

# weekly **worker**



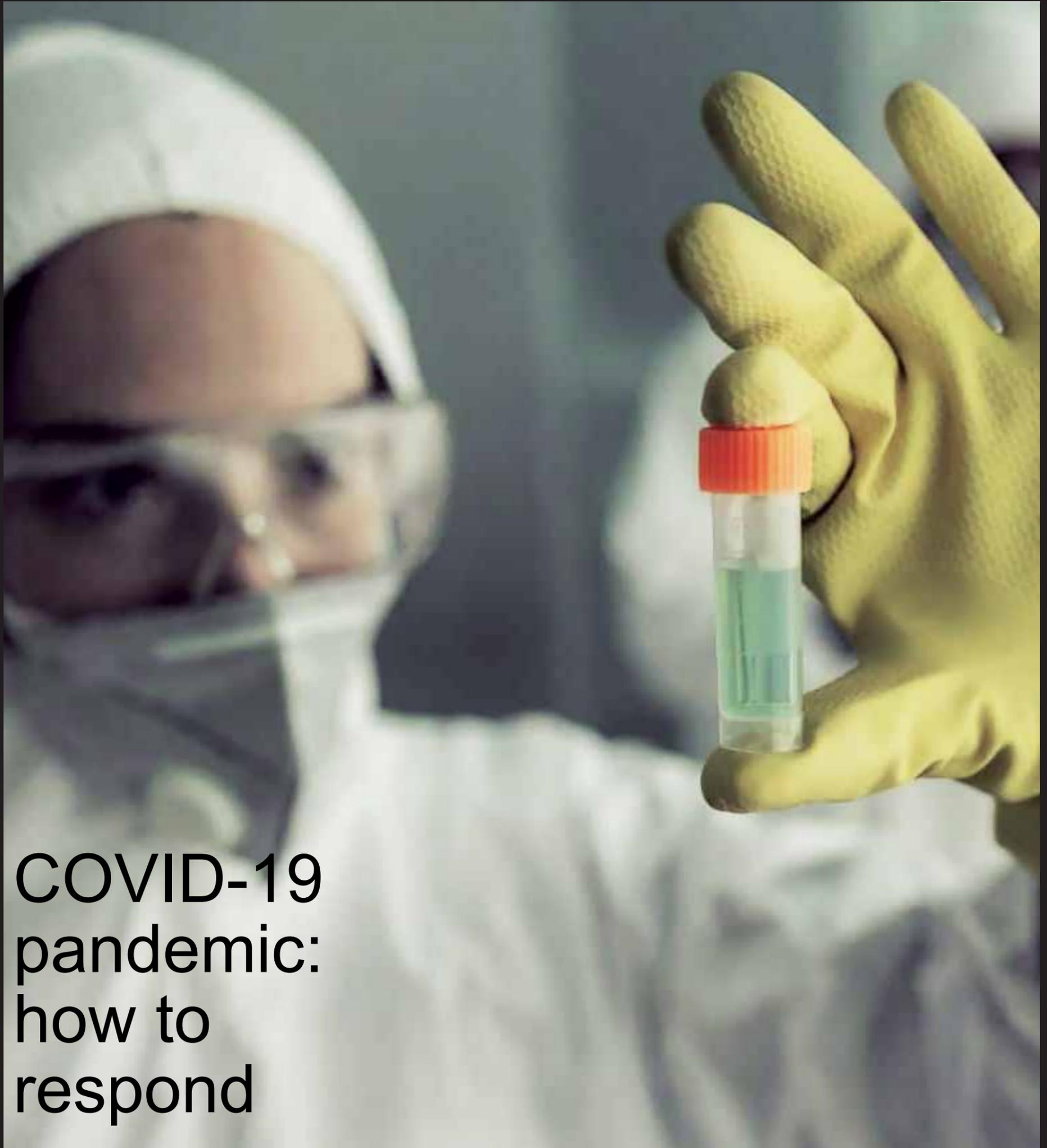
**Bernie Sanders might well be set to lose, but he's still running**

- Letters and debate
- CPGB aggregate
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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# LETTERS



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

## Great split

I have to admit at being amused by the factional fallout within Socialist Fight between Gerry Downing and Ian Donovan, but am also kicking myself for not making use of a previous opportunity.

I had a letter published in March 2018 calling out Downing and Donovan for being genuine anti-Semites, for trying to cover this with their general obsessions with Jews, Zionists, Nazis and Israel, and for deliberately mixing these labels up to try and make their racism a little more concealed.

I wish at the time I had put in writing my prediction that in due course these two would inevitably fall out and would start to take verbal lumps out of each other and rip each other to shreds. We now have the 'great split' within Socialist Fight, and Downing and Donovan on opposite sides, played out in public and in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*. I can see what excited the crowds in the ancient Roman Colosseum...

I had assumed that Socialist Fight had consisted of just two individuals, but I see in the wider press that Downing tried to tip the internal scales by attempting to recruit his daughter and we have Donovan's admission (Letters, March 5) that three individuals by raising both hands managed to outvote all the other members of Socialist Fight on some "critical" issue of principle. So, more than two, but somewhat less than double figures.

We are now treated to the 'great debate' about which is the 'real' Socialist Fight, which one has expelled whom. This is an absolute absurdity, a complete farce. I am reminded of an old bad-taste joke about Richard Nixon, who allegedly required an arse transplant, but unfortunately the arse rejected him. It seems Donovan and Downing have had a personal falling out and are rejecting each other. This was entirely predictable - it goes with the poisonous territory of micro-Trotskyite sects fracturing, dividing and subdividing and ultimately approaching point zero net total mass.

Donovan in the same letter quotes Andrei Vyshinsky in his public prosecutor role on the so-called Moscow Trials in the 1930s saying: "I demand that the dogs gone mad should be shot - every last one of them."

Mm ... I couldn't possible comment ... apart from saying I am very happy for Donovan to describe himself and be described as the "Trotskyist Faction". Genuine Trotskyists will, however, be horrified ...

**Andrew Northall**  
Kettering

## Pointless

Seeing as Ian Donovan has chosen to traduce me in public, and seeing as the *Weekly Worker* for some unfathomable reason chose to publish this screed, it seems I have no choice but to make some sort of reply.

Donovan's argument is thoroughly dishonest. For example, he claims that the allegations made of Atzmon's sympathy for fascism come from Dave Rich and the Community Security Trust. And, while it is true that an article by Rich was brought to bear, it is by no means true that Rich's view, or

the evidence he uses to support that view, is unique to him. In fact it is an opinion widely held, the material is widely cited and Rich's piece was merely useful for bringing it altogether.

Indeed, the very reason the piece was resorted to was because Donovan claimed to be wholly unaware that Rich or anyone anywhere thought Gilad Atzmon was a fascist sympathiser. When it was pointed out to him, by myself and others, that Atzmon's topic of argument, style of argument and even sometimes jargon are directly reminiscent of both the Alt Right that we have been dealing these past few years and even Mussolini himself, Ian accused us of imagining things. When supporting evidence is produced, he reverses course immediately and now claims not that we are jumping at shadows, but that we are the manipulated pawns of some nefarious agency.

Ian's accusation of my supposed "Islamophobia" follows a similarly tortuous route. It relies on his affected outrage that I refused to accept the infamous forgery, *The protocols of the elders of Zion*, as a legitimate source on the basis that some Islamic figures had done so. Any criticism, or even mere refusal to approve, of such figures is in Donovan's eyes a betrayal of the Palestinians and active collaboration with Israeli apartheid. He demands that the most vile anti-Semitism be embraced in order to stand in solidarity with the victims of the Israeli blockade. This is an absurd and fatuous proposition, which I am pleased to reject.

Donovan's more direct allegations rely on a similarly imaginative reinterpretation of reality. The point I in fact made was that Atzmon cannot be excused from responsibility for the Nazi lies he spreads, and neither would you or I if we did the same. The defence offered for Atzmon is that his own heritage excuses him responsibility of his role in initiating stochastic terrorism, but it does not. No appeal to identity exempts you from responsibility for the propagation of the very racist lies that are deployed to justify racist assaults. If you make it your business to validate racist myths that portray other groups as malevolent enemies, then you cannot claim innocence when people act against the enemies you have agreed exist and pointed them towards.

Donovan's defence of Atzmon here is doubly fraudulent, because it is not only the fact of Atzmon's enthusiasm for classic anti-Semitic conspiracy theories alone that is indicative of his embrace of fascism, as he attempts to imply. Donovan knows perfectly well that Atzmon has explicitly approved of fascism by name, and has paraphrased Mussolini to boot, that he consorts with luminaries of the racist right, and that he writes for far-right publications and is openly embraced by them in turn. Yet Donovan would have us believe that it is so mysterious that anyone could possibly think that Atzmon was a fascist sympathiser just because he says he is, and fascists say he is, that only a racist mind could think so. Indeed, Donovan invites us to consider Atzmon's anti-Semitism as evidence in defence against the charge of being a fascist sympathiser. How unfair it would be if a poor innocent anti-Semite was tarred as being a fascist without cause. Despite the fact there is in fact cause, as he well knows.

This tiresome regression

into who said what and when is unseemly, and frankly none of this dispute should be going on in your publication. None of Donovan's arguments are made in good faith, because he cannot defend his central thesis. Every argument must be an elaborate diversion, digression, 'whataboutism', well poisoning, or artfully rationalised slander. Every argument requires that we forget every other argument he made - a classic gish gallop.

Donovan declares he has no wish to associate with me, and I wholeheartedly reciprocate. Relations between the 'factions' are clearly irreparable, so why won't he just go? Why is he fighting so hard to remain associated with people he now affects to deem "race-baiting Islamophobes"? The whole thing smacks of territoriality rather than principle. The differences are not reconcilable, there is no prospect of collaboration whatever, the very discussion is pointless. It should not go on in these pages or anywhere else.

**Gareth Martin**  
Socialist Fight

## I wonder why

So Ian Donovan has gotten the boot from yet another left organisation over his anti-Semitism, and once again he's certain he is the utterly innocent victim of a scandalous conspiracy (the maudlin, self-exonerating minutiae of which he is only too happy to bore you to death with).

This differentiates it, one supposes, from his having gotten the boot from Left Unity for his anti-Semitism despite his being an utterly innocent victim of a scandalous conspiracy (the maudlin, self-exonerating minutiae of which he is only too happy to bore you to death with), and also from Labour Against the Witchhunt's decision to give Socialist Fight the heave over his anti-Semitism, despite him being an utterly innocent victim of a scandalous conspiracy (the maudlin, self-exonerating minutiae of which he is only too happy to bore you to death with).

It seems to happen to him a lot. If only there were a simple, consistent explanation for why nearly everyone on the left Ian Donovan allies with sooner or later concludes he's an anti-Semite.

**Sven Golly**  
email

## Look outwards!

Comrades Gerald Downing and Ian Donovan - both as individuals and as representatives of the two sides within that *sawdust-and-sinew-strewn* dog-pit otherwise known as Socialist Fight - might want to consider this. Whilst they've all been committing intellect, time and energy to tearing lumps out of each other over their densely developed attitudes and positions, the world at large has been continuing to spew its outrages and atrocities without interruption - needless to say, with the working class of each and every capitalist country as the primary sufferers or victims. That being the self-same global working class for which Marxists - even those within ultra-micro-sects such as Socialist Fight - purport to be both current-times champions and emissaries of a wonderful *futurescape*.

No doubt it could be countered that 'polemical debate', the sometimes fierce hammering out of differences and comprehensions between those engaged on the revolutionary left, is mere grist to the mill for achieving any progress in ideas, and thereby the

securing of valuable and vibrant organizational programmes. But have those particular comrades lost all sense of proportion, not to mention any notions of simple common sense? Do they have no concept of what the effect of their spectacle will be upon any potential new supporters, or even upon more *seasoned* participants on the hard left? A spectacle of monomania, chronic introversion, bizarrely inflated self-importance, involving self-mutilation and probable self-destruction - indeed, of utter pointlessness: nothing whatsoever more nor anything less.

Comrades within Socialist Fight, together with the wider readership of the *Weekly Worker*, could easily choose to raise their eyes and thereby their ambitions above such levels. In doing so, I can recommend the following sort of thing - not only as an immediate antidote, but as a longer-term remedy: 'Female filmmakers' on *BBC introducing arts* available on the BBC iPlayer.

The short films featured in this item originate from young and dynamic minds - a next UK generation to be investigating pathways for creativity, enlightenment and liberty outside the mainstream of capitalist confines. That's to say, attempts of theirs at disobeying the mythologies, fairy tales and lullabies that are peddled. In any event, these are the youthful co-citizens 21st-century Marxism should be facing out towards in its efforts and policies and political behaviours.

After all, as prominent culturally and aesthetically and even ethically aware elements within society, any upcoming generation of thinkers and creators constitute important building blocks for that communistic future we're working towards; and then, to an almost infinite degree, that everyone will benefit from.

**Bruno Kretzschmar**  
email

## Back-seat driver?

As a former member of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, I was very interested in the news in *The Socialist* (March 11) that Hannah Sell has become the new general secretary. Veteran Trotskyist Peter Taaffe will remain on the executive committee and will take up the new position of political secretary.

Whilst the ageing comrade Taaffe is now officially taking a back seat, it remains to be seen if in reality he will still be in charge.

**John Smith**  
Cambridgeshire

## English nat

Steve Freeman is a one-trick pony (Letters March 5). He attacks Labour Party Marxists for *not* supporting the right of self-determination for Scotland and Wales. It is certainly true that this demand does not feature anywhere in the programme presented to the founding conference of the Left Labour Alliance in Sheffield. But then nor do women's rights or the fight against austerity.

On the other hand, it is a fact that John Bridge did explicitly raise this demand in a short speech, which defended the motion opposing Scottish independence moved by Matthew Jones. True, that was not mentioned in the *Weekly Worker* report. But, on the other hand, comrade Freeman was there - he was a visitor at the conference.

However, comrade Freeman now opposes the Marxist perspective of a federal republic of England,

Scotland and Wales, in which Scotland and Wales have the right to self-determination. Instead he supports a *separate* Scotland, a *separate* Wales and a *separate* England.

