

weekly **worker**



**Lindsey German sticks to
implication that STWC associates
itself with Labour's witch-hunt**

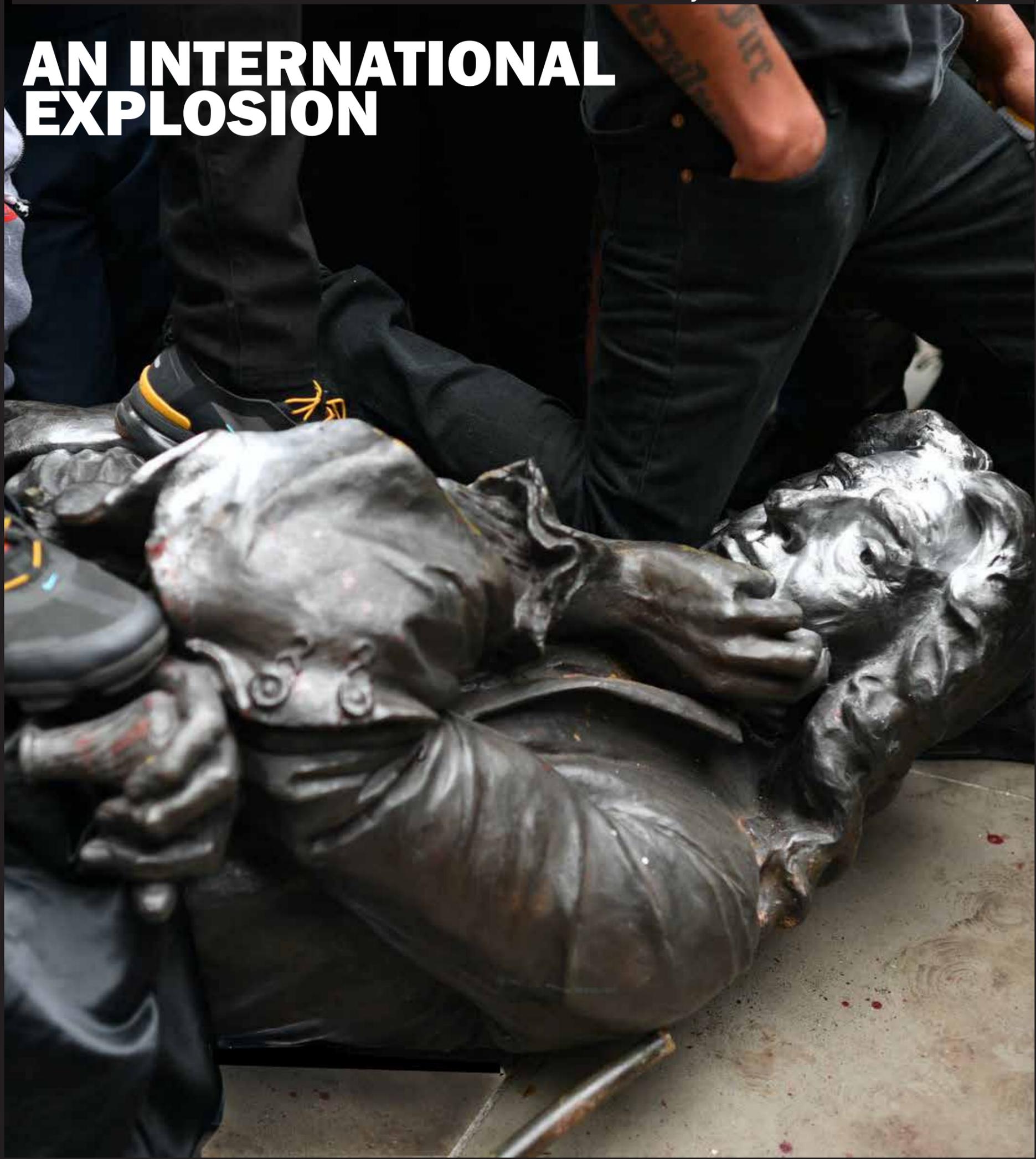
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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AN INTERNATIONAL EXPLOSION



LETTERS



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

Communication

Ben Lewis's second letter (June 5) is a good-faith effort to understand my criticism of Lars T Lih's concept of Erfurtianism and its application to the history of Russian Marxism. Still, we continue to talk past each other.

This misunderstanding is due in large part to Lewis and Jack Conrad attributing positions to me that I do not hold and that were not in my letters of May 14 and 28. I never said that Engels "rejected" or "disavowed" the Erfurt programme; I never expressed any reservations about the need for a minimum-maximum programme; and I didn't place the *Erfurt programme* or the pre-1910 Kautsky outside of the Marxist tradition. Because they think they have to defend positions I have no interest in criticising, they misconstrue my main concern about the kinds of tactics required to fight for a democratic republic.

So much for generalities. Let's go through the main points of Lewis's response to see how these mischaracterisations play out around specific issues.

First, Lewis makes an attempt to identify the crux of the matter under discussion. Claiming that Engels was "delighted at what he saw as the victory of Marxism outlined in the *Erfurt programme*", Lewis says that I can't accept that the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) was a revolutionary organisation and that I think it merely strove for liberal reforms and freedoms under a state controlled by the bourgeoisie. No, the crux of the matter for me is that Lih did not mention the democratic republic in his book on Lenin. I then traced this oversight back to his concept of Erfurtianism, which also fails to mention the issue of the democratic republic in Germany or in Engels' *Critique*. Since we don't agree on what the crux of the matter is, there is bound to be miscommunication. Putting aside what the crux is, Lewis says that I can't accept that the SPD was a revolutionary organisation. I find this either-or logic crude and sterile.

My view of the history of the SPD is actually very much in line with a characterisation of Kautsky made by Lih last year in *Jacobin* (June 29 2019): Kautsky and the SPD "talked the talk, but did not walk the walk". Rather than being either unambiguously revolutionary or not, the SPD's character was multifarious and shifting. Lewis also misattributes to me the view that the SPD only strove for liberal reforms and freedoms within a bourgeois state. My comment on freedoms within a bourgeois state was actually part of a criticism of Lih, who said that Lenin's primary political objective was to obtain the freedoms then already enjoyed by the SPD. I didn't claim that the SPD itself was satisfied with its condition or that it didn't desire full democracy and socialism.

Lewis also defends Jack Conrad's particular form of either-or logic. Conrad said I painted Engels as a "rejectionist" of Erfurtianism. I responded that Conrad was playing anachronistic word games, because there was no such thing as Erfurtianism to reject. Engels was happy with the theoretical part of the programme dealing with the development of capitalism and critical of the political part, because it was not forceful enough. By plopping me into a made-up "rejectionist" political category, Conrad and Lewis want to claim that I am creating a break between an imaginary German reformist social democracy and Russian Marxist orthodoxy. I repeat, it is not either-or. The content of the *Erfurt programme*, the content of

Kautsky's writings, the practice of the SPD leadership, and the sentiments of the SPD membership were by no means identical.

I definitely do think that Engels' criticism and Plekhanov's and Lenin's inclusion of the demand for a democratic republic in the Russian programme embody the full orthodox Marxist position; but then so do Kautsky's writings on republicanism and the road to power, which were more consistent with an orthodox Marxist position than the *Erfurt programme* itself. That is why I do not see the RSDLP and the SPD as "worlds apart" in either 1891 or 1903. I see a sliver of a crack between them (and within both of them) that gradually widened into a chasm. Because these differences and their development were subtle and complicated and stretched over two decades, I find Lih's concepts of Erfurtianism and the merger formula too blunt as instruments of analysis of this complex history.

I'll finish with some points about the history of Russian Marxism. Lewis agrees with Lih's claim that the primary goal of Russian Marxism was legality. I think this claim is in conflict with Lih's own emphasis in *Lenin rediscovered* on the importance of Lenin's agitational writings in *Iskra*, which Lih calls Lenin's "undiscovered book." The aim of these articles was to agitate for a democratic republic. Legality, which existed for a short period of time from 1905 to 1907, and then again in 1917, certainly made it easier for the Russian Marxists to operate among the masses; but there is a big difference between saying that legality made it easier for the Russian Marxists to operate and that legality was their primary political goal and the subject of their political agitation. Limiting Lenin's primary aim to legality can only blur the line of demarcation that he sought to draw in his agitation between bourgeois liberalism and thorough and consistent democracy. It also makes it more difficult to understand why *Iskra* was supported by activists in Russia and became the core of a reconstituted party.

The last point concerns Lih's method of historical argumentation. On three important political events in Russian Marxist history - Plekhanov's draft programme of 1885, Lenin's *Two tactics of social democracy in the democratic revolution* and the October revolution - Lih provides accounts that are accompanied by comments that run something like the one in the above mentioned *Jacobin* article, 'Kautsky as architect of the October revolution': "Of course, I am not saying that Kautsky was necessarily the first to come up with these ideas or that the Bolsheviks did not arrive at them independently. But Kautsky gave authoritative endorsement to the key tactical ideas of Bolshevism, giving clarity and confidence to the Russians with an impact that is hard to overestimate."

Just as it seems bizarre to me to call someone an architect who only approves of a plan drawn up independently by others, it also seems bizarre to label as Erfurtian a political programme developed independently in Russia six years before the Erfurt Congress took place. If Lih's historical efforts merely corrected distortions that Kautsky's work has suffered over the years, we could dismiss this quirky reasoning as relatively harmless; but if his effort to rehabilitate Kautsky involves blurring the distinctiveness of Lenin's own arguments, that is more consequential.

Of course, Lih has produced an enormous amount of work over the last two decades that has vastly improved and elevated the quality of debate within Marxist circles; but there is more to be done. Specifically, Lenin's "undiscovered book" of the theory and content of democratic political agitation needs to be studied and applied to the problem of pulling together a political

party committed to the establishment of a democratic republic in the US.

Gil Schaeffer
email

Economistic?

Eddie Ford rightly rejects the nationalist, statist calls for nationalisation of Nissan, but then calls for the answer to be global trades unions ("Global unions needed", June 5). I am surprised that the *Weekly Worker* is putting this forward, given that you usually oppose economistic solutions. The fact is that creating European Union-wide trades unions would be a big step forward currently, let alone global trades unions. Even the international combine committees that were created in the 1980s across the plants of large multinational corporations have fallen into disuse, so any chance of creating such global trades unions in the immediate or even medium-term future seems unlikely. Certainly not in any time scale that is much use to Nissan workers.

But, even if such a global trades union were created, what good would it be? It could only move forward on the basis of purely trades union politics/economism. What is actually required is for there to be a recognition of the nature of these companies as multinational companies, and, thereby to call for control over them to be exercised by their workers, wherever those workers may be. Now, I really am not fussed whether that takes the form of a new multinational, worker-owned cooperative or of the current multinational corporation, because, as Marx sets out in *Capital* volume 3, chapter 27, both of these forms represent socialised capital - the transitional form of property between capitalism and socialism. The only actual objective difference between these forms is that the workers create the former directly under their own control, whereas in the latter the shareholders use their political power to appropriate that control from the workers, depriving the 'associated producers' of their rightful control over that socialised capital.

The Marxist approach, therefore, is, as Marx and Engels set out in the *Communist manifesto*, to raise the 'property question'. In other words, it is up to Marxists to raise the question of why it is that shareholders and their representatives have been allowed to appropriate control over this socialised capital that does not belong to them. Why have they been allowed to use this control to line their own pockets, even at the expense of the actual underlying socialised capital itself, by massively increasing the amount of interest/dividends, and thereby diminishing the amount of profits available for capital accumulation? Why have their political representatives in the state, aided and abetted by policies of quantitative easing, been allowed to inflate asset prices and divert money-capital away from capital accumulation and into financial and property speculation, creating dangerous bubbles and simultaneously raising the value of labour-power (via higher costs of shelter and pension provision), which reduces the rate of surplus value? Why have they undermined the economy and capital accumulation itself via austerity, so as to restrain economic growth, wages and rises in interest rates, so as simply to keep those massively inflated asset price bubbles inflated?

