For most of the time these things do not matter, but, when it comes to getting married or whether one's children are considered Jewish, then the question of who is a Jew surfaces and causes much agony.

This is what lies behind the refusal of Avigdor Lieberman - a far-right settler thug and former defence minister, who is leader of Yisrael Beiteinu - to form an alliance with Netanyahu and the religious parties. While this is portrayed as a conflict of personalities, what is really at stake is a secular Jewish population which does not wish to see Israel turned into a theocracy. They are at one with the religious Zionists in seeing the Arabs as the enemy, however. Lieberman is an ardent racist who has spoken of drowning thousands of Palestinians in the Dead Sea and who considers Israel's Arab population to be a "fifth column".<sup>1</sup>

## Winners and losers

A coalition that made major gains is the Joint List, consisting of the Communist Party, Hadash, the nationalist Balad and Ta'al parties and the United Arab List. In April 2019 they split into two, but before the latest elections they reunited and today they have gone from 13 to 15 projected seats - possibly even 16. The Joint List will be the third largest bloc in the

Knesset. However, the number of seats they pick up is immaterial. Both major Zionist parties have made it clear that they will not form an alliance with the Joint List or Arab parties of any type.

It has been an unwritten rule of Zionist politics since Israel's foundations that no government should rest on Arab support. Indeed it was the fatal mistake of prime minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1992, the last time that the Israeli Labor Party came near to an outright victory, to rely on the votes of Arab parties to form an administration.

There are those who proclaim that Israel is a democratic state based on the fact that it has nominally free and fair elections. This is an illusion. Leave aside Likud and Netanyahu's attempts at Arab voter suppression. In 2019 Likud joined the fascist NGO, Im Tirtzu, in obtaining an injunction preventing the campaign group, Zazim, from bussing 15,000 Arabs from the Negev to polling stations. Half the Arab villages in the Negev are 'unrecognised', which means there are no polling stations in them, even though their residents are Israeli citizens (theoretically anyway).

Any half-democratic state would say that polling stations are situated where people live, regardless of the 'legality' of their abode. But judge Hanan Melcer was happy to issue an injunction preventing the Arabs of the Negev from being able to vote. The ostensible reason for the injunction is a 2017 law preventing foreign interference in an election. Because Zazim is heavily funded by the US-based New Jewish Agenda, this counted as 'interference'. Thus the racism of Zionism permeates its election system in keeping Arab votes as low as possible. The idea that all Arab voters should be able to vote was probably considered a heresy by Melcer.

Israel is an ethno-nationalist state and therefore most Jews vote for Jewish/Zionist parties, although an increasing number are now voting for the Joint List. But in general voting is based on ethnic, not class, lines. Class politics plays little or no part in Israeli elections. Netanyahu's main card was to portray his opponents as needing to rely on Arab votes to form a government - the unspoken message being, of course, that Gantz could not be trusted not to sell the Jews out to the Arabs.

The major loser in the election is labour Zionism. Prior to April 2019

the Israeli Labor Party, in alliance with Tzipi Livni's Hatnuah, had 24 seats in the Knesset. Within the space of a year this has gone down to seven (possibly six, depending on the final returns). From 1949 to 1977 the ILP formed every government in Israel. In 1949, together with the leftwing Mapam, it won 65 out of the 120 seats, though David Ben-Gurion preferred the religious Zionists as partners in government rather than a party that had illusions in the Soviet Union.

The last time that the ILP came close to an outright majority was in 1992, when it picked up 44 seats, together with the 12 of the social democratic Meretz party. In 2017 the ILP elected Avi Gabbay who had been a minister from 2015 to 2016 under Netanyahu. His previous job had been CEO of Israel's Bezeq telecommunications monopoly. Gabbay declared that the settlement blocks would not be moved under a Labor government. He also supported Netanyahu's attempt to forcibly deport all black African refugees from Israel for the 'crime' of not being Jewish.

Gabbay rejected any idea of joining a coalition with the Joint List: "We have nothing in common with them." As Israel's *+972 Magazine* reported, this "absolute rejection of partnering with Arab parties ruffled feathers even within his own party".<sup>2</sup> When Labor's only Arab MK, Zuheir Bahlul, announced he would not attend the Knesset's celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, Gabbay threatened that Bahlul "won't sit in the next Knesset session." He kept his promise, but lost 18 seats in the process!

As *Ha'aretz* declared regarding his hostility to African refugees, "Avi Gabbay's odious attempts to include non-traditional Labor voters alienate him from the values that justify a legitimate opposition in the first place."<sup>3</sup> This was to prove prophetic. Gabbay then proceeded to break up the alliance with Tzipi Livni, leader of the Hatnuah faction of the Zionist Union, who was sitting besides him, on prime-time television. He had not even bothered to tell her beforehand.

Come the elections in April 2019, the ILP crashed to just six seats. To prove that this was no fluke, the same result was achieved last September. Gabbay had stripped away any reason for progressive Israelis to vote Labor. If all you wanted to do was remove Netanyahu then you may as well have voted for Blue and White.