Apparently, this break-up of Britain would be progressive. Rather like the United Kingdom leaving the European Union.

In all probability such an outcome would result in a carnival of reaction, as workers are divided along petty nationalist lines.

Surely the task of Marxists is to warn against that possibility and seek the maximum unity of the working class that objective circumstances permit.

**Bob Smart**  
Cwmbach, Wales

## Budget shambles

The March 11 budget was a real opportunity to reach out to the poor and the vulnerable, whilst providing the funds to cope with the coronavirus.

In reality, it did neither: it does nothing to lessen the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, and it is limited in terms of provision to deal with the threatened pandemic. In his budget speech, Rishi Sunak said, "We will get through this together", referring to coronavirus. While the Tories said we are all in this together, when referring to austerity, the reality has been so different, with the wealthy actually getting richer, as the gap between the rich and the poor has considerably widened.

The measures announced to alleviate the suffering caused by coronavirus will only help those in permanent work. Those on universal credit, zero-hours and temporary contracts will lose out if they have to take time off work, as, unlike salaried staff, they will not get paid their normal wage for up to six months. They will only get sick pay of £94.25 a week if self-isolating - and even then you have to be earning at least £118 a week to qualify for it.

There were no fundamental changes to universal credit announced in the budget, despite its failings. The minimum five-week delay in receiving your first payment remains. This delay, which can be for several months, is the biggest single link between UC and increased poverty, evidenced by the massive increase in the use of food banks, rent arrears and evictions. Removing the income floor for UC, announced by Sunak, whilst being positive, will only benefit self-employed workers - and then only if you are gainfully self-employed and your business has been running for more than 12 months.

There is nothing in this budget to help local councils like Warwickshire or Rugby provide improved public services, let alone reverse some of the cuts Tory austerity policies have forced them to make. Youth clubs, care homes and libraries will remain closed. People in rural areas will remain without a bus service.

The situation could get even worse for working class people. The emergency £30 billion package that Sunak announced suggests that the treasury is preparing for the possibility of a recession - he actually announced that growth had been revised down. It is always the poorest and most vulnerable who suffer the most in such an economic downturn, and this budget does nothing at all to address that.

**Pete McLaren**  
Rugby Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

## AGGREGATE

# Put principle first

We remain united despite a resignation. Peter Manson reports

Readers may be aware that the CPGB has recently had to deal with a heated dispute, following the resignation of a comrade in a disagreement over the engagement of Labour Party Marxists members in the newly founded Labour Left Alliance. This was discussed - and hopefully resolved - at the March 7 aggregate meeting of comrades from both the CPGB and LPM.

However, I am sure readers will understand if I do not go into too much detail about the exact nature of the dispute. With an ongoing witch-hunt against the left, comrades who openly identify themselves as LPM supporters will be targeted by Labour's right-dominated bureaucracy. So I will avoid saying anything that might facilitate such identification.

It was certainly promising that the comrade who resigned accepted our invitation to attend the aggregate, in an effort to end what was largely a misunderstanding - although, as described below, there are also, we believe, underlying political differences with the comrade. Nevertheless, the meeting agreed unanimously to offer her "the opportunity to withdraw her resignation and continue her membership of the CPGB without penalty".

The aggregate began with an opening from the chair of the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee, Jack Conrad, who began his speech with his take on the nature of the LLA, following its February 22 founding conference. Comrade Conrad stated that the conference had failed to prioritise a discussion on basic principles and instead the conference arrangements committee tried to find commonalities between the alternative - and markedly different - constitutions being proposed. These included one that basically aimed to equip the LLA with a Marxist outlook, which received around 30% support from delegates. However, despite the failure of LPM comrades to win majority support, he stressed that they were correct to state they had no intention of abandoning the LLA. It was a site for struggle, in which the battle to transform the Labour Party could be waged.

Turning to the dispute with the comrade in question, he outlined the background, which had centred on the particular positions that we should advocate in relation to the LLA. The comrade had been involved in drafting a constitution to be put to the LLA conference several months earlier, but the PCC only seriously studied it four or five weeks before the conference. Comrade Conrad admitted that we had been remiss on that question, but declared that this first constitution was hardly something the CPGB should support: it basically advocated uniting the Labour left *as it is*, rather than attempting to arm it with a Marxist programme.

He said that the comrade seemed to have been won round to the PCC position, but then a row broke out over a motion supported by LPM that somehow had not appeared on the LLA website, despite having been ready for submission well before the deadline. The row was over whether that omission should be challenged by LPM, and led to the comrade threatening to resign if it was.

Comrade Conrad stated categorically that laying down such an ultimatum was not a healthy way for comrades to resolve disputes. He admitted having used the word 'sabotage' in relation to the comrade's behaviour, but stated that the PCC had no intention of 'dumping on' her, as she subsequently alleged. It was perfectly legitimate to criticise comrades. However, he was more than pleased to see her in the room. He proposed a motion on behalf of the PCC, which combined an outline of our political approach towards

Labour and the LLA with criticisms of the comrade who had resigned and her behaviour.

Next to speak was William Sarsfield, who presented a motion on behalf of several comrades, who believed that the resigned member had been badly treated by the PCC. It urged the leadership to "distance itself from claims" that her behaviour was "a result of conscious sabotage". As well as calling on the PCC to offer the comrade "the opportunity to withdraw her resignation", it also stated that the PCC should "organise an educational event, where the issues of method, theory and concrete political tactics" relating to Labour could be clarified.

Comrade Sarsfield stated that the notion that the comrade had consciously sabotaged the work of the CPGB was "absolutely perverse". He thought that the problem lay in the fact that decisions relating to LPM work had not been properly recorded.

At this point the 'former member' was invited to speak. She confirmed that before the row she had been won round to the overall approach of the PCC to the LLA and was actually going to write an article for the *Weekly Worker*, stating why the PCC's preferred motion should be supported. However, she thought that the PCC's insistence on opposing a constitution that differed from the PCC's preferred version by only two words was "stupid, sectarian, mad".

She finished by making an interesting point about the extent to which LPM should be involved in the leadership of groups like the LLA, where the majority share politics that are well to our right. She said that the problem would only arise if Marxists stopped fighting for their own views and she would be totally against that.

Next up was Maciej Brzozowski, who proposed an amendment to the motion moved by comrade Sarsfield, which read: "This aggregate does not believe that [comrade X] committed a conscious act of sabotage. It rejects any such implication or insinuation." He said that the motion which he wanted to amend was far preferable to the one moved by the PCC, which was "pompous and pedantic". However, he said he supported the current PCC members, who all worked conscientiously.

He was followed by Anne McShane, an associate member from Ireland who had also resigned, but then within days accepted that she had been wrong to do so and withdrew her resignation. She stated that comrade X had also been wrong to resign. But both sides had to admit their responsibility for the crisis, which was based on a "misunderstanding, not sabotage" - and now we need to "move on to the politics".

At this point comrade Conrad came back in to declare that he thought comrade Brzozowski's amendment should be accepted. But he was against that part of the motion which called for an "educational event." That sounded patronising and what was needed was the kind of debate that we were currently engaged in, not being lectured by some 'expert'. He repeated that he, like others, was open to criticism, and everyone should be able to accept criticism - after all, "no-one is indispensable".

He was followed by Bob Paul, who thought the whole affair revealed questions about our culture and the "management of comrades". The member who resigned had been part of the CPGB for over 20 years, but no-one from the PCC had telephoned her to try to persuade her she was wrong to quit. This sentiment was echoed by Sarah Stewart, but she added that she was now "heartened" by what comrade Conrad had said. However, Farzad Kamangar,

speaking from the chair, said members of the PCC have a collective responsibility and individual approaches would have caused further confusion. Farzad also doubted very much that picking up the phone to the departed comrade would have helped, judging by the kind of response from her to various emails.

Comrade Kamangar was followed by Ben Lewis, who, while stating that the whole affair had been handled "incredibly badly", agreed with comrade Conrad that there were "underlying political differences" that should not be overlooked. I spoke next and stated that I was delighted to see the comrade in question, who I hoped would soon be a member once again. However, I strongly criticised her behaviour prior to her resignation, although I thought the point she made about Marxists taking up leadership roles in organisations like the LLA was a useful one to discuss.

While Phil Kent's brief contribution was limited to calling the PCC's behaviour "bureaucratic, manipulative and arrogant", Stan Keable - a comrade expelled from Labour because of his association with LPM - was more thoughtful. He directly asked the departed member whether she would now withdraw her resignation - the fact that she had been accused of negative behaviour should not be the central question. After all, that "works both ways: you've accused us of some awful things" - including "wanting to push her out". He added that any agreement by her to rejoin should not be conditional on the PCC withdrawing certain statements. That had no bearing on the central principle: the fight for a Marxist party - if the CPGB had given up on that task it might be correct to resign in order to form an organisation prepared to take it on, but quitting because of a dispute over a motion was not serious politics.

A guest at the aggregate, Andy Hannah, said that maybe the comrade had made mistakes, but he reminded us of the valuable work she had done over the years. He was followed by Oliver Grant, who argued that the affair showed that political differences had arisen - "meetings like this are a great way to deal with them" (as opposed to 'educational events'). But resignations - or threats of them - were very damaging and should not be entertained over such questions.

However, showing that she did not agree with either comrade Grant or comrade Keable, the ex-member came back in to state categorically that if the PCC motion was accepted, then "I can't come back". And she declared that, as far as groups like the LLA were concerned, yes, we must fight for our politics, but not go over the top. We must "speak with normal voices", not "just shout".

In response to the debate, comrade Conrad stated that he and comrade Kamangar had decided to withdraw the PCC motion - although he stressed that this was not in response to any "ultimatum". They had taken into account all the views expressed and decided to elaborate upon the principles it contains at future aggregates and other forums.

With the PCC motion withdrawn, there was just the one moved by comrade Sarsfield. This was split into three parts, which were voted on separately. The first part, in its amended form, which rejected the notion of "conscious sabotage", was overwhelmingly supported, with just one member opposing it. Part two, restating that the comrade would be welcome to rejoin without penalty if she withdrew her resignation, was, as I have said, unanimously agreed, while part three, calling for an "educational event", was not carried after a tied vote ●

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## ACTION

### London Communist Forum

**Sunday March 15, 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 C, 'The bourgeoisie 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 17, 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: 'My life as a primate. Tracing the turns of anthropology'. Speaker: Volker Sommer. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [radicalanthropologygroup.org](http://radicalanthropologygroup.org).

### Striking back to defend workers' rights

**Saturday March 14, 11.30am to 4pm:** Rally with workshops, Friendship Cafe, Painswick Road, Gloucester GL4. Defend the right to strike, to protest and to organise. Speakers include Terry Pullinger, deputy general secretary, Communications Workers Union. Organised by Gloucester and District Trades Council: [www.facebook.com/Gloucester-and-District-Trades-Council-1806647526269583](http://www.facebook.com/Gloucester-and-District-Trades-Council-1806647526269583).

### Give Puma the boot

**Sunday March 15, 11am:** Protest outside Sports Direct, Haymarket Shopping Centre, Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1. Sportswear manufacturer Puma is the main sponsor of the Israel Football Association (IFA), which includes teams in Israel's illegal settlements on occupied Palestinian land.

Organised by Leicester Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.facebook.com/events/221444282235169](http://www.facebook.com/events/221444282235169).

### Capitalism, crisis and imperialism

**Tuesday March 17, 7pm:** First of four weekly classes, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London, EC1. Sorcha Foster focuses on Lenin's 'Imperialism' and its relevance today. Full course £17 (£10). Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/254](http://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/254).

### 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).

### March against racism

**Saturday March 21,** Demonstrations to mark UN anti-racism day, organised by Stand Up to Racism. **London,** 12 noon to 4pm: Assemble Portland Place, London W1. [www.facebook.com/events/518483265364312](http://www.facebook.com/events/518483265364312). **Glasgow,** 11am to 2pm: Assemble George Square, Glasgow G2. [www.facebook.com/events/1015960255413276](http://www.facebook.com/events/1015960255413276).

### Stand up to racism - stand up to Zionism!

**Saturday March 21, 10.30am:** Protest, George Square, Glasgow G2. Oppose the participation of the Zionist Confederation of Friends of Israel - Scotland (CoFIS), in the Glasgow Stand Up To Racism march. Organised by Zionism is Racism - Scotland Stand Up: [www.facebook.com/events/556925488263018](http://www.facebook.com/events/556925488263018).

### Gaza fights for freedom

**Saturday March 21, 2.45pm:** film screening, St Peter's Church, Church Street, Chalvey, Slough SL1. A riveting documentary on Gaza's great march of return by Abby Martin and a heroic team of Palestinian videographers. Entrance by free ticket. Organised by Slough Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.facebook.com/events/178162536822844](http://www.facebook.com/events/178162536822844).

### Silencing dissent: Israel's role

**Tuesday March 24, 7pm:** Public Meeting, Irish Cultural Centre, 5 Black's Road, Hammersmith, London W6. Speaker Chi-Chi Shi (War on Want) describes Israel's role in the global business of repression, the security state and surveillance. Admission by ticket, £3 (£1). Organised by West London Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.facebook.com/events/491486041513305](http://www.facebook.com/events/491486041513305).

### End the war on Yemen

**Thursday March 26, 5.30pm:** Protest, 10 Downing Street, London SW1. Halt the sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Organised by Arab Organisation for Human Rights in UK: [www.facebook.com/AOHR.CO.UK.EN](http://www.facebook.com/AOHR.CO.UK.EN).

### Spain's revolution against Franco

**Saturday March 28, 7pm:** Book talk, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London, N1. Author and participant Alan Woods describes the strike wave that brought down Franco, and how the 1970s revolution was betrayed by the leaders of the Spanish communist and socialist parties. Entrance £3 (£1). Organised by Housmans Bookshop: [housmans.com/events](http://housmans.com/events).

### Stopping the Poll Tax: 30 years on

**Tuesday March 31, 7pm:** Meeting, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London, N1. How a popular mass demonstration turned into a full-scale battle across the West End. Free entry. Organised by Autonomy Now: [autonomynow.noblogs.org](http://autonomynow.noblogs.org).