What is required is not - at least as an immediate solution - global trades unions, but a global - or at least an EU-wide - political struggle to remove that unwarranted control by shareholders over capital they do not own. What is required is to raise the property question, and to ask why the "associated producers" are being denied the right to control the socialised capital - which is their collective property, just as much as is the capital of a worker-owned cooperative. After all, even bourgeois theorists like John Kay and Aubrey Silbertson set out long ago that shareholders are only creditors of these companies, and have no right to exercise such control. Even progressive social

democrats in the 1970s put forward the idea of codetermination, and election of 50% worker representation on boards. The EU even drew up proposals along those lines in the 1980s, before conservative governments became dominant.

Of course, those social democratic proposals are not enough, and result only in workers being sucked into corporatism and Mondism, but it does not take a lot for Marxists to make the further extension of that argument that it should be only the workers and managers in these companies that exercise democratic control over them.

Arthur Bough
email

Race and class

In the Online Communist Forum of Sunday June 7 there was some discussion of race and class, in the context of the police murder of George Floyd and the widespread revulsion to that. It was pointed out that there is no such thing as 'race': it has no scientific, biological existence, but was invented to "justify" slavery and colonialism. If you are going to treat your fellow human beings as dirt then you must also attempt to identify them as lesser beings as well. The excellent, two-volume work *The invention of the white race* by Theodore W Allen was cited.

A kind of support given to this appreciation of 'race' was shown in the anti-colonial movements around the world, particularly after World War II. There was a lot of support for liberation movements that said they were not going to get rid of the white bastards just to get black bastards in their place. This was echoed, to various degrees, from India to Indonesia, from Algeria to the Congo, with also varying degrees of success and luck - mostly, in the long run, not much of either.

I recall reading of the great hopes of Kwame Nkrumah and his people in Ghana. There were great deposits of bauxite there and the promise of resultant wealth. The American company responsible promised a "modern" nation with airports, roads and all the rest of the trappings. They needed to borrow to get this up and running, and eventually, of course, they ended up exporting bauxite - to be profitably turned into aluminium elsewhere, and carrying heavy debts for the privilege.

This kind of accomplishment was described in some detail by John Perkins in his *Confessions of an economic hitman*, where he writes of his work in countries such as Ecuador, Panama, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia. His job was, as it were, to promise the earth and exact the price - running up enormous debts to pay for infrastructure. In most cases the cornucopia wasn't delivered, but the debts kept the countries concerned firmly under the neo-colonial thumb of the United States. This remains the case and race doesn't come into it. The US will help the 'black bastards' keep the population in check, while they reap their class rewards.

A couple of further points on race and class. I read some years ago about a study of capital punishment in the US. I can't remember where and when I saw it, but I do remember that the study found that the first correlation to capital punishment was poverty, and then race: the authors did point out that there was an enormous overlap.

We can see it in the many, many stories of miscarriages of justice. If you have no money then, you can have a public defender. If you're lucky this will be an honest, and sober, individual who will do their best and will not be a close friend of the local police and prosecutors. They are unlikely, however, to be able to afford independent forensics or investigators to check out witnesses.

And then we have the UK. I also recall - and again I can't remember where and when - an article that said that black men in Britain suffered schizophrenia at a rate four times that of white men. In

Jamaica, on the other hand, black men suffered schizophrenia at a rate about the same as white men in Britain. Again, crimes of class rather than race. Finally on Black Lives Matter: if Priti Patel and Keir Starmer both think that pulling down statues is wrong, then that's two more reasons to ... keep on pulling.

Jim Cook
Reading

Class conflict

Attempts at defusing the outrage against racism provide a useful reminder about how modern capitalist states are capable of operating, when it comes to serious challenges to their power - or even just their ability to function efficiently. Effective control must be re-imposed by the elites and their various agencies in response to 'tolerable' levels of unrest, but for the moment Trump's deployment of troops and special forces against the US population is viewed as unnecessary or at least premature.

What was *potentially* pre-revolutionary has become drawn back down to a largely impotent form, but fortunately that process is proving unable to stop fresh layers of society being forced to open their eyes and take sides amidst this harsh new reality of starkly opened-up class conflict.

Another simple lesson to be learned, surely (although not only from this current mass uprising), is how it's never primarily a matter of the colour of your skin that determines whether you are to receive brutalisation from The Machine. No, it's fundamentally about how substantial (or even just how visible or popular) any challenge of yours is to its core and essential functions: ie, to US capitalism's ability to continue making ever more inflated margins of corporate profits both in its homeland and globally.

Then there is this extremely important truth: so-called 'people of colour' must be diverted from helping to build and indeed becoming a dynamic, central element within a new and truly socialist party for the USA - as one single entity of the working class organised as a whole. Anything other than following that undeniably complex route to freedom will lay them especially vulnerable to attack by the state machine and its various lackey agencies, to being picked off far more easily, leaving themselves wide open to vicious attack from that traitorous sub-class of black "misleadership" (as comrades at Black Agenda Report rather brilliantly identify it). In such a potential scenario, those 'misleaders' might well join in a chorus about how valuable reforms are being undermined; how achievements secured from their collaborationism (via safely defused protest activity, etc) are being endangered.

There is absolutely zero need to remind anyone - least of all any Marxist - that such a pathway could quite possibly result in a repeat of the murderous repression by the US state machine perpetrated against the Black Power movement or the Kent State University shooting of anti-Vietnam war protesters, etc.

Of course, in that potential scenario of a mass and unified American working class movement organising towards the taking of power, questions around China will then come flooding up to the surface. Would Chinese 'communism' unambiguously and wholeheartedly support a by then super-eco-conscious and ultra-'wokeful' stage of struggle, or regard it as a threat to its own 'national interests'? I'm pretty clear it would be the latter.

Then again, from a dialectical, Marxist point of view, it's a magnificently volatile world that we live in, so who knows what the working class of China by that point in time will have demanded or secured by way of democratic/genuinely communistic changes of its own?

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

AGGREGATE

Broad versus mass

Principles should not be negotiated away. Peter Manson reports on the discussion at last weekend's meeting

The joint aggregate meeting of CPGB and Labour Party Marxists (LPM) comrades, which took place online on June 6, focused on a theoretical question which was directly related to our practical policy: how we try to win working class activists to Marxist principles.

Introducing his talk, the chair of the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee, Jack Conrad, began by reminding comrades of the decision taken by a previous aggregate in March (see 'Put principle first' *Weekly Worker* March 12). A motion calling on the PCC to "organise an educational event", where the "issues of method, theory and concrete political tactics" (in particular relating to the Labour Party) could be clarified, was not carried following a tied vote. But the PCC had assured comrades that, rather than being lectured to at an "educational event", they would be able to discuss the question fully at future aggregates.

Comrade Conrad began by stating that the matter under debate could be entitled "Broad versus mass". Unlike most of the left, we do not attempt to bring together within a single political organisation people with a wide variety of views - certainly not by watering down our own politics and finding some "lowest common denominator". Nevertheless, the aim was to build a mass party - but on a principled basis.

He reminded comrades that the main parties affiliated to both the Second and Third Internationals, while not exactly being 'narrow', could hardly be described as broad. But they were certainly mass parties, despite being organised for the most part on a principled basis. Broadness, he said, was not the "road to socialism": it was more likely the road to nowhere.

We were, of course, used to accusations of sectarianism because we insist on fighting for our principles, but "nothing could be further from the truth", he said. It is not the job of Marxists to "trail behind the movement", but to win leadership over it.

A good example of this struggle came with the founding of the Labour Left Alliance (LLA) in 2019, continued comrade Conrad. The majority involved - initially including the Labour Representation Committee - were in favour of a broad alliance, which adopted exactly such a "lowest common denominator" approach. That is why LPM proposed its principled alternative constitution - in contrast to the version originally put forward by Labour Against the Witchhunt (LAW), which failed to even mention capitalism, socialism, the ecological crisis or the need to fight for democracy - it was more or less limited to the struggle for democracy within Labour, as well as opposition to the anti-left witch-hunt.

We support that struggle, of course, but for us the main question is the need to equip the working class with the politics needed to become the ruling class. By contrast, the majority sought justification in numbers and were prepared to "tone down" their politics in order to attract in particular those with left reformist politics. That was the wrong approach, he said.

Here comrade Conrad gave examples from the early struggle for Marxism, starting with the *Communist manifesto*, which specified exactly what type of socialism was needed. He went on to mention the German Social Democratic Party's *Gotha programme*, which was opposed by Karl Marx, then



The broad road

its *Erfurt programme*, as well as the struggle for principled politics within the Parti Ouvrier in France.

By contrast, he continued, the left today is *disorganised* into rival "confessional sects". His first example was that of the Socialist Workers Party, which actively discourages any serious questioning of, let alone opposition to, its dogmatic positions, such as the idea of "state capitalism". Like other sects, the SWP has a "self-perpetuating leadership", which adheres to an "unofficial programme".

And overwhelmingly the left adopts the 'broad' approach - the SWP attempts to build unity with those to its right through its so-called 'united fronts', such as the Stop the War Coalition and Stand Up To Racism. It does not attempt to use such bodies as a platform for Marxism. But it is not just single-issue campaigns: much of the left is prepared to build *parties* on such a basis.

Comrade Conrad's first example of that was the Scottish Socialist Alliance, which adopted a "tailist approach" to Scottish nationalism and then itself *became* a left-nationalist organisation in the shape of the Scottish Socialist Party. Then there was the Respect party in England and Wales - described by the SWP as an "alliance between socialists and Muslim activists" - in which it was prepared to "sacrifice one principle after another", he said. It not only rejected the call for a republic in opposition to the current monarchy, as well as open support for gay rights, but the SWP even voted down the adoption of its own 'What we fight for' statement (which is published each week in *Socialist Worker*) in the name of unity with those to its right - not least the Muslim Association of Britain.

Before that there was the Socialist Alliance, which - following the line of not only the SWP, but also the Socialist Party in England and Wales - stood in elections on a left-Labourite platform, the idea being to establish a "Labour Party mark two".

Comrade Conrad stressed the point once more - broadness *disempowers* us, because we end up with politics based on those to our right, not Marxist principles. A prime example was the adoption by 'official communism' of popular frontism in the 1930s: in something that was "eerily reminiscent of Menshevism", socialism was ruled to be "off the agenda".

Finally there was the question of the Labour Party itself. Its very form embodies broadness: its professional councillors, its career MPs, its trade union bureaucrats, its cooperative businesses, etc, with their tendency to seek acceptability in the eyes of the bourgeoisie. In this environment the reformist left finds itself constantly drawn to the right. Many completely sell out. That has seen Momentum actually joining the anti-left witch-hunt, he said. Talking of which, it was not just Wavertree Constituency Labour Party that is being investigated: the purge will be far wider.

In conclusion comrade Conrad emphasised that our position was not to stand aside: we need to engage critically not only with Labour members, but within all such 'broad' bodies where we are able to put forward our clear, Marxist principles. We say, "Neither sectarian purity nor broad-frontism!"

Debate

As the first to speak from the 'floor', I stressed the two-sided nature of broad fronts: while, as comrade Conrad had emphasised, they can lead us nowhere in such a form, they almost always give us the opportunity to intervene and fight for principled politics. We had, of course, intervened in the Socialist Alliance, the SSP, Respect, etc, while today LPM comrades are intervening in the LLA.