Meretz was also going through its own travails. Formed in 1992 out of Mapam, Ratz (a civil rights party) and the centrist Shinui, it declined from 12 seats at its peak to just four in the April 2019 elections. Even worse: but for

the votes of some 40,000 Arabs, Meretz would have failed to enter the Knesset. In September last year, the Democratic Union - into which Meretz had merged - obtained 26%.

In order to keep the Arab parties out of the Knesset, Avigdor Lieberman had proposed raising the threshold for representation from 2% to 3.25%. Meretz barely made it. For the September 2019 elections Meretz formed a wholly opportunistic alliance, the Democratic Front, with Ehud Barak, the former prime minister, in the hope of gaining more rightwing Jewish votes and not having to rely on Arabs. But it ended up with just five seats. For this election, to be on the safe side, Meretz merged again, this time with the ILP and the centrist Geshet. The result is that it appears to have gained just seven seats (possibly six, when all results are in).

As Anshel Pfeffer caustically observes in *Ha'aretz*, the last time the Labor Party (previously called Mapai) united with Mapam, it was in January 1969 to form the Israeli Labor Alignment.<sup>4</sup> For the only time in Israeli history one party had an absolute majority in the Knesset (63 seats). In the October 1969 election under Golda Meir it fell back to 56 seats - more than enough to form a coalition government. Compare that to today's pitiful seven (six?). Quite simply, labour Zionism has no role today other than acting as propagandists for Netanyahu abroad.

Labour Zionism today is an anachronism. Once the companies owned by 'trade union', Histadrut, were the second largest employers after the state itself. Today there is no labour Zionist economy, as Histadrut's companies were privatised in the early 1990s. The health service, Kupat Cholim, was taken out of its hands and Israel is now one of the most unequal societies in the world. The lip-service paid to social equality has long been dispensed with and the term 'leftist' is an insult in Israel. As the ILP has moved further and further to the right, it has all but ensured its own extinction. This election marks one more stage in the decline and disappearance of labour Zionism.

The orthodox Jewish parties, Shas and United Torah Judaism, have retained the same number of seats (16) and the far-right settler party, Yamina, has declined from seven to a probable six. What is, however, most noticeable about this election is those who did not vote. Five million Palestinians under occupation have no say whatsoever about who governs them, whilst the all-Jewish settlements, established on stolen Palestinian land, and which sit cheek by jowl with them, take part in the elections. The practice of separating the indigenous population from the settlers and only according political rights to the latter was what was called apartheid in South Africa. However, to racist Labour politicians such as Emily Thornberry, this is classed as 'Jewish self-determination'.

But then you can hardly have a Jewish state if the majority of its citizens are not even Jews. Just as an Aryan state was difficult to achieve with the presence of non-Aryans! ●

## Notes

1. www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-lieberman-goes-after-arab-joint-list-they-are-a-fifth-column-1.8061036.
2. www.972mag.com/explained-why-many-on-the-left-are-furious-at-new-labor-leader-avi-gabbay.
3. www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/labor-party-support-of-deporting-asylum-seekers-cheapens-the-israeli-opposition-1.5467572.
4. www.haaretz.com/israel-news/elections/premium-with-the-labor-meretz-merger-the-party-that-founded-israel-may-be-over-1.8399043.

■ 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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Trump's 'deal of the century' gives the green light for yet more annexations

# weekly worker

**This must be a  
fight between  
class and  
class**

## Biggest possible majority needed

Eddie Ford argues that strike action will pit postal workers not only against Royal Mail bosses, but against a union-smashing government too. Mass solidarity is vital if victory is to be won

**T**his week the Communication Workers Union began a national ballot of its 110,000 members over industrial action, the process closing on March 17. In a statement, the CWU condemned a campaign of “management propaganda, an insulting so-called ‘pay offer’ and impositions of drastic changes without agreement” - a reference to Royal Mail’s failed bid to avert the strike by offering postal workers a pathetic 6% pay rise over three years.

Of course, it would be more accurate to say *reballot*, as in November 97% voted for strike action on a 76% turnout. A pretty convincing mandate, you would think, compared - for example - to the 51.89% on a 72.21% turnout who voted ‘leave’ in the Brexit referendum or the 43.6% on a 67.3% turnout who voted for Boris Johnson’s Tories in the general election. And it far surpassed the legal threshold imposed by the 2016 Trade Union Act. But, no, it was not good enough for the mail bosses or the Tories - with a high court injunction putting the kibosh on the strike. Apparently, the CWU had engaged in a “a form of subversion of the ballot process” - by which the courts meant that some individual union members had filmed themselves voting for strike action in the actual sorting office, even if the law says you are only allowed to do so at home, whilst opening the bills and watching the BBC telling you to be sensible.

In reality, Royal Mail was panicking because the strike action would have taken place at the busiest time of the year - not just because of the pre-Christmas period, but also the general election campaign. Hence the intervention of the courts, coming to the aid of the bosses - the same old story. Tellingly, Royal Mail’s entire case was on the witness statement of *one* single manager - no CWU members, needless to say, had complained about “improper interference” with the ballot. But their voice counts for nothing in the judicial system. One manager, one vote.