### 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.

## USA

# The great Bernie bust

It is now all but certain that Joe Biden will be the Democratic candidate, writes **Daniel Lazare**

**W**ell, that was fun, wasn't it? The Bernie Sanders boom captivated the global left. Everywhere else, social democrats seemed to be on the rocks. Britain's Labour Party was a shambles, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's France Insoumise was losing steam, while Syriza and Podemos were hardly more than memories of radical opportunities lost. Only in the United States did the story seem any different, thanks to Sanders' long march through the Democratic Party.

But that was before the 'Super Tuesday' cataclysm on March 3 and then 'mini-Tuesday' a week later, when six states voted, including the all-important Michigan. After losing 10 of 14 states in the first, Sanders needed a sharp rebound in the second to remain viable. He did not get it. He came in 16 points behind Joe Biden in Michigan, 25 points behind in Missouri, six points behind in Idaho, and a whopping 66 behind in Mississippi. Only in North Dakota and Washington state did he eke out victories by 6.1 and 0.2 points respectively.

Sanders will still have a sizable bloc of delegates going into the Democratic national convention in July. But since he has promised to rally around whoever gets the nomination, he will have no choice but to pay homage to the odious Biden on bended knee.

This is certainly a dramatic turnabout. Hillary Clinton messed up so badly in 2016 that even the most sceptical Marxists assumed that the nomination was Sanders' for the asking. But they proved to be wrong. What happened?

One possibility is that American exceptionalism turns out yet again to be nothing more than a myth and that any notion of the US left bucking international trends is a pipedream. Comparisons with Britain are striking. Jeremy Corbyn's landslide leadership victory in September 2015 presaged Sanders' dramatic breakthrough in the 2016 Michigan primary, while Corbyn's disastrous performance last December paved the way for the latest debacle.

But in another sense the Bernie bust shows that the US is exceptional after all - in a purely negative sense, that is. Not only is the American two-party system exceptionally old and suffocating, but it is exceptionally entrenched. In 1912, when Theodore Roosevelt bolted from the Republican Party to run as a Progressive, he was able to gain ballot access in all of the then 48 states. Today, the same feat would be impossible, thanks to sky-high registration requirements, designed to cripple upstart parties before they can even get off the ground.

Indeed, 1912 would be the last time that one of the two top vote-getters would be anyone other than a Republican or Democrat. (Roosevelt came in second behind Democrat Woodrow Wilson, while Republican William Howard Taft was third.) Since then, Americans have voted 'Repocratic' with depressing regularity. Since polls show overwhelming support for a third-party alternative, it is not because they want to, but because they effectively have no choice.

But the US system is not only restrictive, but exceptionally regulated. "Normally, democracies regard political parties as voluntary associations entitled to the usual



**Despite falling behind, Bernie Sanders says he will stay in the race and is looking forward to debates with Joe Biden**

rights of freedom of association," the social democratic website, Jacobin.com, observed in 2016. "But US state laws dictate not only a ballot-qualified party's nominating process, but also its leadership structure, leadership selection process and many of its internal rules..."<sup>1</sup> Rather than parties, as the rest of the world understands the term, the result is more akin to a couple of state-sponsored churches with intricate government-imposed rules concerning the selection of bishops and parish priests, weekly services, and so on.

It is a travesty of democracy every step of the way. Nonetheless, Sanders hoped to use a free and unbiased primary system to somehow leapfrog to a higher stage of development. He was wrong, not only because the party establishment turned against him at a crucial moment, but because primaries turn out to be shaped by moral assumptions that powerfully affect what voters say and do.

David Brooks, a *New York Times* columnist blessed with occasional moments of insight into America's unique political system, summed up the problem neatly in the wake of Super Tuesday. The primaries, he wrote, showed that:

*Democrats are not just a party; they're a community.* In my years of covering politics, I don't think I've ever seen anything like what happened in the 48 hours after South Carolina - millions of Democrats from all around the country, from many different demographics, turning as one and arriving at a common decision. It was like watching a flock of geese or a school of fish, seemingly leaderless, sensing some shift in conditions, sensing each other's intuitions, and smoothly shifting direction *en masse*. A community is more than the sum of its parts. It is a shared sensibility and a pattern of response.<sup>2</sup>

All those geese and fish call to mind Edmund Burke's famous description of the people as "thousands of great cattle, reposed beneath the shadow of the British oak", as they silently chew their cud. But Brooks is right: rather than rational and deliberative, political parties in America are indeed

leaderless mobs, held together not by a common programme and ideology, but by a shared sensibility. In the case of the Democrats, that means devotion to the tradition of Franklin D Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, and Martin Luther King junior, even though they stood for very different things. But anyone who dares point out that FDR refused to support an anti-lynching bill or that King opposed LBJ's war in Vietnam will be accused of failing to participate in the higher consciousness that the Democratic Party demands.

## Worst candidate

That is why the party leadership was able to turn the race around so neatly. The process began two days after Sanders' impressive 47% win in the Nevada primary, when house majority whip Jim Clyburn intervened on Biden's behalf. When CNN asked Clyburn what he was "hearing from the Democratic caucus in the house about having, potentially, Bernie Sanders, a democratic socialist, at the top of the ticket," he replied:

I was in Texas about three weeks ago ... I talked to the faith community down there, and they were very, very concerned about whether or not we'll have somebody on the ticket that will cause down-ballot carnage. That's our biggest problem among my members. We want to see somebody on the ticket that will allow us to expand our numbers, not having to run as some kind of a rearguard campaign, in order to keep from being tarnished with a label. So our candidates are really concerned about that.<sup>3</sup>

They were concerned, in other words, about seeing their careers go up in smoke, thanks to someone using an s-word that they regard as irrelevant, threatening and unnecessarily disruptive.

But it was Barack Obama's phone call to Pete Buttigieg four days later that really did the trick. Despite Obama's disastrous later years, Democrats remember his administration as a golden age, especially after Trump. Hence, his influence is overwhelming. After months of Yoda-like silence, therefore,

all he had to do was make a single phone call to Buttigieg on March 1, telling him to withdraw in favour of Biden to trigger an avalanche. Suddenly, word was out that Sanders was getting ahead of himself and had to be reined in.

With that, David Brooks' school of fish reversed course. As he says, the response was not deliberative or rational, but intuitive. Democrats *felt* that Sanders was heading in the wrong direction and that Biden would be the wiser course. So they acted on instinct - and radical-left hopes were dashed.

The debacle bears out American exceptionalism in another way as well: ie, by showing that the direction of American politics is now exceptionally disastrous. To be sure, the US is not facing national break-up the way the UK is. But it is hard to imagine a worse Democratic nominee to go up against Trump. The list of Biden's Jerry Lewis-like pratfalls and missteps is too long to go into. Suffice it to say that he joined with the notorious southern racist, Jesse Helms, to oppose school bussing as a remedy for *de facto* segregation in the 1970s and then authored key legislation in the 1980s that ramped up the war on drugs and led to the mass incarceration of millions of poor people and members of racial minorities. He voted in favour of the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and, as vice-president, backed US intervention in Libya, Syria and Yemen - all of which have turned out to be catastrophic. Thanks to a motor mouth he can never quite control, he let the cat out of the bag in 2014 regarding US policy with regard to Syria and al Qa'eda: "Our allies in the region were our largest problem in Syria," he told a Harvard audience:

The Turks ... the Saudis, the emirates, etc - what were they doing? They were so determined to take down Assad and essentially have a proxy Sunni-Shia war ... they poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens of thousands of tons of military weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad - except the people who were being supplied were Al Nusra and al Qa'eda and the extremist

elements of jihadis coming from other parts of the world.<sup>4</sup>

The fact that Obama ordered Biden to apologise to the Saudis and others for his indiscretion confirms that the administration was not only unable to control their pro-al Qa'eda activities, but was determined to cover them up.<sup>5</sup>

All of which will provide Trump with more than enough ammunition in the fall. But Biden suffers from another problem as well: significant cognitive decline. The contrast with the smooth-talking politician of just a few years ago is startling. Words tumble out chaotically, non-sequiturs abound and ideas break off in mid-sentence. Here he is trying to explain how to make up for the effects of school segregation in a presidential debate in September:

...Make sure that we bring into the help the - the student, the, the teachers deal with the problems that come from home. The problems that come from home. We need - we have one school psychologist for every 15 hundred kids in America today. It's crazy ... now, I'm married to a teacher. My deceased wife is a teacher. They have every problem coming to them. We have to make sure that every single child does in fact have three, four and five-year-olds go to school - school, not day care, school. We bring social workers into homes of parents to help them deal with how to raise their children. It's not that they don't want to help, they don't want - they don't know quite what to do. Play the radio, make sure the television, the - excuse me, make sure you have the record player on at night, the-the-the-the phone, make sure the kids hear words. A kid coming from a very poor school, a very poor background, will hear four million words fewer spoken by the time they get there.<sup>6</sup>

## Exceptionalism

There are dozens of examples of such garbled word salads. Trump will undoubtedly make full use of them, just as he will make full use of Biden's disastrous misadventures in the Middle East and his role in the Burisma scandal in the Ukraine. This does not mean that he will win - after all, a lot can happen in the eight months prior to the November election. But, even if Biden prevails, he will be the American equivalent of a Konstantin Chernenko - the semi-comatose commissar who ran the Soviet Union for 13 months in the mid-1980s and helped drive it into the ground.

That will be the final expression of American exceptionalism - a brain-addled serial war criminal who is rushing the empire with exceptional speed to its demise ●

## Notes

1. S Ackerman, 'A blueprint for a new party' *Jacobin* August 11 2016.
2. D Brooks, 'Biden's rise gives the establishment one last chance' *The New York Times* March 5 2020. The full exchange can be viewed at [www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2020/02/28/rep-james-clyburn-democrats-concerned-down-ballot-carnage-sot-newday-vpx.cnn](http://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2020/02/28/rep-james-clyburn-democrats-concerned-down-ballot-carnage-sot-newday-vpx.cnn).
3. The quote begins at 53:30 at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcKVCtg5dxM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcKVCtg5dxM).
4. M Landler, 'Saudis are next on Biden's Mideast apology list after Harvard remarks' *The New York Times* October 6 2014.
5. The full quote is available at [www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=6&v=4AYVwgcAOMY&feature=emb\\_logo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=6&v=4AYVwgcAOMY&feature=emb_logo).

LEFT

# Lessons being learned

Elements of the US left have at last awoken to the possibilities opened up by Bernie Sanders, writes Paul Demarty

**T**hough Joe Biden's previously dismal campaign was regrettably revived on Super Tuesday, signalling that the Wall Street Democrats are not dead yet, the ascendancy of the left within Democratic politics remains remarkable.

I remember writing many articles after the 2016 election, urging our American readers - for what it was worth - to resist despair, and particularly the siren song of lesser-evilism, which would shackle comrades to some other hopeless establishment candidate. Privately, I worried at the time that it was a pious wish, but one that was likely in the main to be ignored, and that the softer supporters of Bernie Sanders would scurry back to hide under the skirts of 'mainstream' liberalism, as the full horror of a Trump presidency unfolded.

Never have I been so happy to be so wrong. The energy and dynamism of the Sanders movement is quite encouraging, for all its political limitations; and, if anything, its centre of gravity is moving *left*. The essential truth of 2016 - vote Clinton, get Trump - is sinking in, for now at least. After a period in which *soi-disant* socialists have conceded endless ground to identity politics, there are signs of movement in the other direction, with liberal anti-racists and feminists uneasily incorporating the class perspective into their worldview. The result is as contradictory as the previous leftwing backsliding, of course, but the direction of travel is very much preferable.

We could illustrate this by pointing to our own regular contributor, Jim Creegan, whose articles on US politics have been a strong feature of this paper over recent years. CPGB comrades do not agree with comrade Creegan on everything, of course, as evidenced by polemical exchanges on the history of the second international, along with other matters. On one matter, however, we have converged; readers of last week's excellent assessment of the campaign will note his optimism about the outcome of the Sanders campaign:

Many Sanders supporters will be little inclined to follow their leader into the cul-de-sac of party politics as usual ... 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'.<sup>1</sup>

This is a distinct improvement on comrade Creegan's assessment of four years ago, in the early stages of the Sanders-Clinton battle: then he

reject[ed] the argument that whether to work inside or outside the Democratic Party is a purely tactical question. For socialists, political independence must remain a question of principle, not for the sake of being true to dogmas, but because beating the bourgeoisie on its own turf has



A mass movement from within the Democratic Party

been shown to be impossible.<sup>2</sup>

The intervening years, of course, have rather cast the bourgeoisie's security on its 'own turf' in a different light. No doubt this interesting - and, in some ways, rather frightening - reality has told on Creegan's outlook. So, it is for one US left outfit guilty of the opposite - and far worse - error of backing Hillary Clinton not only against Donald Trump, but against Bernie Sanders in 2016. Such was the utterly daft perspective of the Communist Party USA, which thereby cut itself off from a generation of socialists. A penitent CPUSA offers us the following wisdom in its online publication, *People's Weekly World*:

The scare tactics of 'liberal' billionaires who try to convince us that only another rich man can beat the rich man in the White House is the other side of the corporate class's response to the Sanders surge and the US's socialist moment. That's why socialism can't just be about winning this or that election. It has to be about building and sustaining a broad democratic movement that can fight for change in all areas of US life long after Trump and Sanders are both gone from the political scene.<sup>3</sup>

A little bit of an improvement - and only four awful years too late ...

## Class question

Sanders' campaigns this year and in 2016 have had a negative effect, logically speaking - they have served to *negate* some wrong perspectives. The two views we have noted here are symptomatic of the historic situation, where the US labour movement has subordinated itself to the Democratic Party, which - since Lyndon Johnson finally alienated the Dixiecrats - has served as the 'liberal' party of capital.

In relation to this, one available view is that of Michael Harrington, a founder of the Democratic Socialists of America, which has enjoyed such success on the back of Sanders's campaigns. Harrington urged his comrades to place themselves on "the left wing of the possible", which

means (in practice) manoeuvres to place more 'progressive' Democratic candidates before voters. This can end up - as with the CPUSA - advocating *seriously reactionary* candidates over more progressive ones, depending on what is thought 'possible'.