However, I warned of the dangers of our comrades actually leading such bodies, which is what happened with the LLA. A long-standing former member of ours ended up effectively running the new alliance, once the LRC pulled out, and as LLA secretary she felt obliged to reflect the views of the 'broad' majority on the organising group in bulletins, website statements, etc. In my view, we must avoid taking up such senior posts within broad groupings.

Next up was another PCC member, Mike Macnair, who referred to the "snowball effect": we cannot "just stand aside", because we need to build a new party. He gave several historical examples to illustrate the positive steps that can be taken from engaging with formations to our right, such as winning over members to our ideas.

He was followed by the meeting's chair, Farzad Kamangar, who talked of the grouping in which she has played a leading role: Hands Off the People

of Iran. There had been problems in agreeing a statement in Farsi amongst Iranian activists - not so much as a result of their own differences, but because some comrades felt there was a need to cater for the views of activists who were not necessarily for socialism or were even opposed to it.

Comrade Kamangar went on to point to the "serious problems" with Corbynism: its unwillingness to stand up to the right. But LPM had "operated on a different level from the very beginning": whereas most on the Labour left look back to what had existed in the past, LPM looks forward to a future under working class rule.

Next to speak was Bob Paul, who wondered if the LLA might end up as a Labour centrist organisation - that is why it needs an injection of "revolutionary ideas". After which James Harvey of LPM added that one of the problems of working within the Labour Party was that it was tempting to make concessions. If you critique existing policies, etc, you may be asked, "What's your alternative?" Comrades know that to propose, for example, the need for popular militias is likely to provoke mockery, as it represents a complete break with the existing British constitution. Similarly, socialism is seen by much of the Labour left as the policies of a Labour government, which means we have to explain what we mean by it before we can outline how it can be achieved.

A guest at the aggregate, comrade Moshé Machover, responded to this by once again stressing the need to engage with Labourism, while not giving in to its politics. He was followed by another LPM comrade, Stan Keable, who pointed out that the likes of Momentum's Jon Lansman see the need to win over the centre ground, so advocating genuine working class socialism is the last thing they think we should do. He pointed out that LPM was formed in 2011 - ie, before Jeremy Corbyn became leader - and its aim is the creation of a Marxist party, not a "halfway house".

Comrade Keable responded to my point about the dangers of taking leadership of broad campaigns and factions by stressing that it is quite possible to form a Marxist minority *within* their leadership. He added that LPM was central to the formation of a 'broad alliance' in the shape of LAW.

William Sarsfield came back to the question of 'broadness' on the part of

the SWP, which decries those who insist on putting forward principled politics within organisations like Respect or Stop the War as "sectarians", and opposed to "the movement". Part of this derives from the SWP's own lack of programme, which allows it to "slip from one approach to another", but that very broadness has a "corrosive effect" on the revolutionary organisation itself.

Replying to the debate, comrade Conrad stated that the problem with the kind of 'left unity' advocated by many on the Labour left was that it had to also include the centre in order to defeat the right. It was opportunist to call for the unity of the Labour left without specifying for what. In the case of the LLA, it refers to the "inspirational leadership" of Corbyn and laughably Labour being a "democratic socialist party". For our part, we do not aim to "reclaim Labour", as do so many on the left. After all, the original clause four was deliberately Lassalleian and anti-Marxist.

Responding to comrade Keable, he pointed out that LAW was rather different from the LLA, since the former was a "single-issue campaign" unlike the latter or other party projects. Finally he summarised the whole purpose of this aggregate debate: to "restate our opposition to broad fronts", which are "a trap for socialists". Within them they either "get silenced or silence themselves". Yes, we must win over the masses - but to the programme of working class self-liberation.

CU

The aggregate ended with a brief session on the CPGB's annual summer school, introduced by comrade Kamangar, who reiterated that this year Communist University will take place from Friday August 14 to Saturday August 22. It will, of course, almost certainly be an online event for obvious reasons.

Comrade Kamangar gave details of how the PCC is planning to organise CU and asked comrades for their views. Since online debates are rather different from face-to-face events - it is more difficult to remain focused for a lengthy period when sitting alone in front of your computer - the PCC felt that there should be only two sessions a day rather than the usual three. But their length has not yet been determined.

Then there is the problem of the variation in sound quality, depending on where the speaker is located and what software they have. There was also the need to update our website and to decide the exact form in which people could access the event and the role of social media.

Emil Jacobs, a guest from the Netherlands, explained how he and his comrades had created a new CU website. He wondered about the possibility of setting up a special studio in London with first-rate equipment, from where speakers could give their talks.

Comrades also raised the question of our usual lunchtime sessions on basic Marxism and the possibility of online fringe meetings. There was also the question of evening socials, since an important part of CU is precisely the social aspect and the need to exchange views informally as well as within official sessions.

There were many useful suggestions raised from the floor, which the PCC will look at over the coming period ●

USA

Race *über alles*?

Daniel Lazare looks beneath the skin of Black Lives Matter and reveals the links with big business

It goes without saying that any Marxist worth his or her salt will give full-throated support to the vast multiracial protests that have shaken the United States since the police murder of George Floyd on May 25. But it also goes without saying that any Marxist will use the dialectical method in an effort to 'peer around the corner' and determine what the movement's equally vast contradictions bode for the anti-racist movement - and to do so ruthlessly and unsparingly without fear of stepping on anyone's toes.

Any such inquiry must focus on three related questions: race, class and political organisation. If there is a sense of *déjà vu* about Black Lives Matter, for instance, it is because we have seen all too many movements burst into life in recent years, burn bright for a few weeks or months, and then fade just as rapidly. The Arab Spring is one example, Occupy Wall Street another and the Yellow Vests movement a third. The last threw France into turmoil and inspired imitators from Russia to Australia. But, despite assurances by groups like Socialist Resistance that "the Gilets Jaunes are not going away" and "they are in no mood to give up", within six months the movement was kaput.¹

Such movements are characterised by spontaneity, a weak to non-existent organisational structure and an extreme lack of staying power. So too with Black Lives Matter, which Alicia Garza, one of its founders, describes as "leaderful" and others describe as "horizontal" - meaning that decision-making is loose, non-hierarchical and decentralised. This means that activists are free to do what they want when proper circumstances arise. But it leaves them high and dry, once circumstances change.

But what BLM lacks in political staying power, it more than makes up for in terms of business hustle. In 2016, it was the recipient, along with other black-oriented groups, of a \$100 million grant from the Ford Foundation and other philanthropic organisations, whose purpose was "to nurture bold experiments and help the movement build the solid infrastructure that will enable it to flourish".² If BLM could not marshal staying power on its own, then Ford would help it. BLM also announced that it would partner with the New York ad agency, J Walter Thompson, to create "the biggest and most easily accessible black business database in the country" and that it would team up with a black-owned, Boston-based bank known as OneUnited to issue a debit card aimed at black consumers.³

"The Amir visa debit card symbolises the continued fight for justice and the power of our dollars," OneUnited Bank proclaimed in a press release. "Yes... #BlackMoneyMatters #BlackLivesMatter."⁴

Never mind that OneUnited is a corrupt capitalist enterprise that provided its chairman, Kevin L Cohee, with a \$26,500-a-month mansion in Santa Monica, California, free of charge; that provided him with a free Porsche with which to motor about town, and which benefited from a \$12 million federal bailout that Democratic Congresswoman Maxine Waters, whose husband sits on OneUnited's board, helped arrange in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.⁵ But none of this matters, as far as BLM is concerned. What matters is that its aspirations are distinctly



BLM: official street art in Washington DC

higher than those of the scruffy, lower-middle class Yellow Vests and that the ruling class is doing what it can to help it achieve its goals.

Needless to say, a decentralised power structure not only rewards spontaneity, but tends to obscure what a few well-placed insiders are doing in the movement's name.

Upside-down logic

As for race, no anti-racist could possibly disagree with a slogan like 'Black lives matter'. For years, cops assumed that they could whale away at people like George Floyd with abandon - so insisting now that such lives are no longer expendable amounts to a powerful demand for human dignity.

Except for one thing: BLM has raised eyebrows by preventing other groups from using the same slogan. As Alicia Garza wrote in 2014, just as the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag was beginning to trend,

Not just all lives: black lives. Please do not change the conversation by talking about how your life matters too. It does, but we need less watered-down unity and more active solidarities with us, black people, unwaveringly, in defence of our humanity. Our collective futures depend on it.⁶

Thus - all lives matter, brown lives matter, migrant lives matter, women's lives matter, and on and on - all such violations of the BLM trademark somehow "erase our existence". It is as if Zionists objected to gays or Romans crying out, 'Never again', on the grounds that it detracts from the only holocaust that counts: that of the Jews.

Sophisticated Marxists and earnest activists will thus explain with a perfectly straight face why BLM is not the least bit sectarian and why the counter-slogan, 'All lives matter', is racist and rightwing. But upside-down logic like this is hardly surprising in a country in which Democratic politicians - not unlike rightwing Labourites in the UK - argue that Israel must be free to be as repressive as it likes and that only an anti-Semite would argue that all lives matter when it comes to Jews and Palestinians.

But this is not the only way in which BLM is sectarian - it is also in its analysis of the problem of police violence. Anyone who attends a George Floyd protest can be forgiven for assuming that all victims of the police are black, since they are the only ones BLM mentions. But in fact only about 25% are black, according to various databases, while 40% are white, 16% Hispanic and the rest are either another race or unknown.⁷ To be sure, 25% is double the black share of the US population as a whole, which suggests that race is still a primary factor. But, once class is factored into the equation, its role ends up much diminished.

David North's Socialist Equality Party has certainly seen its share of craziness since the Healyite implosion of the mid-1980s. But a detailed analysis that the SEP's World Socialist Web Site published in December 2018 is a major contribution to socialist literature. By zeroing in on the economically blighted towns, cities and rural communities in which police killings occur, WSWS was able to demonstrate that economics plays a far larger role than BLM would like us to believe.⁸

America is a land of spatial segregation, in which those with the means purchase homes in leafy neighbourhoods where education and other municipal services are top-notch and violence is rare. But 28% live in districts in which police killings have occurred and where the black and Hispanic presence is significantly higher than average and the poverty rate is higher as well - 19.5% versus a national average of 12.3%. While the police death rate for blacks in such "police killing zones", as WSWS calls them, was two and a half times the average for black Americans generally as of 2017, the rate for whites was nearly five times the national norm. While police were still more likely to murder blacks in such areas, therefore, they were only 17% more likely than they are to murder whites. Simultaneously, they were 25% less likely to kill Hispanics.

This does not mean that cops do not have a special animus toward blacks; given the role of black slavery in US history, it is more than possible that they do. But if that is the case, does

it mean they have a special links with big business fondness for Hispanics, since they kill them significantly less often? Or is the answer, rather, that economics are the chief determinant and that race is secondary? WSWS also broke down the figures for St Louis, Missouri, alone - a city devastated by deindustrialisation and racial discord. Blacks were still 22% more likely to be killed than the city average. But the deaths took place in neighbourhoods in which poverty rates were well above average even for hard-hit St Louis. So, once again, poverty turns out to be the chief factor.

Meanwhile, WSWS's most dramatic finding concerned rural "killing zones", in which the total death rate at the hands of the police is more than 10 times the national average and racial differences are again far less than BLM would suggest.

Conclusions

So what does it all mean? The most obvious is that BLM grossly distorts reality by elevating race *über alles* and 'disappearing' class. The more working class conditions plummet and economic polarisation goes shooting through the roof, the more poor people in general will wind up victims of police violence - and the more BLM will wind up closing its eyes to the full dimensions of the problem.