For all of the bosses’ shenanigans and the genuinely “improper interference” of the courts, there is little doubt that the reballot will deliver another thumping majority against the oppressive management practised by Royal Mail’s chief executive, Rico Back - a German businessman, despite the name. Interestingly, Back was a founding member and managing director of German Parcel, bought in 1999 by Royal Mail and subsequently rebranded as General Logistics Systems (GLS) - Royal Mail’s European subsidiary. He receives £790,000 annually, plus up to £1.3 million in bonuses - not forgetting the £6 million ‘golden hello’. Clearly he is someone who will understand the ordinary concerns of postal workers, struggling to cope with their workload.

Anyway, Back and his colleagues are determined to press ahead with their assets-stripping plans to create a separate parcel company and abandon its tiresome obligation to



**CWU will need more than militancy**

deliver letters six days a week - in that way they can run down the postal service and go for gold. All this could lead to a possible 40,000 job losses and further casualisation. Of course, the remaining workforce will have to work even harder - the bosses wanting, 1984-style, to use postal workers’ hand-held delivery devices to monitor everything they do, or even fit Amazon-like tags or bracelets that vibrate to nudge the workers in a different direction.<sup>1</sup> In other words, treating the workforce as virtual robots - another lesson in the liberating wonders of technology under capitalism. Given that Royal Mail wants to bring in automated parcel-sorting hubs and delivery schedules, maybe it should rename itself Robotic Mail.

Naturally, management’s proposals would mean a further deterioration in the service across the entire country - more frustrations for you and me - but that is an insignificant consideration.

After all, Royal Mail is a capitalist firm that has to make profits - it was privatised in 2013 allegedly to make things ‘more efficient’, Vince Cable the business secretary arguing at the time that this was the only way to make it sustainable. The company has 16 major competitors in the delivery market, including Amazon (which now handles over one in 10 parcel deliveries), Hermes, Yodel, TNT, DPD, UPS, etc.

To this end, Royal Mail in February posted a video on Twitter which makes you weep in sympathy. Presented by a female actor, it told us that “there is no time to waste: our competitors are circling” - these predators “aim to take business away from us because of the industrial relations issue”. The company, we learn, will not be able to reduce the working week by another hour “at this time”, because every hour reduction costs the business £100 million - sorry, folks. But, looking earnestly into the camera,

she continued: “We want to see - no promises - how in the future we might grant more of the shorter working week” and invest £1.8 billion more to “turn around” Royal Mail, which is “your business”. Smile, pan out, end video.

A fundamental part of the company’s “turn around” strategy is to renege on the so-called ‘four pillars’ agreement with the CWU, reached in January 2018. Essentially, this calls for a decent pension in retirement, a ‘redesign’ of the company’s methods, an extension of current agreements and a shorter working week from 39 to 35 hours by 2022, “subject to productivity improvements”. Naturally, for a 21st century boss like Rico Back, such an arrangement represents unacceptable inroads into profits.

Boris Johnson would dearly love to cripple the CWU, which would be a major scalp - the government also has the RMT, Aslef and the TSSA in

its sights. In fact, the Tories explicitly said so in their manifesto last year - targeting the rail unions for the initial attack in an effort to prevent all-out strikes. Train operators and unions under ‘minimum service agreements’ (MASs) would set in advance the number and nature of staff who would remain at work during any strike. In the absence of an MSA, strike action would be unlawful.

The Tories have not yet stated what that proportion could be - although they have said that similar measures in other European countries, such as Belgium, France, Italy and Spain, have set the mark at between a fifth and third of regular services. Grant Shapps, the transport secretary, has righteously remarked that rail strikes “damage the economy” and “force people to use less sustainable means of transport” - nicely playing the green card, albeit totally hypocritically. Quite rightly, Mick Cash, the RMT’s general secretary, has pointed out that banning strikes is “the hallmark of the rightwing junta” - whilst Mick Whelan of Aslef remarked that the proposed legislation was an attempt to introduce a form of “slavery and forced labour”, adding that Boris Johnson “only acts on behalf of the boss class in Britain”. Never a truer word said.

Clearly, solidarity with the postal workers is absolutely vital - of the sort previously outlined in this paper. Like the TUC calling an emergency conference to rally practical support from the whole trade union movement, whilst raising money to support the strikers - maybe even calling a national day of action in support of the CWU. Or Unite drivers refuse to cross picket lines at sorting offices. And solidarity demonstrations of many thousands, given that the law limits pickets to just six people, with the aim of reducing or eliminating scabbing, especially from agency workers and other delivery companies. We must develop imaginative ways to reach out to, and organise, those in the ‘gig economy’ and on zero-hour contracts - that must include the casuals already working in Royal Mail. These are the kinds of measures that militants in the CWU should be agitating for ●

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### Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/jan/31/amazon-warehouse-wristband-tracking.

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