In the face of this, the US far left has traditionally spurned Democratic candidates for high office altogether, on the basis that a full organisational separation from the Democrats is a precondition for working class socialist politics. This is the line, roughly, of the 2016-model Jim Creegan, though the strains were starting to show; but it was also the line of the late International Socialist Organisation, and of Socialist Alternative until 2016, and many others.

In both cases the question of the Democratic Party is misconceived. For the grand, multi-stage strategy of the CPUSA, alliances with the progressive bourgeoisie are simply written into the script; their poisonous character is no more acknowledged in the case of Obama and Clinton than is the same strategy's failure to secure victory for the Spanish Republic in the 1930s, to mention only one example. The Harrington-DSA version is more vague, but equally fails to understand how bourgeois political rule functions in the USA: by *preventing* disciplined, mass-membership parties emerging, in favour of loose 'coalition' parties. The very institutions that allow a progressive city councilman to be elected in Kentucky give the capitalist media an outsized say in who is up for being president.

The far left understood the problem here - that a real chance at socialism lay the far side of a radical shift in politics; but anti-Democrat positions became merely a shibboleth. For the ISO, if not necessarily for comrade Creegan, the key question was always mass action, which would provide a solution to the political problem of the labour movement's enslavement to the Democrats. That has turned out not to be true; a mass movement *within the Democrats* has thrown that unequal alliance into crisis, by bringing the class question to the fore in the political battle over the presidential nomination.

The negation of these two very different perspectives turns out to be the same: the Sandernistas disprove the idea that Democratic inner-party politics can only crush mass movements, never give rise to them; they also give the lie to the idea that Harringtonite 'realism' is necessarily very realistic. What *positively replaces* these perspectives remains to be seen - and fought over.

It is the great blessing and curse of the US left to inherit a national identity based on revolution, which jibes uneasily with the more recent history of the republic, to put it mildly. It is a blessing, inasmuch as explicit counterrevolutionism visibly contradicts the heritage it supposedly defends;<sup>4</sup> it is a curse, inasmuch as the ambiguities and limits of that heritage lead the left to reject important parts of it (the Second Amendment, in particular).

The USA is born of two revolutions so far. The first threw off the colonial tutelage of the British empire in principle, but not entirely in practice. The republican ideals of the revolutionaries of 1776 and immediately after stopped at the colour bar; slavery was not abolished, but made the 'masters' slaves to the cotton mills of England. So long as King Cotton reigned in America, so would the king of England. But, of course, the slave question was more than merely a matter of global state hierarchy: not only did it involve the most repugnant oppression of the slaves themselves; it produced a sectionalist paralysis among the working class of the 'free' north.

The Civil War is properly called a revolution, in spite of the white supremacist reaction that followed the failure of radical reconstruction, not only because it destroyed a mode of production of a certain sort - an un-free agrarian society dominated by capital - but because of the political and economic transformation that followed throughout the uneasily-reassembled union. American industry was unleashed. The greenback dollar of the Federal Reserve - created to fund the war in the early 1860s - supplanted dozens of 'dollars' privately minted by banks. The political class, so long dominated by southern slave states,

was transformed. Slave-owning sons of the south had held the presidency for more than two thirds of the USA's history before the war; in the century afterwards, only Woodrow Wilson of Virginia and Lyndon Johnson of Texas hailed from former Confederate states. The 'slave power' was not a bogeyman of abolitionists: it existed, dominating all branches of national government. In the 1860s, it was destroyed.

What exists now is an empire: a society whose industrial production is overwhelmingly entangled with the military, whose financial sector dominates the global system, and whose political culture is increasingly disfigured by militarism and Bonapartism. Americans are used to legislative paralysis, since such paralysis is part and parcel of the separation of powers: one bitter fruit of this is the cult of the Strong Man, who will sweep such pettifogging opportunists aside. So we get the corruption and grotesquerie of the Trump regime.

What is needed is a *third* revolution - one that will irreversibly reshape the USA as a democratic, not an aristocratic, republic; that will build on the firm foundation of the political liberties enshrined in the Bill of Rights, and the fleeting egalitarian promise of the best of the country's political history, to consign the twin evils of technocratic 'moderation' and Bonapartism to oblivion. We cannot overcome Donald Trump without also rejecting Alexander Hamilton.

However the primaries shake out, a second consecutive strong showing for Sanders gives us a glimmer of better possibilities; of the left emerging from its long night of tutelage to the liberal bourgeoisie ●

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## Notes

1. 'Primary contradictions' *Weekly Worker* March 5 2020.
2. 'Possibilities and pitfalls' *Weekly Worker* February 25 2016.
3. <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/f/dont-let-socialist-moment-pass-us>
4. Consider, for amusement's sake, Fox News host Tucker Carlson's hatred of the 'revolutionary' metric system "imposed at the business end of the guillotine": [www.newsweek.com/fox-tucker-carlson-attacks-metric-system-1442485](http://www.newsweek.com/fox-tucker-carlson-attacks-metric-system-1442485).

**LABOUR**

# Clause wars

James Marshall of Labour Party Marxists says RLB's clause four owes more to Tony Blair than Sidney Webb. Either way, both amount to bullshit. What we need is a clause four that marks a real political shift

In the final weeks of her floundering campaign Rebecca Long-Bailey has made a pivot to the left. She is proposing the adoption of a new clause four. The fingerprints of Jon Lansman - autocrat, witch hunter, master strategist and organiser of defeats - are all too visible.

Clause four, she writes, in her letter to Labour members, "is important for our party". Quite right. In her own words, clause four is "a statement of our values, why we exist, and it tells voters what they can expect from us". Yes, principles speak of the tradition, character, aims and methods of a political party.

Why the sudden alighting upon clause four? Why did she not raise the suggestion at the launch of her leadership bid? The answer is pretty obvious. With voting set to end on April 2, she looks set to lose, and lose badly.

However, true to form, her pivot to the left is calculated, feeble and trite. Long-Bailey is uncritical of both the 1918 clause four written by the arch-Fabian, Sidney Webb, and Tony Blair's replacement, agreed in 1995. Dumbly, she tells us that "the original clause four promised common ownership and an equitable distribution in the economy", while the Blairite version "described us as a democratic socialist party". True enough. But the fact that the 1995 version abandoned the state capitalism previously espoused seems to entirely pass her by. Nor does the fact that Tony's Blair's "democratic socialist party" embraced neoliberal capitalism register.

No, the sole problem Long-Bailey identifies is time. A century has gone by since the original clause four. Twenty-five years since Blair's revision. Hence we find Long-Bailey saying this: "Now it's time to update clause four for the 21st century."

Well, I suppose that would be the case if "common ownership and an equitable distribution in the economy" had already been achieved. To state the obvious, it has not. We live in the age of privatisation and unmatched inequality. The same goes for Labour being a "democratic socialist party". Unfortunately, as shown by the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' witch hunt, the party is hardly democratic. Nor, as shown by the 1995 clause four - the *operative* clause four - is Labour a socialist party.

The approach taken by Long-Bailey lacks any solid foundations. She wants to appeal to those in the party who despise Tony Blair's attempt to de-Labourise the Labour Party. But she dares not say so. Instead she asks members to "let me know what you want to see in a new clause four".

Not that she is completely lacking in ideas. It is just that her ideas are completely lacking. Her new clause four wish list certainly owes more to Tony Blair than Sidney Webb. Here is what she proposes in all its underwhelming glory:

I want to see a clause four that makes clear we are a democratic socialist party committed to justice and prosperity for all.

That we believe the welfare of the people is the highest law - and the duty of a Labour government is to improve living standards year on year.

To obtain the security and betterment of all our people, we seek the democratic and socialist transformation of society: the fundamental and irreversible shift in the distribution of wealth and power from the few to the many.

That's why I think, to help us fulfil our historic mission, clause four should include commitments to:

- a green economy and a sustainable planet that recognises socialism and environmentalism go hand in hand.
- expanding democratic public ownership and universal provision of high-quality public services.
- a prosperous economy with a more equal distribution of wealth, ownership and economic power.
- an independent foreign policy based on peace, internationalism and human rights.
- expanding democracy and devolving power, so people and communities have a real control over economic and political decisions.
- equality, liberation and dignity for all.

Worthy mottos and fashionable buzzwords mix with empty phrasemongering. What is "socialism"? Are ever-improving living standards compatible with a sustainable planet? Don't the Tories too say that they are committed to "justice and prosperity for all"? How does RLB square her commitment to equality with her self-proclaimed monarchism? How do you obtain the peace and human rights by pressing the nuclear button?

The giveaway, though, surely comes with this: "a more equal distribution of wealth, ownership and economic power". The presumption must be that capitalism continues, along with wage labour. When it comes down to it, all Long-Bailey wants to change is the "distribution of wealth" between capital and labour. Yes, along with equality, justice and dignity, the time-honoured pledge of generations of social reformers, charity-mongers and vote-chasing politicians.

Anyway, as Long-Bailey has done us the favour of asking what we want to see in a new clause four, let us take up the opportunity to restate our views.

## Sacrificial killing

Compared with the almost imperceptible changes achieved under Jeremy Corbyn, Tony Blair was a rightwing 'revolutionary'. Fully backed by the Murdoch press, Blair "redefined the Labour Party as New Labour".<sup>1</sup> Riding high in artificially driven opinion polls, he presided over a sweeping series of internal 'reforms'. Conference was gutted. No longer could it debate issues, vote on policy or embarrass the leadership in front of the media. Instead, the whole thing became a rubber-stamping exercise. Then there were the tightly controlled policy forums, focus groups and the staffing of the party machine with eager young careerists (most on temporary contracts). Blair thereby also asserted himself over the national executive committee, considerably reducing its effectiveness.

And then there was the old clause four. By sacrificing it in the full

glare of publicity, Blair, and his New Labour clique, reassured the neoliberal establishment, the City, the Confederation of British Industry, the global plutocracy, the US hegemon, etc. Capitalism would be *absolutely* safe in their hands. A New Labour government could be relied upon to not even pay lip service to a British version of state capitalism. Leftwingers such as Tony Benn, Dennis Skinner, Diane Abbott and Ken Livingstone protested; trade union leaders grumbled. But the April 1995 special conference voted by 65% to adopt Blair's clause four.

And, whereas Jeremy Corbyn made do with his plodding Straight Leftist advisors, Tony Blair had Alastair Campbell, Jonathan Powell and the high priest of spin, Peter Mandelson. His journey from opposition leader to a prime minister - with a record parliamentary majority - took just three years. New Labour promised a New Britain. Blair told the 1994 Labour conference that his proposed constitutional reforms would be the "biggest programme of change to democracy ever proposed".<sup>2</sup> It was not mere hyperbole. Much of it happened: Good Friday Agreement, Scottish parliament, Welsh assembly, reform of House of Lords, Freedom of Information Act, city mayors, etc.

What of Corbyn? His professed republicanism was quickly exposed as merely platonic. Ditto his opposition to Nato, Trident renewal and the standing army. Nor did Corbyn fare much better in terms of Labour Party internal reforms. Whereas many CLPs were set on restoring the old 1918 clause four, following backroom negotiations he got the 2019 Brighton conference to agree to a "working group" to consider the question - an attempt to appease the right-dominated Parliamentary Labour Party.

Strangely, the moving spirit behind the campaign to restore the old clause four was Socialist Appeal, the British section of the International Marxist Tendency - otherwise known, at least in our circles, as the International Fabian Tendency.

Here we find the *minority* faction of the old Militant organisation, which refused to go along with Peter Taaffe's 'open turn'. Socialist Appeal remained committed to deep Labour Party entry (apart from its brief infatuation with left nationalism and a busted-flush Scottish Socialist Party). Anyhow, in the spirit of the great chameleon, Ted Grant, Socialist Appeal's long time cadre, Rob Sewell, wrote of the need to "restore Labour's commitment to socialism".<sup>3</sup> As might be expected, Kier Hardie in 1901, and even Clement Attlee in 1937, are given his seal of approval.

The Labour4Clause4 campaign garnered support from the likes of Ken Loach, the leftwing film director, and MPs Karen Lee, Dennis Skinner, Ian Mearns, Chris Williamson, Dan Carden and Ronnie Campbell. Alongside them there are like-minded trade union officials, such as Steve Gillan of the POA, Ian Hodson and Ronnie Draper of the bakers' union, and Mick Cash and Steve Hedley of RMT.

## Fabian

But let us discuss the political significance and class nature of the original clause four.

Our February 1918 conference

agreed the new constitution. Clause four (objects) committed the Labour Party to these aims (subsequently amended in 1959):

1. To organise and maintain in parliament and in the country a political Labour Party.
2. To cooperate with the general council of the Trades Union Congress, or other kindred organisations, in joint political or other action in harmony with the party constitution and standing orders.
3. To give effect as far as possible to the principles from time to time approved by the party conference.
4. To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.
5. Generally to promote the political, social and economic emancipation of the people, and more particularly of those who depend directly upon their own exertions by hand or by brain for the means of life.
6. To cooperate with the labour and socialist organisations in the commonwealth overseas, with a view to promoting the purposes of the party, and to take common action for the promotion of a higher standard of social and economic life for the working population of the respective countries.
7. To cooperate with the labour and socialist organisations in other countries and to support the United Nations and its various agencies and other international organisations for the promotion of peace, the adjustment and settlement of international disputes by conciliation or judicial arbitration, the establishment and defence of human rights, and the improvement of the social and economic standards and conditions of work of the people of the world.

These formulations - crucially the fourth - are too often celebrated as being a defining socialist moment. Yet, when first mooted in November 1917 - amidst the slaughter of inter-imperialist war - Sidney Webb, its principle author, Fabian guru and dogged social climber, had no thought, no wish, no intention of promoting genuine socialism. Parliament, the courts, enlightened civil servants and the liberal intelligentsia provided his road to a streamlined British empire. Webb wanted an imperial government of high-minded experts, whose decisions would be no more than ratified in elections: even referendums were ruled out, as impeding the will of the educated elite.

Top leaders of the Fabian Society - eg, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Edward R Pease, Annie Besant, Sydney Olivier, HG Wells and George Bernard Shaw - considered themselves social engineers of the highest order, intellectual superstars, heralds of a glittering technocratic future. The role of these ever-so-clever people was to

carefully, slowly, patiently, courteously persuade the great and the good of the benefits of 'socialism' ... hence their organisation's chosen name (taken from Quintus Fabius, the Roman general who avoided pitched battles with Hannibal's superior Carthaginian army and instead pursued a strategy of attrition).