A second conclusion is that the hostility to 'All lives matter' is not only morally twisted, but politically self-defeating, since the effect is to shut out Hispanics, whites and others who are essential, if an interracial working class movement against racism - the only effective anti-racist force possible under capitalism - is ever to be built. If poverty is exploding in rural America along with police violence, then BLM, by ignoring and even denigrating poor whites, all but forces them into the arms of Trump. Since urban liberals do not care about such people, they figure that they may as well flip them the bird by voting for the person they most despise.

A third conclusion concerns the specific nature of US policing. Eighty-six percent of police funding comes from municipal governments dependent on highly inequitable property taxes, with the rest provided by the 50 state governments and only a

tiny admixture from federal authorities on high.⁹ Middle and upper class communities thus hire cops to serve as a kind of border patrol, while urban police forces, which usually draw more in the way of state support, are specifically charged with pacifying high-crime zones. Rural areas, beyond the sight of the urban media 'panopticon', are meanwhile no man's lands, in which anything goes and no-one cares - least of all anti-racist campaigners in the big cities.

Until recently, no-one cared about the consequences, as long as they got the job done. But now they are shocked - *shocked* - to discover that there is gambling at Rick's Café and are calling for reform.

Finally, there is the nature of racism in a class society like the US. While race is not an immediate factor in police shootings, it, of course, permeates the American class structure as a whole. The US political condominium rests on a vast and amorphous middle class dependent on good schools, nice homes, safe streets and an ever-rising standard of living. But it also requires a reserve army of the unemployed in the form of a vast and unruly underclass, consisting of poor blacks and Hispanics, and a growing number of poor whites as well. While it is certainly racist that blacks and Hispanics are disproportionately consigned to the lower ranks, the fact is that racism did not cause the underclass: US capitalism caused it, rather, and then used whatever human material was at hand to fill its ranks.

An increasingly undemocratic constitutional structure meanwhile reinforces racism and inequality by steering power to white rural states, while short-changing multiracial giants like New York and California. However, if BLM is not inclined to talk about structural reform, it is no doubt because the Ford Foundation would not like it - and in America, it is money that talks. So it is better to cover up the problem of an increasingly class-stratified society, while enjoying whatever fruits capitalism has to offer ●

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IDENTITY

An international explosion

Protests against police violence and structural disadvantage have erupted in country after country, but what happens next, asks Paul Demarty

The police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis has brought forth a mass, spontaneous political response.

One of the most striking features is its geographical spread, with protests taking place in cities throughout the United States - despite sometimes hideous police repression - and further afield indeed than that. Several cities around the UK have seen spontaneous solidarity demonstrations, with some marches numbering 20,000 participants - no mean feat under circumstances where mass gatherings are banned. The most stirring image perhaps came from Bristol, where a statue of the slave trader, Edward Colston, was pulled down, dragged about town and tossed into the harbour. A hysterical response to the event from 10 Downing Street demanding these vandals be 'brought to justice' seems a little tone-deaf. Any attempt to prosecute the 'guilty' ought to be resisted as enthusiastically as the images of their actions are to be enjoyed.

It is not uninteresting that the American events should have had such an intense response this side of the pond. Some rightwingers are scratching their heads a little. Many of the issues are different. Though our police hardly have a spotless record, when it comes to the deaths of young black men in their care (the death of Mark Duggan and subsequent riots of 2011 being a relatively recent case in point), the numbers are barely comparable, and the criminalisation of poor neighbourhoods is not nearly so advanced as in the States, where they are often effectively under permanent police occupation. The most notorious index, there, is the rate of incarceration: the US prison population is over two million, 20 times that of Britain (over four times *per capita*).

Many other things are the same, however. The immediate background - of a pandemic disastrously mishandled in both countries - is perhaps the most pertinent. (Race has, of course, made its way into that discussion as well.) The accession of 'law and order' politicians to the two countries' highest political office (however oddly the word 'order' sits in a description of the Trump presidency) - in both cases men with a long history of racism controversies - is another relevant homology.

In this country, the protests have somewhat caught the left off-balance. The Socialist Workers Party, which has more or less reduced itself to an anti-racist pressure group with a sprinkling of Sunday-school socialism and a toytown-Bolshevik internal regime, was almost completely absent from the first wave of protests, having radically overcommitted itself to maintaining the lockdown in debates within the National Education Union. Mike Macnair discussed this question last week,¹ so we will not revisit it except to note the irony. The one thing that the SWP ought to be the most ready for of all possible events - a mass spontaneous protest movement against racism - left it in the dust. A glance at this week's *Socialist Worker* reveals ample coverage of the protests, suggesting an increased level of participation, but its profile remains low, with home-made placards in evidence and the *Socialist Worker*/Stand Up To Racism brand all but invisible. The Socialist Party in England and Wales was quicker off the mark this time around, and had a presence on some of the earlier demonstrations.

The primary question is: where next? This is an especially acute matter on this side of the Atlantic, where the very concrete issue of the police force being trained to act as 'warrior cops'



Such movements brilliantly flare up, only to slowly fade away

is not *immediately* posed, and instead protests feed off a more varied cocktail of grievances (including, as well as the habit black men have of tragically kicking themselves down the nick stairs, the Windrush scandal, the demographics of Covid-19 deaths, the presence in Downing Street of a man unafraid to use the word 'picanniny' ...), but the problems are the same in both cases: some tactical, and some strategic.

On the tactical front, it must be stated baldly that protest movements fizzle out as a matter of course. I was reminded, when I saw Colston dragged down like Saddam Hussein, of the day I - and thousands of others - stood and watched our comrades invade the office buildings of Millbank, evacuating Tory headquarters and a host of other grubby enterprises, and kicking off a movement against student fee hikes with a real bang. The result was that the police were ready for us next time, and kettled us half to death. Meanwhile, the fee rise passed, and we had run out of road. The movement never gave birth to anything longer-lasting, so it faded into the memory of a particular generation of activists. Those in Oxford hoping to put Oriol's monument to Cecil Rhodes out of commission ought to bear in mind that Thames Valley police *will be ready for them*, and will send rougher sorts of officers to deal with the situation than we usually see on *Inspector Morse*. In any case, sooner or later the shock value of violence against imperialist statuary will fade; and BLM supporters will be faced with the transition from attacking *symbols* of power, to power itself.

Race and class

Which brings us to strategy, and theory. On the face of it, the orientation of the BLM movement - its determinate character as politics - is anti-racism in its modern 'identity politics' form. This is hardly surprising. Black identity politics is, today, the lens through which

most liberal and leftwing activists view events of this sort; and it can hardly be said that yet another black man dying at the hands of a police officer offers any kind of disproof of this theory.

Meanwhile, the far left has - to some extent since 1968 and overwhelmingly in the last decade - come to an uneasy accommodation with what is now called identity politics. This may be summarised in the proposition that capitalism is the root cause of racism, and therefore anti-racist politics can be expected to grow over into socialist politics if pushed to their limits. Indeed, therefore, the left's fight against racism is *inherently* a fight against capitalism, which cannot live without it. SPEW's Hugo Pierre quotes Malcolm X on this point: "You can't have capitalism without racism."²

Things are, at the very least, more complicated than that. There is first of all the brute fact that in western capitalist societies, including America and Britain, deliberate efforts have been made to diversify the professional layers of society over many decades. It has not, for a long time, been unusual for American cities to have black mayors, congressmen, state officials, lawyers and so on. All these cohorts remain disproportionately white, of course - the point is merely that they are no longer essentially 100% white.

The overwhelming majority of - well - *everyone*, but disproportionately black people, are not in the upper layers of the professions. What the black proletariat has in common with the black professionals and bourgeoisie as an object of struggle is, of course, prejudice and discrimination; and doing anti-racism *as identity politics* proposes black people *qua* black as the political agent. But the interests of black people are not aligned - there is, in an important sense, no such thing as 'the black community', though that is not to say - like Santa Claus - the *idea*

of it is not effective. So whose interests are *concretely* represented in identity-politics anti-racism? No prizes for guessing.

At issue, then, is the *subordination* of politics around the race question (but also, for that matter, the question of the repressive state apparatus) to the interests and outlook of the professional elite's black members and, consequently, to that elite as a whole. (This analysis is most closely associated today with Adolph Reed junior, Walter Benn Michaels and others on the United States left.)

Of course, this style of anti-racism is not *consciously* an ideology of that sort. The protestors of Ferguson in 2014, Baltimore in 2015, and Minneapolis, Bristol and wherever else today are certainly not under the impression that they are fighting for technocratic managerialism. It is not the sort of thing for which people are generally prepared to get tear-gassed. It is nonetheless discernible in the characteristic blurring of the line between representation and violence in this sort of politics, such that relatively minor workplace discomforts may be dramatically designated as "microaggressions", while the deaths of people like George Floyd are traced back to the tropes through which white police officers dehumanise black people (that is, a *representation*). Representations are the playthings of the professions - indeed, the very material substrate of them (the possession of quasi-proprietary rights over information leased to the capitalists or the state for rent). We generously-salaried professionals - even if our skills are very technical and abstruse - live by our ideas, and the representational aspects of our lives. Evening out the semiology of race is in the interests of black professionals. We need, in short, to attack more than statues.

There are signs that - for the more radical activists in the recent movement at any rate - certain limits are being reached. We may instructively compare the

political demands of the last such wave of protests in the middle 2010s to those of today: while the greatest prominence is given to the 'moderate' demands for meaningful judicial reckoning for Derek Chauvin *et al* and firmer oversight of police activity in the Twin Cities and elsewhere, demands for the 'defunding' and even abolition of the police have far greater prominence and popularity today, however hard corporate PR departments and pious politicians and clergymen attempt to smother such things with gestural solidarity.

It seems to me that that this represents a *rejection* of the mainstream identity politics associated with Wall Street Democrats, albeit not directly a rejection of Wall Street, and thus an aspect of the shift in American politics that resulted from the Bernie Sanders nomination challenges and the return of the word 'socialism' to the political vocabulary of American progressives - who are now refreshingly liable to see the Democrat right as *enemies*, not merely disappointing allies. It is no more than a nudge, however, and a more systematic programme with regard to the capitalist state is needed than essentially emotivist demands for the abolition of its most obviously despicable elements. Unfortunately, activists will not get it from the existing far left, busily telling them how brilliant they are in all things.

The first BLM protests gave us, as a by-product, the term 'woke' - initially used as a self-designation by activists, but now primarily used by the sneerier elements of the right as an insult. The question today is whether the 'woke' are capable of waking from the slumber of identity politics ●

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Notes

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DEBATE

Discontent and messianism

Chris Gray gives his take on the various oppressive regime forms that have appeared in modern times

Let us start with parliamentary democracy, where the people supposedly rule. However, the people are, of course, divided into two principal classes, one of which exploits the other: the bourgeoisie and the working class.

Things are so arranged under the capitalist mode of production that neither of these classes is able to completely enforce its rule. This point is well brought out by Hal Draper in *The revolutionary thought of Karl Marx*. In the first volume of this opus it is stated:

Of all the ruling classes known to history, the membership of the capitalist class is least well adapted, and tends to be most averse, to taking direct charge of the operation of the state apparatus. The key word is direct. It is least suitable as a governing class, if we use this term in its British sense to denote not a socioeconomic ruling class, but only the social circles from which the state machine tends to derive its personnel.¹

This, Hal Draper argues, is because the capitalist wants to make money, and looks to the state merely to support it in that. The pursuit of money takes up a lot of time and effort, and involves fighting off the competitive plans of rival capitalists. Such conditions produce openings for career politicians, whom the bosses see as a necessary evil.