No surprise, Marxists have long considered Fabianism to be the crassest expression of opportunism. Friedrich Engels heaped particular scorn on this "well-meaning gang of eddicated middle class folk".<sup>4</sup> True, he credited them with enough wit to realise the "inevitability of the social revolution". But the Fabians could not possibly entrust this "gigantic task to the raw proletariat alone". Engels concluded that "Fear of revolution is their guiding principle."<sup>5</sup>

The real class war was denounced by the Fabian ladies and gentlemen. The underlying contradiction in society, according to them, was not between labour and capital, but the idle rich and the industrious masses ... of all classes. Managers and entrepreneurs provide an invaluable service to society. As long as they honestly paid their taxes, fat profits and fat salaries are fully justified. In other words, original Fabianism amounted to nothing more than a form of bourgeois socialism.

That so-called modern-day disciples of Leon Trotsky want to embrace Fabianism testifies to a terrible degeneration. The Fabian Society was not only elitist: its leaders were thorough-going eugenicists too. Friedrich Nietzsche provided a warped inspiration. HG Wells urged the death penalty for those suffering from "genetically transferable diseases". Defective men, women and children were to be dealt with by the means of a "lethal chamber".<sup>6</sup>

As for the "swarms of black, and brown, and dirty white and yellow people" who did not match his criteria of intelligence and efficiency, "they will have to go". It is their "portion to die out and disappear".<sup>7</sup> With that noble end in mind, Shaw demanded that "Extermination must be put on a scientific basis, if it is ever to be carried out humanely and apologetically, as well as thoroughly".<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, the working class was to be lifted out of ignorance. As for the unemployed, they would be herded into "human sorting houses" to be trained for useful work - those who refused would be sent off to semi-penal detention colonies.

The Fabians were committed pro-imperialists too. According to their *Fabianism and empire* (1900) tract, Britain needed to get its fair share of the spoils from the division of the world:

The partition of the greater part of the globe among such [great] powers is, as a matter of fact that must be faced, approvingly or deploringly, now only a question of time; and whether England [sic] is to be the centre and nucleus of one of those great powers of the future, or to be cast off by its colonies, ousted from its provinces, and reduced to its old island status, will depend on the ability with which the empire is governed as a whole, and the freedom of its governments and its officials from complicity in private financial interests and

from the passions of the newspaper correspondents who describe our enemies as 'beasts'.<sup>9</sup>

Over the years 1899-1902, as good patriots, the Fabians backed Britain's war against the Boer republics: the "native races" must be "protected despotically by the empire or abandoned to slavery and extermination".<sup>10</sup>

The British empire was portrayed as an unintended bringer of democracy to the white dominions and a saviour of the 'lower breeds' (shades of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty). The best interests of 'black, brown and yellow' peoples lie in being ruled over by young men fresh from Britain's public schools. Under their guiding hand they would eventually be led to "adulthood".<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, as an aside, the Fabians thought that the South African war demonstrated the "superiority of a militia" system over the professional army.<sup>12</sup> An idea that the timorous left refuses even to contemplate nowadays.

Naturally, come the 1914-18 great war, the Fabians did their best to serve the imperial cause. Europe had to be saved from the Junkers and Prussian militarism. However, as the war dragged on and the corpses piled up, any initial popular enthusiasm turned into discontent. The February 1917 revolution in Russia galvanised the hopes of wide sections of the working class. Strikes, including in the munitions industry, assumed epidemic proportions. Demands for a negotiated peace grew and, amongst sections of the ruling few, there were serious worries that Britain stood on the edge of revolution. Reports came of mutinies in army base camps and the killing of military policemen. June 1917 saw a big labour-movement conference in Leeds. Famously delegates voted for a national network of Workers' and Soldiers' Soviets on the model of Russia. Then came the October Revolution, which shook the capitalist world to its very foundations. Bourgeois politicians of every stripe rushed to make concessions. Hence, Sidney Webb's clause four.

By cynical calculation he had three goals in mind.

Firstly, his clause four socialism could be used to divert the considerable rank-and-file sympathy that existed for the Russian Revolution into safe, peaceful and exclusively constitutional channels. Not that that stopped prime minister David Lloyd George from declaring, in his closing speech of the 1918 general election campaign, that the "Labour Party is being run by the extreme pacifist Bolshevik group".<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, by adopting clause four socialism, the Labour Party could both distinguish itself from the exhausted, divided and rapidly declining Liberal Party and please the trade union bureaucracy. Since the 1890s the TUC had been drawing up various proposals of what ought to be nationalised: eg, rails, mines, electricity, liquor and land. Clause four socialism also usefully went along with the grain of Britain's wartime experience. There was steadily expanding state intervention in the economy. Nationalisation was, as a result, widely identified with efficiency, modernisation and beating the Austro-German foe. It therefore appealed to technocratically minded elements amongst the middle classes.

Thirdly, clause four socialism had to be implicitly anti-Marxist. Webb well knew the history of the Social Democratic Party in Germany. And, of course, Karl Marx savaged various passages in its *Gotha programme* (1875) - not least those which declared that every worker should receive a "fair distribution of their proceeds of labour" and that "the proceeds of labour belong undiminished with equal right to all members of society".<sup>14</sup>

Contradictory and vacuous, seethed Marx. What is fair? What

about replacement means of production? What about the expansion of production? What about those unable to work? More than that, Marx explained these and other such formulations as unneeded concessions to the followers of Ferdinand Lassalle. His *Workers' programme* (1862) called for "an equal right to the undiminished proceeds of labour". Obviously Webb wanted to give clause four a distinct Lassallean coloration. Not out of admiration for Lassalle, but because he wanted to distance the Labour Party from Marxism.

## Red ribbon

Almost needless to say, clause four was mainly for show - a red ribbon tied around what was Labourism's standing programme of social liberalism. Labour customarily supported Liberal governments and their measures of palliative social reform. Because of its alliance with the Liberal Party, the party even found itself divided over the abolition of the House of Lords and the fight for female suffrage. While a minority - eg, George Lansbury and Keir Hardie - defended the suffragettes and their militant tactics, the majority craved respectability. As Ramsay MacDonald wrote, "The violent methods ... are wrong, and in their nature reactionary and anti-social, quite irrespective of vote or no vote."<sup>15</sup>

Yet, even if it had been put into effect, clause four socialism remains antithetical to working class self-liberation. Capitalism without capitalists does not count amongst our goals. Railways, mines, land, electricity, etc, would pass into the hands of the British empire state.

Capitalist owners might well be bought out - eased into a comfortable retirement. But, as they vacate the field of production, a new class of state-appointed managers and supervisors enters the fray. In terms of the division of labour, they substitute for the capitalists. The mass of the population, meanwhile, remain exploited wage-slaves. They would be subject to same hierarchal chain of command, the same lack of control, the same mind-numbing routine.

Marxism, by contrast, is based on an altogether different perspective. If it is to win its freedom, the working class must overthrow the existing state. But - and this is crucial - in so doing the proletariat "abolishes all class distinctions and antagonisms, abolishes also the state as state".<sup>16</sup>

Capitalist relations of production and the whole bureaucratic state apparatus are swept away. Every sphere of social life sees control exercised from below. All positions of command are elected or chosen by lot and are regularly rotated. Hierarchy is flattened. Alienation is overcome. What is produced and how it is produced radically alters too. Need, not exchange, is the ruling principle. And, alone, such an association of producers creates the benign conditions which allow for the full development of each and every individual.

Doubtless, the old 1918 clause four resulted from progressive political developments. Opposition to the horrors of World War I and the inspiration provided by the October revolution has already been mentioned. But there is also the formation of the Socialist International, the worldwide celebration of May Day, the considerable influence of the socialist press, the increased size of trade union membership, the formation of the shop stewards movement and the election of a growing body of Labour MPs. Then there was state intervention and regulation of the economy. Capitalism was widely considered outmoded and doomed. Socialism more and more became the common sense of the organised working class.

By contrast, Fabian socialism meant arguing against unconstitutional

methods, slowly expanding the provision of social welfare and persuading all classes of the benefits that would come to the nation if the commanding heights of the economy were put in state hands. In other words, the Fabians consciously sought to ameliorate the mounting contradictions between labour and capital ... and thus put off socialism. Rightly, Lenin denounced Fabianism as the "most consummate expression of opportunism".<sup>17</sup>

Revealingly, before 1918, attempts to commit the Labour Party to socialism met with mixed success. The 1900 founding conference rejected the "class war" ultimatum tabled by the Social Democratic Federation.<sup>18</sup> Despite that, conference voted to support the "socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange". The next year a socialistic motion moved by Bruce Glasier was defeated. In 1903 another socialistic motion fell, this time without debate. Two years later conference passed a motion with the exact same wording. In 1907 the previous endorsement of socialism was overturned at the prompting of ... Bruce Glasier. The same conference agreed to set the goal of "socialising the means of production, distribution and exchange".<sup>19</sup>

The explanation for the seesawing doubtless lies with electoral calculation. While most in the party leadership considered themselves socialists of a kind, they were mortally afraid of losing out in the polls. What appeared acceptable to likely voters set their limits. So, instead of fearlessly presenting a bold socialist vision and building support on that basis, Sidney Webb, Arthur Henderson, Ramsay MacDonald and co chased the vagaries of popularity. With the growth of militancy and radicalism, socialist declarations were considered a sure way of adding to Labour's ranks in parliament<sup>20</sup> - forming a government being both a means and an end in itself.

## Reclaiming

Nevertheless, the Blairising of clause four in 1995 was hugely symbolic - the ground having been laid by the Eurocommunists and their vile *Marxism Today* journal. Socialism was declared dead and buried, the working class a shrinking minority. Only if Labour accepted capitalism and reached out to the ever-expanding middle classes would it have a future.

Neil Kinnock, John Smith and finally Tony Blair dragged the party ever further to the right. Out went the commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament, out went the commitment to comprehensive education, out went the commitment to full employment, out went the commitment to repeal the Tories' anti-trade union laws, out went the commitment to "the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange".

Needless to say, his clause four is stuffed full of managerial guff and classless nonsense. Eg, (IV.1) Labour "believes that by the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more than we achieve alone, so as to create for each of us the means to realise our true potential and for all of us a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many, not the few; where the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe and where we live together freely, in a spirit of solidarity, tolerance and respect". Then we have similarly vacuous formulations about (IV.2a) "a dynamic economy", in "the public interest, in which the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition are joined with the forces of partnership and cooperation to produce the wealth the nation needs and the opportunity for all to work and prosper with a thriving private sector and high-quality public services". A "just society" (IV.2b), an "open democracy" (IV.2c), a healthy environment" (IV. 2c) follow, as does

(IV.3): "Labour is committed to the defence and security of the British people and to cooperating in European institutions, the United Nations, the Commonwealth and other international bodies to secure peace, freedom, democracy, economic security and environmental protection for all."

Note, the Labour4Clause4 campaign merely proposes to replace IV.2a. All the other Blairite shite remains. Hence, Labour4Clause4 leaves unchallenged the European Court of Human Rights, the UN, the Commonwealth (and by implication Nato). There are also the historically entrenched, labyrinthine restrictions, disciplinary offences and countless other bureaucratic command-and-control mechanisms. That explains why real Marxists - not fake Marxists - have never talked of "how to reclaim the Labour Party",<sup>21</sup> of fighting to "reclaim Labour" from the pro-capitalist right,<sup>22</sup> etc, etc. Labour has never been ours in the sense of being a "political weapon for the workers' movement". No, despite the electoral base and trade union affiliations, from the beginning Labour has been dominated by career politicians, trade union bureaucrats and party functionaries: a distinct social stratum, which, no matter how left it might talk, serves not the interests of the working class, but the continuation of capitalist exploitation.

Lenin can be usefully brought into the argument here. Speaking in the context of the need for the newly formed Communist Party of Great Britain to affiliate to the Labour Party, he said this:

... whether or not a party is really a political party of the workers does not depend solely upon a membership of workers, but also upon the men that lead it, and the content of its actions and its political tactics. Only this latter determines whether we really have before us a political party of the proletariat.

Regarded from this - the only correct - point of view, the Labour Party is a thoroughly bourgeois party, because, although made up of workers, it is led by reactionaries, and the worst kind of reactionaries at that, who act quite in the spirit of the bourgeoisie. It is an organisation of the bourgeoisie, which exists to systematically dupe the workers with the aid of the British Noskes and Scheidemanns [the German social chauvinist murderers of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht - JM].<sup>23</sup>

Despite all the subsequent changes, this assessment remains fundamentally true. Labour is still a "bourgeois workers' party". Of course, Corbyn is not a reactionary of the "worst kind". During his time as Labour leader he showed himself to be a right-moving, run-of-the-mill left reformist - albeit a left reformist with an enduring commitment to workers involved in economic struggles, campaigners for democratic rights and liberation movements in the so-called third world. Meanwhile, the vast bulk of Labour councillors, regional officials, MPs, AMs, MEPs, etc remain on the hard right.

Corbyn and Corbynism must be judged a failure. Even in its own terms. By definition, the same goes for that section of the left which insists that the "battle to defend the policy gains of the Corbyn era" is the "principal task of Labour Party socialists".<sup>24</sup> No, the "principal task" in the Labour Party is to advance a radically different agenda. Hence this version of clause four, championed by Labour Party Marxists:

- Labour is the federal party of the working class. We strive to bring all trade unions, cooperatives, socialist societies and leftwing groups and parties under our banner. We believe that unity brings strength.
- Labour is committed to replacing

the rule of capital with the rule of the working class. Socialism introduces a democratically planned economy, ends the ecologically ruinous cycle of production for the sake of production and moves towards a stateless, classless, moneyless society that embodies the principle, 'From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs'. Alone such benign conditions create the possibility of every individual fully realising their innate potentialities.

- Towards that end Labour commits itself to 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.
- Labour seeks to win the active backing of the majority of people and forming a government on this basis.
- We shall work with others, in particular in the European Union, in pursuit of the aim of replacing capitalism with working class rule and socialism.