Meanwhile, for different reasons, the proletariat is, under normal conditions of ruling class hegemony, likewise not “fit for political rule”. The working class is, by deliberate bourgeois policy, educationally stunted - as Marx puts it in his *Economic and philosophical manuscripts*, working for capital so adversely affects the worker that it “mortifies his body and ruins his mind”.

An inevitable consequence is the phenomenon of ‘messianism’: the craving for a charismatic leader and movement (the two usually go together), which will provide a miraculous solution. Here the work of Norman Cohn is of fundamental importance.²

We need good politicians, and there is no sure-fire way of getting them. Their absence generates a widespread, understandable belief that ‘politics is too serious a business to be left to the politicians’. And here messianism finds its point of entry. As Cohn puts it, “People feel themselves victims of forces which they are quite unable to master - and, the more concerned with religion they are, the more grievous their affliction.”³

Where the facts are not adequately grasped and marshalled in a framework worth utilising, instinct and prejudice come into play. The philosopher, John Gray, has characterised the resulting messianic or millenarian approach as follows:

Millenarian sects or movements always picture salvation as:

- collective, in the sense that it is to be enjoyed by the faithful as a collectivity;
- terrestrial, in the sense that it is to be realised on this earth, and not in some other-worldly heaven;
- imminent, in the sense that it is to come both soon and suddenly;
- total, in the sense that it is utterly to transform life on earth, so that the new dispensation will be no mere improvement on the present, but perfection itself;
- miraculous, in the sense that it is to be accomplished by, or with the help of, supernatural agencies.⁴

Such movements keep recurring,



Jacques-Louis David, ‘Napoleon crossing the Alps’ (1801): Marxism has largely neglected the phenomenon of military rule

provoked by ruling class action. Examples from Europe can be found in the English Civil War (1640-60), the French Revolution (1789-1802) and in the Russian Revolution (1917-24). But the classic instance could well be the seizure and rule over the German city of Münster by Anabaptists in 1534-35.

Münster’s revolutionary Christians (‘Anabaptists’ or ‘Rebaptisers’) drew from the *New Testament* a call for the re-establishment of human society on the basis of absolute equality and common ownership of goods. They expelled the Catholic bishop of Münster, Franz von Waldeck, who promptly organised a siege of the rebel city. But here we have a siege, messianism proclaiming equality, and the rapid emergence anew of inequality - plus, it is safe to assume, growth of unpopularity of the ruling elite.

John Gray gives a gripping account of the events occurring in the city, which was under siege until June 1535, when the traditional authorities recovered control of it. He records, *inter alia*, the imposition of communal dining (involving the requisitioning of private food supplies), compulsion to serve in the city’s armed forces or work as a public artisan, the expulsion of Lutherans and Catholics, who were forced to leave behind their money, food and spare clothes, prohibition of all unauthorised meetings and a theatre of public executions (pp75-78).

Antidote

The only antidote to this millenarian poison is a fully democratic regime, in which ordinary citizens have the necessary knowledge, information and opportunity to control their affairs by popular vote. But there is no prior guarantee of such an outcome. Furthermore, the messianic process can just as easily appear in a rightwing shape as in a leftwing one. Norman Cohn has a lot to say about the author of a work called *The book of a hundred chapters*, who is known as “the revolutionary of the Upper Rhine”. This personage presents himself as a combination of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa and Jesus Christ redivivus at the head of a movement of pious layfolk, monogamous and born in wedlock.

A note of opposition to commercial capitalism and private property is struck. Not only that: promotion of common ownership is combined with “megalomania nationalism” in the form of a resurgent German empire (sounds

like Adolf Hitler, doesn’t it?). This empire will subdue France, England, Spain and Italy, as well as the Islamic world.

As Lenin was fond of reminding people, there is an English saying: “Facts are stubborn things”. If the capitalist class, the bourgeoisie, cannot sort out the mess and the working class cannot either, it falls to some other social class or group to undertake the job. And we have become familiar with such a state of affairs. Tony Cliff referred to it way back in the last century under the name of the “deflected permanent revolution”: ie, a variation of Leon Trotsky’s perspective, in which the working class fails to impose its own rule, leaving an unpleasant social vacuum. Example: Indonesia, following its declaration of independence in 1945, which led eventually to the seizure of power by the army in 1965. And there are other potential protagonists - for example, the peasantry, and the bureaucracy (even in combination).

As regards the peasantry, historical experience from at least 1798 onwards leads to the conclusion that the peasants, once they move, contribute great energy to a revolution - Ireland, Russia, Mexico, Spain, China can be cited as evidence. Furthermore, as peasants vary from country to country (and even within states), there are degrees of creativity among them. Perhaps in Europe Spain holds pride of place.

The peasants drive the revolution forward, and can, under favourable conditions, establish a cooperative and sustainable mode of agriculture, but it is doubtful whether they can reshape the whole of society successfully in their own image. Although French peasants up until fairly recently were capable of moving politically in their own interest - as witness the southern movement led by José Bové around 1990 - and have not ceased to be active outside Europe (like the Zapatistas in Mexico), the fundamental role in a transition falls to an urban class. As Lenin put it, the question is, which urban class will the peasant follow? The bourgeoisie? The proletariat? Even the bureaucracy perhaps.

Bureaucracy

Ethiopia under Mengistu Haile Maryam (1937-2013) is an example of the latter. Ken Tarbuck visited the country when Mengistu was in control, having been appointed an assistant professor of economics at the University of Addis

Ababa in 1978.⁵

The 1974 Ethiopian revolution was in significant part the work of a secretive group of army officers called the Derg, which destroyed the old feudal ruling class, and suppressed any and every opposition:

The old emergent absolutist regime [of emperor Haile Selassie] was overthrown, the feudal class that had battered upon the country for centuries was swept aside, often into the grave in a literal sense. National unity was proclaimed - although ethnically there was no nation; only a collection of nations which had been cobbled together by a conquering elite. Even democracy was preached, but never carried out. All of these things would have stamped this as a semblance of a bourgeois revolution, except what bourgeoisie there was also expropriated. So we seem to have a bourgeois revolution without the bourgeoisie.⁶

From this Tarbuck concludes (admirably) that “a state machine can indeed develop interests of its own, that do indeed go against the ruling class of a society” (p13). Admirable, because this conclusion agrees with the analysis of the state bureaucracy outlined by the young Karl Marx in his critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of right*.

Given the complexity of contemporary human society and its forms of the division of labour, it is hardly surprising that the bureaucracy itself sees itself as a candidate for the role of universal class. Another possible candidate, of course, is the military. Surprisingly, the Marxist tradition appears not to have produced a great deal on this topic - or at least not much that is readily retrievable. Tom Bottomore’s *Dictionary of Marxist thought* gives it no separate treatment: the nearest approximation to that is the article on Bonapartism, but I do not think that tells us much.

Engels started to write on this, but was unable to complete (owing to the necessity of bringing out the second and third volumes of Marx’s *Capital*), an essay with the title “The role of force in history”, which is really an analysis of Bismarck’s policy for German unification under Prussian leadership at Austria’s expense.

Reading the classical Marxists over the years leads me to only two apposite conclusions:

1. that the armed forces contain within themselves all the relevant national contradictions - which gives them the incentive to substitute for democracy in the life of the nation (Julius Caesar, Cromwell, Napoleon Bonaparte and their innumerable successors);
2. that the outbreak of war speeds up human social evolution.

In her *Junius pamphlet* (1916), Rosa Luxemburg asserted: “Historically the war is ordained to give the cause of labour a mighty impetus”.⁷ She also quotes Friedrich Engels, to the effect that “Capitalist society faces a dilemma: either an advance towards socialism or a reversion to barbarism”. Regarding which she adds: “This world war means a reversion to barbarism.” I think that was a realistic judgment.

We need, therefore, to study in detail these “special bodies of armed men”, with particular reference to Egypt, Afghanistan, Burma, Indonesia, Venezuela, etc. In Europe that means Spain and Greece.

The Wikipedia article headed ‘Military’ has a useful paragraph as follows:

A nation’s military may function as a discrete social structure, with dedicated infrastructure such as military housing, schools, utilities, logistics, hospitals, legal services, food production, finance, and banking services. Beyond warfare, the military may be employed in additional sanctioned and non-sanctioned functions within the state, including [dealing with] internal security threats, population control, the promotion of a political agenda, emergency services and reconstruction, protecting corporate economic interests, social ceremonies and national honour guards”.⁸

Anti-British feeling was strong in Egypt following World War II, finding expression in the election of 1950, when the Wafd emerged as the strongest parliamentary force. On January 24 1952 Egyptian guerrillas and police attacked British troops in their base in the area of the Suez Canal. The attack was repulsed, and King Farouk seized the opportunity to dismiss his Wafdist prime minister, which did not endear him to the populace. The result was a military coup on July 22-23 1952. There was a brief period of civilian rule, but then on June 18 1953 a republic was proclaimed, and Gamal Abdel Nasser became president in 1954. He announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal in 1956 - hence the ‘Suez crisis’.

The results of Nasser’s rule were mixed. There was a land reform, a growth in university education and a reduction in social inequality, with expansion of the numbers of professional middle class people. On the other hand, Nasser insisted on launching a renewed war with Israel, announcing: “The battle will be a general one and our basic objective will be to destroy Israel”.⁹ Egyptian forces came off worst in the encounter. Nasser died in 1970, but the Egyptian military have continued to play a dominant role in Egypt ever since, despite fierce competition from Islamists.

Afghanistan is another country that became accustomed to military rule in the 20th century. It is a patchwork of nationalities, in which the capital, Kabul, has for long existed as a bastion of reforming zeal, surrounded by an arch-conservative countryside. In the mid-20th century the standard-bearer of reform was Muhammad Daud, prime minister from 1953 to 1963, an advocate of “guided elections”. In 2002 The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty devoted a

special issue of *Workers' Liberty* to Daud and his successors. Sean Matgamna noted:

Though he acted in the name of the king, Daud had effectively been dictator. In terms of achievement, he is the most important of all Afghan reformers. Daud got rid of the compulsory veil for women. It was a milestone in Afghan social history when Daud, one day in 1956, appeared in public alongside the women of his family demonstratively unveiled. He built up the conscript army - that is, the independent power of the state, raised autonomously above society, and potentially a force by way of which the towns could hope to subdue the countryside.¹⁰

Daud carried out a coup against the king in 1973 without bloodshed, declaring a republic and becoming the country's first president. Unfortunately the people who helped him in the armed forces wished to adopt the Stalinist economic model, which suited the rulers of the USSR, but not Daud. As a result he fell victim to a coup carried out by supporters of the so-called People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), which consisted of two quarrelsome factions known as Khalq (People) and Parcham (Flag).

However, while Daud had operated like a feudal chief, the PDPA conspicuously lacked any such traditional cachet. Eventually its Soviet backers recoiled and decided to send in Russian troops, which led to an upsurge of political Islamism in the country and the rise of the Taliban.

There are plenty more non-European examples of states which have been taken over by the armed forces with noxious results. Burma is one such. Aung San, a founder of the Burmese Communist Party, was appointed prime minister of what was still the British Crown Colony of Burma in September 1946, but was assassinated a year later. Military rule has continued to this day in one form or another. The original military ruler was General Ne Win, who presided until his retirement in 1988, to be succeeded by the State Law and Order Restoration Council. The activities of these gentlemen have been expertly chronicled by Thant Myint-U.

Thant Myint-U describes Ne Win as:

an army boss who set the country on a decidedly authoritarian and puritanical path, directing ruthless counter-insurgency campaigns, jailing any opposition, silencing a once-flourishing press, and banning a slew of entertainments he had once enjoyed himself, from beauty pageants to horse-racing. Ne Win also ruined Burmese education ... For decades, investment in education hovered close to zero.¹¹

Overall, the situation was very bleak.

Lethal

Indonesia provides another glaring example of the lethal effects of military rule. One of the principal leaders in the war of independence against Dutch overlordship (1945-49) was Kusno Sosrodiharjo, better known as Sukarno. He became president of the republic that emerged, then took a back seat until 1956, when he

returned to centre stage, attacking the parliamentary system of political parties ... The establishment of martial law the following year, in response to regional revolts, gave Sukarno an opportunity to ally with one faction of the army, divest the party system of executive power, and reinvest it in himself, as president. Sukarno now instituted his version of strong-man rule, or ... 'guided democracy', which banned two of the most important political parties for supporting rebellions against the government.¹²

Around this time there was an

ambiguous relationship between Sukarno and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). However, he showed a degree of approval of Mao's China, being "impressed by China's disciplined political leadership and mass displays of enthusiasm". He "respectfully asked for Chinese guidance on key aspects of state-building, such as economic development and the appropriate relationship between politics and the army".¹³

From 1957 until 1965 the army exercised more and more influence over the Indonesian Republic and the PKI ended up by trying to stage a coup in 1965. But it was badly organised, and was quelled by prompt action on the part of major-general Suharto, who took control of the situation in Jakarta, the country's capital city:

Suharto ordered loyal troops to ... capitalise on the failed coup to purge anyone suspected of 'communist' sympathies.

Within a year, at least half a million were dead, through a combination of army and militia violence ... The army mobilised the PKI's local enemies: youth organisations of anti-communist political parties or religious groups. With army consent and orchestration, hundreds of thousands of their members detained those associated with the PKI, burned their houses and murdered them.¹⁴

Venezuela offers an interesting contrast. The country is no stranger to military coups. For example, in 1899 Cipriano Castro seized power in Caracas and ruled from 1899 to 1908, when he was in turn ousted by Juan Vicente Gómez. On Gómez's death in 1935 the dictatorship continued, being relaxed a bit from 1941 under Isaias Medina Angarita, who allowed political parties to operate. But Angarita was then overthrown in what appears to have been a popular-military coup in 1945, and a parliamentary democracy ensued. This, however, lasted only three years before another 10-year period of military rule under Pérez Jimenez. Elections were held in 1952, but the ruling junta ignored the result and retained power.

An accumulation of government debts resulted in the ejection of Jimenez and the institution of a 'normal' kind of two-party parliamentary system, until the 1980s, when once more there was a heavy burden of debt, plus pressure for the introduction of economic deregulation and destatification - commonly known as neoliberalism. This led to an explosion of popular discontent in the capital in 1989, known as the Caracazo.

Following on from there Hugo Chávez launched an abortive coup in 1992. This, in its turn, was followed by another abortive coup in November of the same year. Then, after his release from prison, Chávez began using parliamentary tactics in support of revolutionary change (as he saw it). This led to the creation of a popular electoral front, the Polo Patriótico, which won 56.2% of the vote in the elections in December 1998.

Once securely in office Chávez was able to embark on a number of progressive policies. He attempted to bring more areas of the country under cultivation in order to reduce reliance on food imports. He introduced a land reform which barred individuals from owning more than 5,000 hectares, and enabling the state to take over and redistribute land not being cultivated. He set up a state oil company, Petróleos de Venezuela SA, which expropriated foreign producers and began talking about the desirability of moving towards socialism. However, the talk of socialism remained abstract and rhetorical.

Alan Woods has made this essential criticism:

If Chávez were a Marxist, he would appeal to the masses over the heads of the National Assembly. The

establishment of action committees in every factory, oil refinery and army barracks is the only way to defend the revolution and disarm the counterrevolutionary forces.¹⁵

Despite this necessary criticism, one or two small victories can be recorded. Eg, in Caracas there is an outdoor area where goods and services may be obtained free of charge, the so-called *esquina caliente* (literally 'hot corner'). Clearly this is a result of the protecting power of the Venezuelan armed forces standing against the external and internal counterrevolution. However, the Chávez initiative is something of an exception where military rule is concerned: military dictatorships tend not to lead in that direction.

Europe

On the continent of Europe, possibly the classic example of military involvement in politics is Spain, the land of the *pronunciamiento*, or military political declaration. The starting point here is the liberal constitution of 1812, which enshrined Catholicism as the sole legal religion in Spain. It also asserted the sovereignty of the nation, as against the crown, and affirmed separation of powers, freedom of the press, capitalist enterprise, abolition of feudalism and a parliamentary system based on universal adult male suffrage. The constitution was abrogated in 1814 by King Ferdinand VII, who restored the absolute monarchy.

A series of wars then broke out, starting in October 1833. In the course of the first one a group of sergeants organised a mutiny in 1836, forcing the monarch to declare a return to the constitution of 1812 - largely re-enacted in 1837. As many commentators have emphasised, this state of affairs was the result of the political weakness of Spanish absolutism, which connected in turn with the weakness of Spanish capitalist enterprises on the world market. Trotsky has some especially useful observations on this:

In this country of particularism and separatism, the army necessarily assumed great significance as a centralising force. It became not only a prop of the monarchy, but also a vehicle for the discontent of all sections of the ruling classes. Like the bureaucracy, the officers are recruited from those elements, extremely numerous in Spain, that demand of the state, first of all, their means of livelihood. And, as the appetites of the different groups of 'cultured' society greatly exceed the state, parliamentary and other positions available, the dissatisfaction of those left over nurtures the republican camp, which is just as unstable as all the other groupings in Spain ...

Military coups and palace revolutions follow on each other's heels. During the 19th century and the first third of the 20th, political regimes kept changing kaleidoscopically. Not finding sufficiently stable support in any of the propertied classes - even though they all needed it - the Spanish monarchy more than once fell into dependence upon its own army. But the atomisation of the provinces puts its stamp on the character of the military plots. The petty rivalry of the juntas was only the outward expression of the Spanish revolution's lack of a leading class. Precisely because of this, the monarchy triumphed over each new revolution. A short time after the triumph of order, however, the chronic crisis once more broke through.¹⁶

The last great Spanish *pronunciamiento* was the work of four generals, including Francisco Franco, who came to power in 1936 in response to the republican and socialist (and anarchist) desires of ordinary Spaniards from 1931 onwards.

The other European country notable for political interventions by the military is Greece. In the early 20th century a cycle of military interventions began with a coup staged by army officers in 1909. The officers invited a popular radical politician, Eleutherios Venizelos to act as their advisor. This move paved the way for pro-capitalist development and a series of political reforms introduced in 1911-14.

In World War I Venizelos's sympathies lay with the Franco-British-Russian Entente, whereas King Constantine favoured the Central Powers. Greece ended up being coerced into joining the war on the Entente side. When the king and his supporters obstructed the Entente's plans, this led a group of pro-Venizelos officers launching a coup in 1916, and the result was an unstable 'dual power' situation. After the Allies in the Entente demanded that King Constantine abdicate, he stepped down. A majority of Greeks were now war-weary, and Venizelos sensed it, but the royalists seized the opportunity, and King Constantine returned to Athens in December 1920.

The pendulum then swung back yet again with another republican coup in 1922. A plebiscite was held on the question of the Greek monarchy in 1924, but republicans spoke of not relying on the ballot box, but the army, and the cabinet now contained military men as well as civilians. Plans were made for a new constitution, but before this could be brought in there was another military coup, led by republican officers under general Theodoros Pangalos, following on from which an unstable royalist-republican ministry governed in parliamentary mode until February 1928. Then there was a fourth Venizelos government until 1932. The political seesaw continued, with two abortive republican attempts at a military coup until, under a further period of restored monarchy, elections in January 1936 produced a parliament in which the numerical balance was held by 15 communist deputies. The bourgeois majority was quite happy for general Ioannis Metaxas to take over as a means of dealing with the communist menace.

Metaxas ruled until 1941, long enough to oppose Benito Mussolini's attack on Greece in 1940. Mussolini needed German help with his invasion, and the result was rule by Nazi Germany

until 1944, followed by a vicious civil war from 1946 until 1949. US support for the Greek conservative ministers continued afterwards. The regime was oppressive, amounting to a police state, with a shadow 'para-government'. Attempts to deal with the political and economic problems inherent in this situation by George Papandreou's government from 1964 to 1967 did not stop another rightwing paramilitary backlash and coup, the ensuing government labelled the 'regime of the colonels' (1967-74). They outlawed trade unions, prohibited meetings of more than five people, censored newspapers and organised the arrest of communists. Finally, faced with the collapse of their over-confident putsch in the island of Cyprus, the colonels bowed out.

There is another institutional component which I have not discussed, however: that is to say, established religion - primarily faiths derived from Abraham/Ibrahim. Suffice it to say that this component tends not to operate on its own, but to attach itself to other groupings: eg, as in Austria in the 1930s under Engelbert Dollfuss, Franco in Spain, and so on.

Quite what we can expect in the near future will be heavily dependent on what happens in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic. Let us hope that we can minimise the damage ●

Notes

1. H Draper *The revolutionary thought of Karl Marx* New York 1977, p321 (original emphasis).
2. N Cohn *The pursuit of the millennium* St Albans 1970.
3. N Cohn *Europe's inner demons* London 1993, p29.
4. J Gray *Seven types of atheism* London 2019, p73.
5. See K Tarbuck *Ethiopia and socialist theory*, printed together with his *Bonapartism and the nature of the state* (New York 1973).
6. K Tarbuck *Ethiopia and socialist theory* New York 1973, p12.
7. M-A Waters (ed) *Rosa Luxemburg speaks* Boston 1970, p265
8. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military.
9. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt#Arab_Republic_of_Egypt.
10. archive.workersliberty.org/wlmags/w1102/Afghanistan.htm.
11. Thant Myint-U *The hidden history of Burma: race, capitalism and the crisis of democracy in the 21st century* London 2020, p33.
12. J Lovell *Maoism: a global history* London 2019, p157.
13. *Ibid* p159.
14. *Ibid* p174.
15. A Woods *The Venezuelan revolution: a Marxist perspective* London 2005, p16.
16. L Trotsky *The Spanish revolution* London 1973, pp70-72.

Fighting fund

Lost time

We are quite a way behind where we ought to be, if we want to reach our £2,000 fighting fund target for June - not to mention make up for the deficit of £122 we were left with in May.

With exactly one third of the month gone, we have just £438 in the kitty, meaning we're lagging behind the going rate by £229 - which will translate into a much bigger deficit of almost £700, unless we see a big acceleration over the next 20 days.

Of course, the lockdown has meant that donations in cash and even cheques by post are more difficult to come by, but there is, of course, that PayPal link on our website and - better still, because there's no charge - bank transfers, including standing orders. But this week we didn't get any PayPal donations, which left us with just seven SOs and only one other transfer.

Standing orders first: thanks go to CG and NH (£30 each), FV and GF (£25), LM (£15), and JK and SM (£10). In other words, we got £145 from that source. Then there

was MF's bank transfer of £22, which all adds up to an extra £167 for the last seven days.

Mind you, we are gaining extra income, because, as I've reported several times, virtually no-one is cancelling their monthly subscription payments, despite not receiving a printed copy of the *Weekly Worker*. But we're not counting any of that as donations at this time, because everyone will have the option of extending their subscription without payment, once we resume printing. In other words, for the moment we're treating all monthly and quarterly subs as payments in advance, unless we're told otherwise.