Clearly this clause four is based solidly on the Marxist world outlook. Not least the understanding that the class struggle is the motor of history. Therefore, we do not draw up quixotic plans to refashion society, preach to the capitalist class, appeal to their political representatives and paid agents, about how to introduce equality, fairness and dignity for all. Nor do we rely on stuntism, broad frontism or politically 'independent' trade unionism. No, our task is to organise the class struggle and lead the working class to the point where it can conquer political power. That being the starting point for a transition to a stateless, moneyless, classless society.

There are doubtless those 'realists' who dismiss this perspective as purist, sectarian and madly extreme. As being electorally suicidal, a proposal to convert Labour into an intolerant religious cult, etc. We know all about such people. No, instead of establishing a new, socialist, society, they propose to modify, tinker with, improve existing, capitalist, society and call it socialism. That is RLB to a tee ●

## Notes

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**TURKEY**

# Two-way mirror of shame

Erdoğan's regime is playing with the lives of innocent victims to both its east and west. **Esen Uslu** describes the shambles

In the mid-60s Sylvie Vartan, the famous French singer, had a hit ballad called 'La Maritza'. In those days the Turkish pop music industry was in its infancy and would grab any good tune and give it Turkish lyrics. While the original song was about the Maritsa river, which runs through Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece, in Turkish it became 'When the moon is rising'.

Vartan was born in Bulgaria, and her family migrated to France in 1952, and for her the song must have provoked deep emotion. The lyrics went:

All the birds of my river  
We sang freedom  
I hardly understood  
But my father knew

The Maritsa river catches the rain and snow falling on the slopes of the Rila, Balkan and Rhodope mountains. It carves an elliptical arc, forming the border between Greece and Bulgaria, and then the border between Greece and Turkey, before discharging its waters into the Aegean.

The first and second Balkan Wars of 1912-13 - the prelude to World War I - erupted in that region. And the never-ending feud between rival regional powers continued into World War II, and then burst out again with the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. And, of course, another never-ending feud is between Greece and Turkey - and not only on the Maritsa river border, but all along the Aegean Sea and the islands within it.

The birds of the Maritsa were not 'singing freedom' during the last century, when Turkey's borders with Greece and Bulgaria were no-go areas under a virtual state of siege. For years crossing the border unaided was almost suicidal, but with the end of the cold war the situation changed. Nowadays the 'major threat' is from refugees and so-called 'illegal immigrants' desperate to cross into western Europe. As the Arab spring uprisings were replaced by counterrevolution, with reactionary regimes holding onto power through civil war, more and more refugees have been attempting to cross the border into the European Union.

The migrants have responded to various measures adopted by EU countries to stem the tide, by changing the routes used. As the Syrian war heated up, crossing the Aegean Sea or the Maritsa into Greece in dinghies became the chosen option - especially as Turkey was turning a blind eye. Fortress Europe responded by building higher and stouter fences along the Bulgarian-Turkish and Turkish-Greek borders, and providing more staff for its Frontex border force. And the EU bartered with Turkey, as if it was over an old oriental carpet in the Grand Bazaar, over 'how to share the burden of refugees', provided Turkey did not allow them to mass along EU borders.

The agreement reached stabilised things for a couple of years, but the dispute between Turkey and Cyprus, Greece and the EU over exclusive economic zones and maritime borders provoked the Turkish regime into taking drastic measures. Faced with a coalition of Egypt, Israel, Cyprus and Greece, with their interests in offshore gas fields, and the backing of the EU to thwart Turkish claims to the same waters, Istanbul opted for a dodgy agreement with one of the warring parties in the Libyan conflict in order to declare a new maritime border.



**On the Greek border**

To support its claims the Turkish regime sent survey teams and drilling platforms under the protection of the navy into the disputed waters. In response a nuclear-powered French aircraft carrier arrived in the zone for exercises. The US navy followed suit, sending out a loud and clear message.

## Syria

On the other side of Turkey's land mass, there was the incursion of its army deep into Syria's Idlib province. The Astana and Sochi agreements between Russia, Iran and Turkey allowed Istanbul to intervene in alliance with Islamist jihadist forces.

One of the tasks it set itself was to clear the M5 route between Damascus and Aleppo, along with attempting to disarm the extremist jihadists. That was, of course, an impossible task, as the US experience in Iran and Afghanistan had demonstrated. And when the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad gathered sufficient forces with aerial support from Russia, a military offensive campaign started. During the last few weeks, town by town the Assad forces cleared the M5 route, and eventually captured Saraqib, the town on the junction of M4 and M5, and a few miles from the city of Idlib.

Turkey was left with a few observation posts behind the Assad forces' front line, under the protection of Russian military police. By December 2019 the Turkish regime would have been wise to withdraw its forces a little. However, the regime of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, believing in its prowess in the brinkmanship game, declared that none of the observation posts would be vacated or relocated. On the contrary, unless the Assad forces withdrew to the positions they occupied when the Sochi agreement was signed, they would be driven back. And a massive military build-up backed up the rhetoric, with thousands of heavily armed Turkish troops streaming into Idlib province.

During this period, four high-ranking Russian intelligence officers, who had come to the Turkish

occupied zone to meet their Turkish counterparts, were mysteriously killed. This was the last straw for the Russians. Their response came in the form of an air strike on a Turkish convoy at the end of February, killing around 30 military personnel. It was the largest death toll suffered by Istanbul during the conflict and really shook the regime.

Erdoğan, who usually appears daily on TV, giving his take on mundane matters, was unable to utter a single word for two long days. But behind-the-scenes diplomatic moves with the USA, Nato and the EU, as well as the Russians, had borne fruit and a smiling Erdoğan finally took to the rostrum once again, declaring that Assad's forces (not the Russians) had paid a heavy price - so many enemy soldiers were killed, so much equipment was destroyed, etc, etc. It was obvious that the Russians had relaxed its airspace blockade, allowing Turkey to operate its drones. And a tentative date for a Putin-Erdoğan meeting was set.

It was during these tense days that the Erdoğan regime decided to put pressure on Greece, which it deemed to be the main culprit on the diplomatic front. Refugees and 'illegal immigrants' residing in Turkey were allowed to cross the border into no man's land, as well as use rubber dinghies to head off for Greek islands.

As has been widely reported, the Greek response was coordinated with the Frontex - ie, the EU - and was very heavy-handed. Despite the hypocritical speeches of European leaders, the response was to defend the borders of Fortress Europe. The migrants' dinghies were rammed and fired upon by the coast guards' boats, while on the land border refugees who managed to cross the Maritsa river were beaten, forced to strip and swim back to Turkey. When some attempted to jump the razor-wire fences, they were fired on with live ammunition and a couple were killed. Liberal amounts of CS gas canisters were discharged.

So the Maritsa border has become a two-way mirror, revealing the

dirtiest aspects of both parties, while presenting a jingoistic, racist image to their own people. While on both sides of the river this deadly game with the lives of refugees is being played out, the politicians are at the same time stressing the need to prioritise combatting the COVID-19 pandemic.

Erdoğan had what must have been an acrimonious meeting with top EU leaders on March 10 - his team left Brussels without taking part in the prearranged press conference. But since his return to Turkey almost all the mainstream media has remained silent on what happened. As I write, a meeting with Nato representatives is taking place.

All these desperate moves by Erdoğan give a clear indication that the regime's sell-by date has passed.

However, what would cause him and his cohorts to leave office and disappear into oblivion is not clear. There is no opposition grouping capable of becoming the rallying point for forming a government to replace the current one. And the so-called Turkish left is paralysed by its anti-Arab, anti-Kurdish, racist-nationalist sentiments. The internationalist opposition or those who are looking across the borders for a solution are in the minority - so much so that even Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the Kurdish freedom movement, has been unable to make his voice heard.

The irreconcilable differences between supporters of the Eurasian wing of Turkey's military top brass and the American/Nato wing are heading towards a calamitous clash ●

## Fighting fund

### On track

**O**ver the last week £359 has been added to our March fighting fund, taking the running total for the month up to £940. That means we are on track for that £2,000 target, which we need to reach every month to produce the *Weekly Worker*.

The most generous donor this week was comrade SK, whose excellent £79 bank transfer landed in our account early in the week. Then we had three separate £50 donations made via PayPal - thank you, comrades TB, RL and MF, the last two of whom are now contributing that amount every month!

And, of course, we had the usual batch of standing orders, ranging from the tenners thrown in by JK and SM to the £30 from HN. Other contributors were LM (£15), DV and GD (£25 each). Added to which we had Hassan's

usual £10 note, handed to one of our comrades, plus the £5 that JB added to his subscription cheque.

So there are still 19 days left to make the £1,060 we now need. That's definitely within reach, but there's no room for complacency in this game! So please use any of the methods described above - bank transfer being easily the most efficient and speedy. Our sort code is 30-99-64 and the account number is 00744310.

As I say, I'm confident we'll get there, but I'm relying on you, the readers, to make sure we do. Over to you! ●

**Robbie Rix**

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

## CENTENARY

# Beyond the sects

**N**egotiations to merge the British Socialist Party, Socialist Labour Party and Workers' Socialist Federation into a united Communist Party dragged on from May 1919. The SLP was stubbornly opposed to the BSP's suggestion that a newly formed Communist Party should seek mass influence through the tactic of affiliation to the Labour Party.

In the name of 'revolutionary purity', the SLP leadership blocked all compromises and made the question of Labour affiliation the barrier that stymied unification. In addition, Sylvia Pankhurst's WSF was not only implacably against Labour affiliation, but also upheld the 'principle' of boycotting all parliamentary activity - even after Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership in Russia had made crystal-clear their support for making use of bourgeois parliaments.

However, in April 1920 things began to look up for advocates of communist unity.

The trio, William Paul, Arthur MacManus and Tom Bell, had been the SLP's reps in the stalled unity negotiations - that is, until they were repudiated by the organisation's doctrinaire leadership.<sup>1</sup> Now they made a dramatic move to break the logjam. Coinciding with the SLP's official annual conference on April 3-4, Paul, McManus and Bell called their own unofficial gathering in Nottingham.

This event had the support



Sylvia Pankhurst: talented, badly wrong ... and subject to sexist taunting

and participation of the most active members of the SLP, and particularly those playing leading roles in mass movements. The pro-unity SLPers renamed themselves the Communist Unity Group, and adopted a manifesto that committed them to work for the "unity of all elements scattered throughout the various groups and parties as the first essential to the formation of a Communist Party in Britain".

This bold move broke the deadlock, and negotiations at last began to bear fruit. The meetings

of April 24 and May 9 agreed that the tactical questions of Labour affiliation and parliamentary activity should be decided after unity had been achieved, rather than be a precondition for it.

On May 29 the representatives of the BSP and the CUG - with the distinctly unenthusiastic and numerically far smaller WSF initially tagging along - felt ready to issue a call for a fusion convention.

This did not mean that everything was now plain sailing. The bold unity initiative produced

a sharp political/organisational bifurcation with a hardening of sectarianism on one side, as Sylvia Pankhurst and her WSF confirmed their trajectory towards an impotent, leftist stance. Isolated - and, presumably, desperate - she turned to a decomposing and increasingly irrelevant SLP and hopeless initiatives like the 'Emergency Conference', convened as a direct alternative to the drive to the unity project that was to produce the CPGB.<sup>2</sup>

In vivid contrast to the decomposition of their ultra-left

opponents - and on the basis of a genuine communist principle - the BSP and CUG, who between them represented the bulk of communist forces in Britain, were drawing closer together. From July 15 1920 *The Call* gave over, weekly, a full page for the CUG to use as it saw fit.

The CUG had since its formation "felt the need of a paper that would enable us, without let or hindrance, not only to express our views on matters of general policy, but to publicly refute the lies and slanders against us from time to time". However, because of the self-proclaimed "transitory nature" of the group, they preferred to husband resources in "deference to the larger object of a united Communist Party". With this prize within touching distance, the CUG used the 'gift' from the BSP to good effect ●

## Notes

1. The SLP leadership had come to mistrust their team responsible for unity negotiations: Tom Bell, Arthur MacManus and William Paul, collectively named the Unity Committee. Even though these three comrades opposed affiliation to the Labour Party as individuals, they put the formation of a CPGB above such tactical differences. Because of this, the dogmatist majority on the SLP leadership voted by a narrow majority to break off negotiations and to dissolve its own UC.

2. However, the "direct alternative" primarily consisted of inviting left-communist organisations and sects to this 'Emergency Conference', based primarily on their sterile opposition to affiliation to Labour. A poorly attended conference was convened in June 1920, whose only 'achievements' seemed to be to boycott any future unity meetings and to lobby the crisis-wracked SLP for a merger. Thus, it consigned itself to the dustbin of history.

## Communist unity

### The Call June 3 1920

Considerable progress towards the establishment of a united Communist Party was made at a further meeting of the Unity Conference in London last Saturday. Those present were: JF Hodgson, AA Watts and Fred Willis (representing the BSP), Thos Bell, Arthur MacManus and Wm Paul (representing the Communist Unity Group formed by members of the SLP), and Sylvia Pankhurst, Nora Smyth and Melvina Walker (representing the WSF).

A national convention is to be held to establish the Communist Party, to which all organisations, branches of organisations, groups and local societies accepting the three cardinal principles of unity (dictatorship of the proletariat, the soviet system, and the Third International) are to be invited to send delegates. This convention will also decide the tactical question of the relations of the Communist Party to the Labour Party.

Meanwhile various sub-committees will deal with the general arrangements for the convention, prepare suggestions for the constitution, platform and organisation of the Communist Party, and go into the details of the amalgamation of the existing organisations. All the bodies participating in summoning the convention are pledged to accept the decisions of the convention and to merge their organisations in the Communist Party, and representation at the convention will imply that organisations, branches and groups represented will also accept its decisions and become parts of the Communist Party. The convention will be held in London, and the date is provisionally fixed for Sunday August 1.

The delegates of the BSP and the

Communist Unity Group were acting on mandates from their respective bodies. The participation of the WSF delegates was stated to be conditional upon a referendum of their membership now being taken.

## Unity, ourselves and others

### The Call June 10 1920

Last week's issue of *The Socialist* contains a letter sent by Miss Sylvia Pankhurst to the SLP, in which she discusses the advisability, or otherwise, of taking part in this convention [printed on June 3 along with an SLP reply]. It is a long letter (about 2,000 words), but it can be summed up very briefly.

Miss Pankhurst considers the question of participation under the separate headings of advantages and disadvantages. The advantages, says Miss Pankhurst, are that the delegates may be induced to accept her own particular point of view, in which case all would be well. The disadvantages are that they may not, and then, of course, all would be very far from well. But, she concludes naively, in the latter unfortunate event those agreeing with her need not consider themselves bound by the decisions of the conference - and, so again, all would be well.

The reply of the national executive committee of the SLP to Miss Pankhurst's letter is what was to be expected. It is rigid and doctrinaire, but quite honest.

These Calvinists of the socialist movement will have nothing to do with the proposed convention. They do not favour Miss Pankhurst's brilliant tactic of running away from the unity proceedings in the event of not being able to stampede them, but they make one suggestion, which, to put it mildly, is surprising. They

invite the WSF to join with them in calling a conference of their own. And to invite thereto representatives of the South Wales Socialist Society, the Irish Communist Party, the British section of the Third International, Socialist Labour Party and the Socialist Party of Great Britain. I should like to have seen Miss Pankhurst's face when she saw this suggestion.

The SPGB stands for what it calls revolutionary parliamentary action, as opposed to industrial action. It has as much right to its opinions as any other body, and we do not quarrel with its members for holding them, but to ask it to take part in a conference which would presumably endorse the soviet system, the dictatorship of the proletariat and industrial mass action is something which - like the peace of god - passes all understanding.

Apparently, Miss Pankhurst thought so too. The reply of the SLP to her letter is dated May 27. On June 4, she issued an invitation to all organisations who accept non-parliamentarism as a basis of unity to attend a meeting for the purpose of deciding whether or not to be present at the conference our own unity committee is engaged in calling. Neither the SLP nor the SPGB will be represented at Miss Pankhurst's gathering, we presume, unless the voice of the charmer has been so alluring as to outweigh even the sterner call of principle.

For ourselves, we are willing to leave the less important matters of immediate tactics to the free play of opinion in the rank and file of a united Communist Party when formed. To rally the workers of this country to the banner so gloriously raised by our Russian comrades is all-important at this juncture - all

else is sound and fury, signifying less than nothing.

Fred Willis

## HQ notes

### The Call July 15 1920

In the discussions that took place in the initial stages of our unity negotiations, Wales figured largely through the South Wales Socialist Society. We at no time lost sight of the fact - and indeed had it repeatedly brought home to us in correspondence from many of our Welsh comrades - that the SWSS by no means adequately represented communist opinion in Wales. We were scarcely prepared, however, for the news that it had 'gone west'. Yet such, we are assured, is actually the case.

From its ashes, and from some late SLP branches, there has arisen what we think will prove a more substantial organisation, in the shape of a South Wales Communist Council. This council counts eight definite groups, while the Neath Socialist Society has just affiliated, and others are expected to follow - all for the Communist Party. We can appreciate the disappointment of the WSF, which always counted on the SWSS to back her up. It was no small surprise to find her secretary writing the council, soliciting support for her latest adventure. Needless to say, there was 'nothing doing'. Let this be the reply to all such seductive attempts coming from 400 Old Ford Road [headquarters of the WSF].<sup>1</sup>

## Towards the Communist Party

### The Call July 15 1920

History teaches that every crisis capitalism has to go through is a test period. The strain at such a period, however, is not confined to the purely commercial credit of its national groups. It is as much a test upon the loyalty

and convictions of the revolutionists towards their communist principles.

It is just at such periods when it is brought home to us that our Labour politicians of the Thomas and Henderson type are indeed the watchdogs of capitalist interests. The former, apprehensive of the dangerous situation capitalism is drifting into, is even now appealing to the government to reduce the cost of living and so help to stave off "the turmoil and agitation that upsets everything and everybody". But, since there is nothing in common between communism and capitalism, the latter's difficulty must be the former's opportunity.

Here, then, is where the test will be applied to the communists. Are we to go on pottering about, as a great many fragmentary groups - our efforts rendered sterile and fatuous by our sectionalism? Or are we capable of rising to the occasion and, concentrating all our resources, make a strong national effort worthy of the principles we profess?

July 31 will be your opportunity for making an effective reply. At the national convention will be laid the foundations of a Communist Party that will seriously challenge the powers of capitalism. The Communist Party will, by its industrial, political and social activity, foster the spirit of revolution. When Lloyd George told his German confrères at Spa to deal with the communists as his French brothers did in 1871 - ie, shoot them like dogs - he not only made a deadly thrust at Labour Party democracy, but he threw down a challenge to the communists of Britain.

We shall not be worthy of the name if we do not pick that challenge up and prepare for the coming struggle ●

## Notes

1. The "her" repeatedly referred to is Sylvia Pankhurst.

**CORONAVIRUS****Nationalism and COVID-19**

Despite the rapid spread of coronavirus, notes **Toby Abse**, the response of the Italian government compares favourably to Boris Johnson's

Italy has been singled out as the alleged epicentre of coronavirus in Europe. In fact, as I will explain, the infection arrived in the Lodigiano area from Munich, not directly from China. Earlier cases involving Chinese tourists were satisfactorily dealt with in Rome's Spallanzani hospital and did not have any link to the subsequent epidemic, which started spreading from northern Italy. However, on March 8 Italy overtook South Korea and Iran to become the country with the second highest number of reported cases.

As the death rate also rose (of the 463 who had died by March 9, 97 had succumbed on that day), the decision was made to place the entire country under lockdown. A number of countries are refusing entry to anybody arriving from Italy, whilst rather more have banned anybody coming from the worst affected areas of the country.

Whilst I would not for a moment seek to deny that COVID-19 has become a very serious problem in the country, especially in the northern regions of Lombardy, Veneto and Emilia Romagna, I would argue that there is a gap between the negative foreign perceptions of the Italian case and the reality. Those who now paint Italy as the leper of Europe may well find themselves in the same situation within a fortnight.

Regular readers of the *Weekly Worker* will know that I am no fan of Italian premier Giuseppe Conte and his shaky four-party coalition government. But in this instance there does seem to be a degree of demonisation of Italy taking place both within the European Union and the UK. Indeed I would contrast the Italian government's robust response with the ostrich-like antics of other premiers and presidents, more concerned with maintaining the favour of business interests (or in the case of Boris Johnson, scoring points against the EU) than protecting their citizens' welfare.

Italy has actually been more honest and transparent about the problem than many of its European counterparts, let alone the Iranian regime. One of the main reasons that there have been more reported cases in Italy than elsewhere in Europe is that the Italian authorities have been more willing to carry out systematic testing of all known contacts of those obviously infected with the disease, instead of confining themselves to testing only those patients displaying very severe and obvious symptoms. Although it is the case that the disease arrived in Italy some weeks before anybody spotted it - with many early sufferers who ended up in hospital, even in intensive care wards, being regarded as cases of standard seasonal flu - the same point could be made in relation to other countries, not least in the Wuhan area.

**German link**

Contrary to what was initially assumed, the disease (or, to be more precise, those cases that gave rise to the pandemic) did not come to Italy directly from China. Given the degree of commerce between the two countries, it was a rational enough assumption that it might have entered the country in that way and early attempts by medical experts to trace the contacts of the first recognisable COVID-19 patients pursued this hypothesis.

Needless to say, the far-right Lega



**Deserted: Duomo Square, central Milan**

party was all too eager to stir up hostility towards the large Chinese community in the textile town of Prato and elsewhere and there have been some instances of physical attacks. The Lega president of the Veneto region, Luca Zaia, publicly claimed that the Chinese "eat live mice" and did not wash enough. Predictably, party leader Matteo Salvini's initial response to the arrival of COVID-19 was a demand to close the borders - which seemed singularly pointless, as the disease was already inside the country. The so-called centre-right as a whole was demanding stricter controls on immigration, despite there being no real evidence that the countries from which the refugees and migrants were coming (eg, Nigeria, Eritrea and Senegal) have any significant number of cases.

It is no accident that COVID-19 was first spotted in the region of Lombardy - in other words, in a prosperous northern region, which is heavily involved in international trade. The virus seems to have arrived in the region from Germany - the outbreak in Munich also seems to have been the source of the virus's spread to Scotland, Finland, Mexico and Brazil. Whilst in this epoch of neoliberal globalisation such pan-national epidemics are inevitable and no country's nationals should be scapegoated as 'super-spreaders', it is rather significant that this German-centred chain of events has had little or no attention from the international media.

To cite a more recent example, *The Guardian's* front-page headline on March 9 - "Italy in chaos, as thousands race to escape quarantine" - was unduly sensationalist. In Italy, the phenomenon referred to was a movement of some northerners to the south, triggered by the willingness of the online version of *Corriere Della Sera* to publish an irresponsible leak of the expected quarantine decree. The leak came from the Lega-run Lombard regional government, and not central government sources, and was quite possibly a deliberate attempt by Salvini and his cronies to undermine the Conte government. This reduced the effectiveness of the regionalised quarantine decree and led to the subsequent nationwide lock-down announced on March 9.

Giuseppe Conte, who has headed one government in which his

Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S - Five Star Movement) was allied with the Lega (May 2018-August 2019), and then another (from September 2019) in which his principal ally is the centre-left Partito Democratico (PD), certainly cannot be regarded as a man of consistent political principles. However, his handling of the present crisis has demonstrated a degree of seriousness totally absent from the conduct of our own part-time prime minister, Boris Johnson, who on March 7 felt the best response to COVID-19 was to attend the England-Wales rugby match.

In Conte's televised address to the nation on March 4, he showed a grasp of detail and an empathetic engagement with the problems faced by his citizens that is in stark contrast with the incoherent stream of consciousness and pathetic jokes that illustrated the bottomless contempt for the masses of our entitled Etonian buffoon.

**Business as usual**

Conte's initial extension on March 7 of numerous restrictions from the original 'Red Zone' with its 50,000 inhabitants to the whole region of Lombardy and 14 other provinces (about a quarter of Italy's entire population) showed he was a man who was willing to take precautions that he sincerely believes will protect the citizenry, regardless of the desire of Confindustria (the Italian equivalent of the CBI) and other business lobby groups to get back to business as usual.

The business-as-usual approach has intermittently been pursued by the Lega - I stress intermittently, because Salvini is torn between his habitual default position of stirring up fear and insecurity and his more recent desire to pose as the fearless champion of northern business interests against the interfering, bureaucratic state, with its molycoddling of the unproductive elderly and infirm.

There was a certain irony in the way in which Attilio Fontana, the Lega president of Lombardy, shortly after dismissing COVID-19 as more or less the same as normal flu, ended up going into self-isolation after a key member of his staff tested positive. More recently, one of the policemen in Salvini's group of bodyguards has been found to have the virus. Salvini himself was refusing to take a test. Doubtless, even if he were forced into

self-isolation, he would continue to rant on Facebook and Twitter.

It should go without saying that Roberto Speranza, the health minister, who represents the social democratic Liberi e Uguali (Free and Equal) in the cabinet, is also approaching the crisis with a degree of concern and commitment lacking in Johnson's obedient lackey, John Hancock - Speranza had pushed for an increase in health spending in the run-up to the December 2019 budget. Conte has now publicly acknowledged that a decade of cuts has weakened the Italian health service and is trying his best to improve provision - although recruiting an extra 5,000 hospital doctors, as announced on March 6, is far easier said than done.

The Italian health service has been run down due to the neoliberal austerity measures of the last two decades - especially since the world economic crisis in 2008, and the euro zone crisis of 2011. Whilst the moral responsibility of prime minister Mario Monti and his cabinet of technocrats and of the PD - which first colluded with Monti's cuts and then implemented further cuts of its own in 2013-18 - cannot be ignored or minimised, the driver behind all this was the EU's ghastly fiscal compact, and its incorporation into the Italian constitution during the euro zone crisis.

Between 2010 and 2017 the number of doctors in Italy fell by 5.4% and the total number of people employed by the health service fell by 5.8%. The number of hospital beds fell from 350,000 in 1997 to 250,000 in 2017, with 70,000 of these losses occurring over the last decade. Between 2012 and 2017, 769 hospital wards were closed. The number of beds available in 2017 was 3.2 per thousand inhabitants in Italy, compared with six in France and eight in Germany. The 2010 starting point had been four per thousand, so this is a fairly drastic reduction - even if it is not as great as the decline in the UK over the same period: from 3.5 to 2.5 per thousand under Cameron and May.

President Sergio Mattarella gave his general backing to Conte - with a few rather minor coded criticisms about the timing of announcements - and urged cooperation between central and regional governments. In the Italian context this is not as much of a 'motherhood and apple pie' cliché

as it might appear to a UK audience. It needs to be pointed out that the devolution of powers to regional governments in relation to health has not been a good idea and that any further "differentiated autonomy" of the kind currently being demanded by northern regional governments (particularly the Lega-led regions of Lombardy and Veneto) will make matters worse.

The centre-left has not been blameless here any more than it was in relation to cuts at the national level. The devolution of these powers was a short-sighted piece of opportunism by the PD's immediate predecessors, who vainly sought to placate the Lega or at least the Lega's electorate. The devolved powers have given further scope for privatisation and outsourcing in both Lombardy and Veneto - an appalling model that the Lega is seeking to introduce into Umbria, which it took over after the October 2019 regional election. In any event an efficient national health service needs to be truly national, not an incoherent conglomeration of regional services.

Although the measures being taken by the government have been quite drastic, there is some hope that this approach will prevent the epidemic from getting worse, in view of the recent slowdown in China in the wake of a broadly similar approach. Conversely, it is obvious that the more *laissez-faire* approach favoured by many business interests would put more lives at risk.

Given that Italy had negative growth in October-December 2019, it is extremely likely that the COVID-19 crisis will push it into a full-blown recession - particularly if industrial production slumps and tourism continues to decline. There had already been a serious stock market slump in the February-March period - on March 9 the index plunged by 11.17% (€51 billion) in a single day. On March 10 the fall continued (-3.28% ie, 13.6 billion Euros). Moody's forecast is that Italy's gross national product will decline by 0.5% in 2020. Therefore - perhaps because Conte knows that, despite his high popular approval ratings, he is not regarded as completely reliable by big capital, because he is at least nominally linked to M5S - it looks as if he is taking a gamble on putting people before profit.