But all that's for the future - hopefully one that's not too far away, once we beat the pandemic. Right now, though, we need to make up for lost time. So who'd like to help? ●

Robbie Rix

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

CENTENARY**Welcome the CPGB**

The formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain was a huge achievement for the entire working class movement in this country. In qualitative terms, it represented far more than the merger of the British Socialist Party, the

Communist Unity Group and other, smaller, left groups. The July 31-August 1 1920 Unity Convention (later characterised as the 1st Congress of the CPGB) established an organisation that was far more than the sum of its parts. Despite

its small size the CPGB would go on to have a profound impact on the workers' movement in Britain.

The first edition of *The Communist* (August 5) - described as an "organ of the Third (Communist) International", published by the CPGB and

"incorporating" the BSP's journal, *The Call* - carried a series of short vignettes by leading comrades. Participants gave their impressions of the recently concluded Congress - its historical significance, the many "delicate" moments that had to be navigated, etc.

Also featured in the launch edition (and republished here) was a short article by comrade Arthur MacManus, leader of Clyde workers and chair of the 1st Congress: 'The tasks awaiting the Communist Party' ●

William Sarsfield

Convention impressions

Arthur McManus: The Convention more than surpassed the best of my expectations. The feeling created was that, after all, everything involved in its preparation had been well worthwhile. The atmosphere was intense, with the earnestness and determination of the delegates. To preside over such a convention was a pleasure indeed, because, however delicate the moments may have been - and these, I can assure, were many - the sincerity of all was demonstrated by the willing and ready assistance rendered to the chair. The value of the work done is inestimable at the moment, but of one thing I feel sure: It will bring more hope and gladness to the soul of our struggling comrades in Russia and elsewhere than anything else which has been done in this country ...

Bob Stewart¹: The essence and value of the conference was its evident eagerness and sincerity. Its old men were young, its young men did not lack wisdom and that comprehensive understanding which seeks and finds and acts upon its findings. To chair a conference where all can talk and nearly all wish to, where tension is strong, and issues are straight is a test to try even a nimble-willed laddie like McManus, but he survived the ordeal, and will chair where issues will be still further narrowed to immediate questions of life and death import. The leftest of the left and the rightest of the right showed an evident anxiety to start fair, and to keep the Communist Party of Great Britain free from puerilities and that ineptitude for action which has hitherto been not an uncommon feature in the debating stage of our growth.

In resolute action and emulation of the high-spirited and far-seeing but practical social revolutionists of Russia, minor differences will be relegated to their proper place, and the Communist Party of Great Britain - belated in arrival though it be - will play its part in the overthrow of capitalism and the rising of the first real common civilisation built by workers for workers.

AA Watts²: It will be of no use for the capitalist press to call this convention a collection of hot-headed, irresponsible youths; there were a very considerable number of middle-aged men and women delegates, and when it is remembered that these men and women have arrived at the need for a Communist Party, that they represent a definite membership - and also a large, indefinite body of opinion outside their actual membership - the outlook for a powerful revolutionary party in this country is exceedingly hopeful. Its power will depend upon the numbers, its energy, its determination. It is possible for every communist organisation to be affiliated; it should be made possible for every individual communist to become a member. It is up to every organisation and every communist to rally to the party and to make it the power it should be.

Lt Colonel CJ Malone³: The number of delegates who were able to be present was good, remembering that, owing to the difficulties of travel, expenses, etc, the numbers present were only a percentage of the communist groups in Great Britain, apart altogether from the bodies of communist opinion not yet organised.

Some delegates appeared even now a little muddled as to parliamentary action. Of course, it is purely for propaganda and, I still hold, not the most effective means of employing available energy. As to affiliation [to the Labour Party] with the Thomas Henderson crowd, a little more effort and the motion would have been defeated.

But the formation of the party stands out as a definite milestone of the weekend. The resolutions are subsidiary.

Work, work everywhere, and organisation are now required; not discussions or resolutions. Let the delegates go back and those who were not present devote all efforts they can spare in the workshop, factory, town and hamlet to make the party not merely a strong force, but in the not far distant future the governing force in this country.

JT Walton Newbold⁴: The heartiest possible welcome to the Communist Party of Great Britain! To my mind it behoves every out-and-out communist in this country to lend every energy towards building up "this party in one rock-bound programme of the Communist International". We who embrace without hesitation or reserve the soviet system, the dictatorship of the proletariat, with all that it entails, and all the apparatus and ideology of the capitalist state, must, responding with enthusiasm and determination to the ringing call "to the communists of the Independent Labour Party", ... do all in our power to swing our party into, and merge it into, the Communist Party. My loyalty, at any rate, is now - as it has been for two and a half years - first and foremost to the position of the Third International.

I call on my comrades to fight for the affiliation of our party with the Communist International; not by obtaining the unwilling consent of your leaders to join it, but by means of determined propaganda within our own party to rid ourselves or the opportunist leaders of the right ...

Who is not with us is against us, and we are with the Communist International every time!

The tasks awaiting the Communist Party

Arthur MacManus

The education of the masses to communism, the shattering of their faith in the institutions of capitalism, the encouragement of a belief in their own powers of social construction, of self-reliance, the general work of agitation and



Arthur MacManus: first chair

organisation, and the stimulation of an aggressive revolutionary fervour amongst the working class: these are but a few of the matters to which we must bend our efforts at once.

The general situation with regard to capitalism has lost none of its vicious, soul-destroying and slavish qualities, while we have been engaged in constituting our organisation; if anything, it has become much more intense. The cost of living still goes soaring up, and the endeavours of the engineers, miners, textile workers, etc to secure even a compensating increase in wages are ruthlessly turned down with contempt. More production is called for, further working class exploitation is insisted upon, if the relative position between wages and prices would be maintained ...

Such is still the capitalism ... which continually promises to amend itself, when approached by our reluctant trade union and Labour Party delegations. Capitalism - and particularly that section which emerged victorious out of the recent commercial struggle - is saturated with the power of achievement ...

The birth of the Communist Party is not a moment too soon. The shams, hypocrisies and lying subtleties must be torn aside, and the beast revealed in all its perfidy and soullessness.

The challenge of our Churchills must be taken up, and the spirit of the working class struggle for emancipation nursed, tended and directed to smash capitalism in its entirety. Nationally, locally and in our individual capacity we must set about this task - expedite the organisation of your branch and facilitate the work of stabilising the machinery of the Communist Party; transfer the zeal and enthusiasm of the Convention into the local work, and set about the work of local education, agitation and organisation; take fullest advantage of every opportunity to acquaint the workers to communism; explain it to them inside of the workshops and outside; assist and encourage the formation of shop stewards' committees inside every workshop, plant or factory; develop the interest of the worker in that committee; explain the possibilities which are latent in such organisation, and by insistent discussion endeavour to wean away his faith from the false moral values of capitalism ...

A word here on the convention, will not be out of place ... The voting on the Labour Party was such as indicated a strong, evenly divided opinion on the question of affiliation and, while, according to the result, the minority are honourably expected to acquiesce

in the decision, there is also an obligation placed upon the majority to fully appreciate the strength and character of the minority.

The matter has now, for the time being, got beyond the stage of argument, and time and actual experience alone will indicate the validity of other points of view. Let us, then, cease devoting our full energy to discussing the various points involved, to the neglect of our other work, and let both sides realise that the party itself is our immediate responsibility ...

The only points of difference were tactical points, and not a single voice was raised against the party's principles. Let us carry these to the masses then, and endeavour to secure their acceptance. Every communist employed in a factory or workshop should secure election as shop steward or delegate, and there try by argument and example to demonstrate the full value of a communist outlook by the advice and guidance given to the workers. Don't stand aloof because you may from time to time be asked to negotiate for something which to you may appear as trifling and non-essential; state your opinion on the matter first, and, in the event of its not being accepted, pursue it to its ultimate, assured that sooner or later the workers will come to learn the full value of your advice and guidance. Remember always that it is the working class *alone* who can effect the emancipation of the workers, and that you must be with them when they may be wrong today, if you hope to be with them to guide them rightly tomorrow ...

The Communist Party is *not* its executive, but every single member of that party, and the extent to which it will succeed will just be the extent to which we each individually respond to our obligations and responsibilities. The revolutionary movement has received a considerable impetus by this weekend's deliberations, and the decks are cleared for action. The Third International is our one international hope, and in this country it must become the rallying standard for the revolutionary movement ●

Notes

1. The former leader of the Socialist Prohibition Fellowship and a popular figure in Scotland. He spent years in jail as a punishment for his resistance to World War I.

2. Former treasurer of the British Socialist Party.

3. Lt Colonel CJ Malone was a sitting MP, originally elected in 1918 as a Coalition Liberal. In 1919 he visited Soviet Russia and joined the BSP on his return. Official CPGB historian James Klugmann sees Malone as a prominent figure in the party's first year, during which he was "very active not only in parliament, but addressing mass meetings and rallies all over the country. Whatever his theoretical weaknesses, he was a man of passion, moved by the revolutionary tremors that were shaking the world, full of wrath and indignation against the powers that be ..."

4. Comrade Newbold was a sitting Labour MP, a member of the left wing of the Independent Labour Party.

COUNTERFIRE

Cowardice and opportunism

Lindsey German has refused to withdraw the implication that the Stop the War Coalition will not associate itself with those expelled from Labour. Tony Greenstein reports

During the Labour leadership campaign the Board of Deputies of British Jews, which has support for Israel hardwired into its constitution, issued an updated version of the 10 Commandments.

Its fifth commandment is slightly different from what was handed to Moses on Mount Sinai. Instead of ‘Honour your father and mother’, there is ‘Thou shalt not have anything to do with those expelled from the Labour Party’. Or, to use the exact words, Labour must ‘Provide no platform for bigotry’. From the start, the Zionist-inspired fake anti-Semitism campaign has been a prime example of ‘doublethink’ - racists accusing anti-racists of racism.

This is the same Board of Deputies which has just refused to even take a position on - still less condemn - Binyamin Netanyahu’s declaration that Palestinians in the areas of the West Bank annexed to Israel will not be given Israeli citizenship. The fact that Keir Starmer takes his orders on fighting ‘anti-Semitism’ from a group that historically has always been opposed to Jews fighting genuine anti-Semitism speaks volumes about his ‘anti-racism’.

It is consistent with Starmer’s condemnation of the Bristol demonstration, which threw the statue of slaver Edward Colston into the Avon. No doubt he would have told Rosa Parks, when she refused to give up her seat to a white man on a bus, that she should have obeyed the law on segregation.

On April 29 at a ‘Don’t Leave, Organise’ meeting, where MPs Diane Abbott and Bell Ribeiro-Addy were speakers, Jackie Walker and myself spoke from the audience. The very next day the *Jewish Chronicle* headline was ‘Communal outrage over participation of Abbott and Ribeiro-Addy’. The BoD demanded that both black MPs should be suspended for not having the presence of mind to pick out those who had been expelled or suspended from the Labour Party.

Speaking at a meeting attended by two Jewish anti-Zionists is now considered ‘anti-Semitic’ in the Labour Party! This is a parallel universe, where the laws of logic don’t operate. But if you repeat a lie long enough it becomes received wisdom. And, given the numbers being expelled under the ‘fast-track’ procedures that Corbyn introduced, it is going to be very difficult to keep up with who one is allowed to speak with.

One would expect Sir Keir Starmer QC - a former director of public prosecutions, to propose legislation to enforce the Fifth Commandment. If he is looking for a legal precedent, there is apartheid South Africa’s 1992 Internal Security Act. Under the ISA a banned person was prohibited from attending meetings of any kind, speaking in public or publishing or distributing any written material. The media was prohibited from reporting the banned person’s words. This would be much fairer on MPs and Labour Party members, because it would obviate the need to know the history of all those in any audience they address.