That he may in part be motivated by understandable personal hostility to both Matteo Salvini (who brought down his first government) and more recently Matteo Renzi (who has sought to undermine the M5S-PD coalition he advocated back in 2019) is irrelevant. It is equally fortuitous that PD leader Nicola Zingaretti, who started to feel ill on the night of March 6-7, has tested positive for COVID-19 and is pushing the PD members of the cabinet to back Conte to the hilt, despite the initial hesitation of the PD economics minister, Roberto Gualtieri (who seemed more inclined to listen to business lobbyists and more wary of clashing with the EU Commission over the urgent need to increase Italy's budget deficit).

The role of the president in this crisis should not be ignored - Mattarella, who has the personal integrity that most of his predecessors lacked, clearly finds Salvini's racism and xenophobia abhorrent and is prepared to back Conte's gamble in what he perceives to be the national interest. ●

# ACTION PLAN



Success in combating virus relies on transparency and popular sentiment

# It is a pandemic

The number of cases outside China has increased 13-fold over the last two weeks alone, says **James Linney**

**A**t the time of writing the new coronavirus - now named SARS-CoV-2, which causes the COVID-19 clinical syndrome - has just been officially classified as a pandemic by the World Health Organisation. It was only a matter of time. The rate of infection has been soaring. Over the last two weeks alone the number of cases has grown 13-fold and it is likely that we are in the early stages of the outbreak.

Currently, according to the WHO,<sup>1</sup> COVID-19 has been reported in 115 countries with a total of well over 100,000 individual cases. China still has by far the most of these, with 71%, followed by Italy (8%), South Korea (7%) and Iran (6%). A small glimmer of hope has been the dramatic fall in the number of new cases in China, where they have decreased from more than 2,000 per day to just 36 in the day before this article was written. Unfortunately, however, the virus is spreading as rapidly as ever elsewhere: Italy has seen 1,797 new cases in the past 24 hours.

It is still early days in terms of our understanding of the pathogenesis of the COVID-19 illness. The most common symptoms are fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat and fatigue. The majority of cases (about 80%) are mild, requiring no special treatment apart from rest, drinking fluids and paracetamol. The more severe ones can lead to increased shortness of breath, pneumonia and respiratory failure - so far there have been over 4,000 deaths. The case fatality rate (CFR) is an estimate, and is in constant flux. The WHO figures currently equate to a CFR of 3.5%, although this is likely to be an overestimation, due to an unknown number of cases not being reported due them being very mild; even so this is not a reassuring number.

The vast majority of deaths have been of people over 70 - mostly those who have other co-morbidities, such as cardiovascular or respiratory diseases. Interestingly (and something to be

thankful for), the virus does not appear to affect young children as severely as adults. A study in China found that of the 45,000 cases examined 2.5% of children and teens who became infected developed severe disease and only 0.2% became critical.<sup>2</sup> Another study found that children are just as vulnerable to contracting COVID-19,<sup>3</sup> but for some reason the illness causes less morbidity and mortality; one theory being that more immature lungs do not have as many receptors affected by the virus. Another early study has reported that the median incubation period is five days and 97.5% of those who develop symptoms will do so within 11.5 days,<sup>4</sup> giving credence to the 14-day quarantine period being applied.

There have already been over 5,000 studies published (mostly in China), contributing to a valuable, growing understanding of SARS-CoV-2; yet some of the most important questions remain unanswered: from what animal(s) did it originate? Will it fade out in the coming months, like we would expect from a seasonal influenza outbreak? Will it be possible to develop a vaccine? Will the virus be able to make small changes to its outer proteins to produce new strains (a process known as 'antigenic drift'), meaning that any future vaccines will become ineffective? With so many unanswered questions, predictions about the global impact of COVID-19 are impossible at this stage.

In the United Kingdom, Chris Whitty, chief medical officer, has stated that a population-wide outbreak is likely and that up to 80% of people could be infected; this could potentially mean, in a worse-case scenario, up to a 100,000 deaths. Boris Johnson and Matt Hancock have been doing their best to try to appear in control, but they are both so obviously way out of their depth - with Johnson trying to stick to his general election tactic of repeating meaningless, pathetic mantras in press conferences. This time, instead of "get Brexit done", we are told, "We can

beat this" or "We know how to defeat this and we will". Along with this hyperbole, we have the government's published 'Coronavirus action plan': more useless verbosity; good only in giving Johnson something to say. We are currently in the 'containment phase', we are told, but very soon will be entering the 'delay phase' - which is essentially the same as the containment phase (plus some other stuff not thought of yet). At some point down the line we might get to the 'mitigate phase,' but meanwhile it is business as usual. Hopefully SARS-CoV-2 has been briefed as to what phase it should be in.

## Two tactics

In reality, there are only two tactics when fighting an outbreak and they are not mutually exclusive. Firstly, containment: ie, trying to keep the virus in or out of a certain area - including quarantining, which is the isolating of a suspected infected person beyond the incubation period. We are already beyond the point where we can rely solely on containment: it is in the general population now, albeit in low levels.

It is crucial to continue to test people, try to identify where a case came from and trace contacts, whilst at the same time minimising the risk of people carrying the virus into and out of the country. Parallel to this - and something the UK government should have already started - must go the second tactic: mitigation. In other words, trying to stop the spread by reducing social contact and particularly large gatherings, where 'super-spreading' incidents are possible. Both China and Italy have attempted large-scale mitigation. China is implementing this (and no doubt strengthening its authoritarian military surveillance apparatus) on more than 60 million people in Hubei. Italy similarly is currently enforcing a country-wide lock-down. Draconian, military-style mitigation measures are counterproductive and lead to panic, misinformation and increase the chances

of infected people fleeing. The best way to mitigate is through voluntary cooperation, the sharing of up-to-date information and transparency.

No matter what measures are taken now, COVID-19 is inevitably going to mean extreme pressure for the national health service in the coming months. This is an NHS already much depleted - with 17,000 fewer beds, compared to 2010. Despite the vast majority of infected people not needing any medical input, the minority of very severe cases do require intensive supportive care, including dialysis for kidney failure and ventilation for respiratory failure. As Italy has discovered, hospital beds, trained staff, medical equipment (including ventilators) and plenty of capacity in intensive care units (ICUs) are the key to managing COVID-19. These are things that cannot be created quickly and no number of well-meaning volunteers or returning retired doctors are any sort of substitute for them. Italy has twice as many ICU beds per 100,000 population, compared to the UK, which ranks 24th out of 31 European countries in terms of ICU beds per head of population and 29th for hospital beds.<sup>6</sup>

This week's budget included some token money for the NHS, but this is all too little, too late. If there is a large outbreak in the UK, it is not going to be the implementing of Johnson's 'delay phase' that matters: rather the decade-long 'NHS cuts phase' that his party has ruthlessly enforced could result in thousands of unnecessary deaths ●

## Notes

1. [www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronavirus/situation-reports/20200310-sitrep-50-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=55e904fb\\_2](http://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronavirus/situation-reports/20200310-sitrep-50-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=55e904fb_2).
2. <http://weekly.chinacdc.cn/en/article/id/e53946e2-c6e4-41e9-9a9b-fea8db1a8f51>.
3. [www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.03.03.20028423v1](http://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.03.03.20028423v1).
4. <https://annals.org/aim/fullarticle/2762808/incubation-period-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-from-publicly-reported>.
5. <https://fullfact.org/health/nhs-vacancies>.
6. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00134-012-2627-8/figures/1>.

# What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# weekly worker

**International  
Women's  
Day:  
then and now**

## Class and women's liberation

Like anti-racism, International Women's Day has been colonised by the bourgeoisie, writes **Eddie Ford**

The bourgeois media had a field day when Vladimir Putin's Russia marked International Women's Day by holding beauty pageants for female members of the armed forces.<sup>1</sup> As *The Sun* reported in delight, one parade organised by the Black Sea fleet marked the achievements of naval personnel "of the weaker sex". Another event, called 'Beauty of the Airborne Forces', was staged by paratroopers in Tula, the official description stating: "In the course of the contest girls will take part in several trials, in which they will demonstrate their beauty, aesthetic excellence, intelligence, moral and spiritual properties" - including skills in cooking and sewing. If that was not enough, there was also the 'Omsk police lady' contest in Siberia - the participants were required to pose in uniform to find the most "glamorous" police officer.

Of course, the anti-sexist *Sun* and other papers were inviting us to sneer at the terribly backward Russians. But they appear to have forgotten a certain event that was prime-time TV viewing in Britain until fairly recently and, incredibly, still exists - ie, the thoroughly demeaning Miss World, which does exactly the same thing, along with Miss Universe, Miss International and Miss Earth.

Revealingly, this year's International Women's Day was sponsored by, amongst others, Jeff Bezos of Amazon - as proudly displayed on the home page of its horribly corporate website, which makes you lose the will to live.<sup>2</sup> Bezos, of course, is the man who drives his workers to suicide by treating them like robots - squeezing every last second out of them, so he can enjoy his billionaire lifestyle. One thing you can guarantee is that he does not give a damn about his female employees any more than his male ones - though he might well have to treat Amazon's female executives differently.

Just as putrid is Amanda Milling, MP for Cannock Chase and "co-chairman" of the Tory Party. Writing in the *Express* - always a stalwart for equality and social justice - she argues that her party embodies the "real spirit" of International Women's Day: the Conservative Party "has led the way in breaking down barriers for women in politics" (March 7). She reminds us that, unlike the Labour Party, the Tories have had two female leaders and can claim the first sitting woman MP, Nancy Astor - which is somewhat disingenuous, of course. But you can see why Milling would have been embarrassed to mention the actual first woman MP: Constance Markievicz, a revolutionary Irish nationalist who took part in the 1916 Easter Uprising but refused to take up her Westminster seat.

### Working Women

Obviously, what Milling says is stupid and hypocritical - maybe she even believes it. She would doubtlessly be horrified to learn that the annual celebration was originally called International Working Women's Day. The March 8 anniversary actually began as a commemoration of the



**Weird: International Women's Day in 2020 Russia**

1857 strike by New York women garment workers, demanding a 10-hour working day and votes for women - viciously attacked by the police. Half a century later, on February 28 1909, the Socialist Party of America staged a 'National Women's Day' demonstration in New York to commemorate the strike, and to renew its demands - for a shorter working day and votes for women.

Then the August 1910 International Socialist Women's Conference held in Copenhagen, organised by the Socialist International (which the Labour Party had joined in 1908), adopted the proposal of the German delegates, led by Clara Zetkin, for an annual commemoration. On March 19 1911 the first International Working Women's Day was marked by millions turning out for mass rallies and demonstrations wherever the Socialist International was strong - in Germany, Austria, Denmark, Switzerland, etc.

Another thing our rulers would dearly like us to forget is that the IWWD was opposed to feminism. Some sections of the suffragette movement in Britain were demanding "equality" between women and men - which meant demanding the vote only for middle class women, those with property, leaving working class women in the same boat as working class men, *without a vote* - on the grounds that it was a 'realistic' first

step. As everyone knows, International Women's Day in 1917, on February 23 (March 8 using the Gregorian calendar), presaged the end of tsarism. The demonstrations were initiated by women textile workers in Petrograd and spread from factory to factory, city to city, their demands becoming increasingly militant and revolutionary. As Leon Trotsky wrote:

We did not imagine that this 'Women's Day' would inaugurate the revolution. Revolutionary actions were foreseen but without a date. But in the morning, despite the orders to the contrary, textile workers left their work in several factories and sent delegates to ask for support ... which led to a mass strike ... all went out into the streets.

Within seven days tsar Nicholas II abdicated and the provisional government granted women the right to vote.

Clara Zetkin was convinced that the struggle for women's rights had to go hand in hand with working class men - it cannot be won by women alone, it needs the active participation of men. This was not a patronising attitude, as some might think, but showed Zetkin's determination to wage a class struggle for the liberation of all humanity regardless of sex or ethnicity.

Eventually, in 1977, the Soviet Union effectively handed over

International Women's Day to the United Nations. Since the collapse of the USSR and the weakening of the left globally, high finance and the bourgeoisie moved in to take it over - profits were to be made, and the working class origins had to be written out of the story. There is a parallel here with anti-racism, without stretching the point too much. The idea that the bourgeoisie of 2020 is the same as the bourgeoisie of 1920 or 1950 is nonsense - even if many on the left seem to think so. The bourgeoisie and bourgeois feminists have colonised International Women's Day, making it their own. This does not mean that women have been liberated, but rather that the ruling class has adopted different methods in order to keep the working class in its place. Nothing stands still.

Placing things in a broader historical context, enfranchising women in Britain was accompanied by an extension of the vote for working class men. But it was only middle class women initially who got the vote. The Representation of the People Act 1918 enfranchised all men over 21, but only women over the age of 30 who met *minimum property qualifications*.<sup>3</sup> The intention was to offset the influx of working class men into the electorate with that of middle class women. Before that the Tory Party was proposing a referendum on female suffrage, in which only the

existing electorate - of middle class men - would vote. Back then, taking a healthier attitude than recently, Labour rejected referendums as a dictator's device.

In the end, it was a Tory government which passed the 1928 Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act, extending the franchise to everybody over the age of 21. In 1948 the Labour government at last removed plural voting rights which had been held by about 7% of the electorate - people affiliated with a university were allowed a vote in both the university constituency and their home constituency, and property owners could vote both in the constituency where their property lay and that in which they lived, if the two were different. Some lucky people got five votes!

It was only in 1969 that Harold Wilson's Labour government reduced the voting age from 21 to 18, while the CPGB's Draft programme demands the vote for 16-year-olds ●

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### Notes

- www.thesun.co.uk/news/11119828/putin-army-sexism-international-womens-day.
- www.internationalwomensday.com.
- Although by 1900 more than one million single women in England were registered to vote in local elections: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s\\_suffrage\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom#cite\\_note-HoCL2013-8](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage_in_the_United_Kingdom#cite_note-HoCL2013-8).

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