STWC statement

On May 12 I was invited to speak at a Birmingham Stop the War Coalition meeting, where Salma Yaqoob was also invited to speak.

Almost immediately former Labour MP Ian Austin and the Zionist-run Campaign Against Anti-Semitism demanded that Salma be suspended from the Labour Party. She denied



Lindsey German: craves respectability in the eyes of Labour MPs and trade union officials

having agreed to speak, but, given her situation as a prominent target of the right, a tactical withdrawal was totally understandable.

But that did not stop the *New Statesman*’s Ailbhe Rea pontificating that ‘Starmer is facing his first test over anti-Semitism’. The irony is that the *New Statesman* was founded by a genuine anti-Semite, Sidney Webb, who once proclaimed that ‘French, German, Russian socialism is Jew-ridden. We, thank heaven, are free.’ But at least the *New Statesman*, after complaints from Jackie Walker and myself, altered Rea’s execrable piece by accepting that neither of us were expelled for anti-Semitism. Even this mouthpiece for the Labour right accepted that lies should be corrected.

Would that the same were true of the ‘revolutionary’ Lindsey German, convenor of the STWC and one of the founders of Counterfire, which likes to present itself as the with-it, revolutionary and *avant-garde* alternative to the staid Socialist Workers Party, from where it originated.

When the furore over Salma Yaqoob erupted, the STWC issued a statement in her defence.¹ While no-one can complain about this, the statement was extremely defensive, emphasising that the STWC is ‘implacably opposed to anti-Semitism’, thus lending credence to the idea that the attacks on Salma was somehow about combating anti-Semitism. It also said that it was ‘deeply irresponsible of the Campaign Against Anti-Semitism to be adding fuel to this fire’. The CAA is a far-right, Islamophobic charity, with close ties to the Israeli embassy. Calling it ‘irresponsible’ for encouraging the abuse of Salma Yaqoob is like criticising Tommy Robinson for failing to condemn Islamophobia.

The statement strenuously avoids using the term ‘Zionist’ to describe Israel. Instead it calls for ‘justice’ for the Palestinians, which most Zionists could sign up to. It is a liberal phrase that avoids the politics of the Palestinians’ oppression. It goes on to say that STWC ‘refuse[s] to accept that criticism of the Israeli government and its policies can be construed as anti-Semitic’. So would

most Zionists, at least in theory. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s misdefinition of anti-Semitism is quite clear about this. It states: ‘criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic’.

It is only when people criticise the Jewish supremacist nature of the Israeli state itself or, in the words of the IHRA, claim that ‘the existence of a state of Israel is a racist endeavour’ that the accusation of anti-Semitism is levelled. This is just liberal flatulence, pure sound and fury. This is not accidental.

Stephen Sedley, a Jewish former court of appeal judge, is not a revolutionary socialist as John Rees and Lindsey German of the STWC and Counterfire claim to be. Yet Sedley in ‘Defining anti-Semitism’ was able to deconstruct the IHRA in a way that Counterfire seems unable to. He wrote: ‘Endeavours to conflate the two [anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism] by characterising everything other than anodyne criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic are not new ...’² It is a sad day when so-called revolutionaries find themselves to the right of a former court of appeal judge.

This liberal verbiage in the STWC statement is not simply sloppy wording, but a deliberate attempt to accommodate to Labour’s ‘anti-Semitism’ smears and in particular the surrender of the Campaign Group of MPs to that operation. The final two sentences of the statement make this clear:

Local STWC groups act autonomously in deciding their platforms, but we note that Tony Greenstein has never been asked to address a national STWC meeting. STWC rejects both anti-Semitism and abusive language in political debate.

This is, as I told Lindsey German, pure scabbing. It is saying to Ian Austin and the CAA that unfortunately local STWC groups are autonomous and the national group can do nothing about them. However, the national STWC has never had *and never would have* Tony Greenstein on its platforms. Why

else advertise the fact that I have ‘never been asked to address a national STWC meeting’?

The final sentence makes it even clearer. The statement had already said that the STWC is ‘implacably opposed to anti-Semitism’, so why repeat it? It clearly can only refer to me. It refers to ‘abusive language’. This was precisely the charge that was levelled against me at my expulsion hearing - and which, of course, I reject. For example, one of the key examples of ‘abuse’ was when I used the term, ‘crooked McNicol’, referring to Labour’s former general secretary, Iain McNicol. But, following Labour’s leaked report on anti-Semitism, ‘crooked’ was precisely the adjective that Unite general secretary Len McCluskey used when referring to McNicol’s team.

As the CAA, in its attack on Salma Yaqoob correctly noted, the second charge against me included ‘calling the Jewish then-Labour MP Dame Louise Ellman a ‘supporter of child abuse’’. That is true. In January 2016 and again in February 2018, in debates in the House of Commons on Israel’s treatment of Palestinian children - which includes blindfolding, beating and sexual abuse - Ellman defended the Israeli military on ‘security’ grounds.

Counterfire’s repetition of this charge is truly shameful. And why has it done so? Because it seeks the patronage of Labour MPs and is willing to bow to their cowardly prejudices and the received establishment wisdom that Labour is overrun with anti-Semitism.

Opportunism

The behaviour of Counterfire, which controls the STWC, is not accidental. When Counterfire came out of the SWP, it was a rightwing split. When the SWP’s coalition with George Galloway in Respect collapsed in 2008, John Rees was blamed. He had led the break-up of the Socialist Alliance in order to form a cross-class party based on communalism. In Respect’s founding conference in 2004 he had argued:

We ... voted against the things we believed in, because, while the people here are important, they are not as important as the millions out there. We are reaching to the people locked out of politics. We voted for what they want.³

This is just liberal opportunism, not Marxism. The things the SWP voted against in Respect included a woman’s right to choose in deference to Galloway’s anti-abortion views.

Rees was quite prepared to make a bonfire of his principles and in essence there are no principles that Counterfire is not prepared to sacrifice. Perhaps the most fundamental of all is solidarity: you don’t cross a picket line. Whatever our differences, when we see fellow socialists under attack from the state or their representatives, we express solidarity and give support. This is the ABC of socialism. The SWP was therefore quite right to remove John Rees from its central committee (although it was clearly responsible for having agreed to the Respect party initiative in the first place).

When I first read the STWC statement, I assumed that the final sentences were penned by an inexperienced office volunteer. Naively I assumed that wiser heads would delete the sentences in question. I therefore wrote on May 23 and again a week later, asking that the statement be amended. On June 4 Lindsey German responded as convenor of the STWC.

What she wrote was short, sweet and to the point: ‘In response to your communications: we are not changing the statement issued, which made no allegations against you. We will not engage in any further correspondence on this issue.’

This was, as they say, economical with the truth! It is true that I was not directly accused of anti-Semitism (though some members of Brighton and Hove Labour Left Alliance disagreed with me on that), but, as libel lawyers argue, there was a clear innuendo meaning. Its sole purpose was to reassure Labour MPs that the STWC would not be taking up the cudgels against the ‘disinformation paradigm’⁴ that led to Corbyn’s removal.

There is however a supreme irony in all this. Because if anyone was guilty of tolerating anti-Semitism and worse, it is Rees and German. Between 2005 and 2010 the SWP had a close working relationship with Gilad Atzmon, an acknowledged anti-Semite.

Atzmon has written so much anti-Semitic material it is difficult to know where to start. In ‘Guide to the sayings of Gilad Atzmon, the anti-Semitic jazzman’,⁵ I noted on my blog that he subscribed to the world Jewish conspiracy theory, when he wrote ‘we must begin to take the accusation that the Jewish people are trying to control the world very seriously’. Atzmon also cast doubt on the holocaust in ‘Truth, integrity and history’: ‘If the Nazis ran a death factory in Auschwitz-Birkenau, why would the Jewish prisoners join them at the end of the war?’ He went on to ask: ‘Why were the Jews hated? ... Why are the Jews hated in the Middle East?’

For over five years the SWP - under the leadership of Rees and German - worked with Atzmon, defending him as an Israeli anti-Zionist. Throughout this time I wrote numerous articles calling on the SWP to cut their links with him. For example, in February 2008 I wrote ‘Time to say goodbye’, the introduction to which read: ‘Why does the SWP not break its links with holocaust-denier Gilad Atzmon?’⁶

In February 2007 I wrote for *The Guardian*’s ‘Comment is free’ (before the heavy hand of Jonathan Freedland descended!), expressing my surprise that ‘the Socialist Workers Party, which previously had a good record on fighting fascism and anti-Semitism, should invite Atzmon to its conferences and rallies’.⁷ I argued that it was not Jews who would suffer as a consequence of Atzmon’s anti-Semitism, but the Palestinians. During that time Rees and German said nothing.

Yet despite this I did not accuse either of them of anti-Semitism. What they were (and are) is political opportunists, who use revolutionary rhetoric to cover up their reformism and opportunism - even to the extent of working with a well-known anti-Semite.

It is this opportunism - the desire not to alienate their MP supporters - that leads to their willingness to echo the witch-hunters’ accusations ●

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LABOUR



Began with high hopes, ending in complete political collapse

Backward Momentum

Jon Lansman's organisation is trying to reinvent itself. But, looking at the contending factions, Daniel Harvey is convinced that the whole project is bankrupt

The Forward Momentum faction has put forward its proposals on what it sees as the main objectives within Momentum itself and the wider Labour Party. This is after two meetings of delegates, which are reported by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty as being "reasonably open" and democratic, in spite of a number of 'founding members' getting a vote without being elected by any branch or caucus in the organisation.

They are now committed to a number of left-sounding positions. These include the "fight for socialist policies", including the "Green New Deal", "public ownership", rolling back privatisation in the national health service, "advancing migrants rights" and repealing "all anti-trade union laws". They are calling for a "united left slate" for the Labour national executive elections and "greater democracy" in the party. The latter includes support for the open selection of candidates.

However, what is significant is what is not included in this set of proposals: you might think that the primary motor, if you really want a "member-led process" which will "put members in charge", would be a sovereign conference. But even the proposal for a Momentum conference able to make binding decisions was voted down, with 19 delegates for and 37 against. Also blocked was a proposal for regional all-member meetings, which could discuss policy and elect members to the Momentum national coordinating group (NCG).

Even more telling about the

bureaucratic nature of this group is that the vote for a sovereign Labour Party conference was passed overwhelmingly, with 50 votes in favour and only four against - yet this crucial demand is not included anywhere in the Forward Momentum document. Other positions voted for, but not included, were the demand for "democratic ownership of energy and finance" and the demand that councillors should "fight cuts". The proposal for "advancing migrants rights", including freedom of movement, was passed, but a third of delegates opposed it. This was originally not included in the document and then added in later.

Of note is the position of the AWL in Momentum, including its own smaller 'faction within a faction', Momentum Internationalists, which has been attracting varying degrees of hostility. This has come from both the bureaucratic Lansmanite 'office' faction, Momentum Renewal, as well as from other leftwing activists and those pulling the strings in Forward Momentum.

An example of this is the disqualification of Ruth Cashman from standing for election as a representative for Forward Momentum on the NCG, on the grounds of her refusal to condemn an Islamophobic article written by the AWL's founder, Sean Matgamna. One of my articles from 2015 - written about a joint ticket between her and a member of Workers Power in Left Unity - was presented as evidence. I asked her for clarification on her stance towards this article at the time and she was

emphatic: "I do not distance myself from Sean Matgamna, the article or the AWL's position on the rise of reactionary, politicised religion and the growing role of religion in world politics" ('Meaningless noise' *Weekly Worker* March 12 2015).

She has since slightly softened her position. On the one hand, she says of her refusal: "I said no, in the strongest terms. It is laughable to imagine I could have answered in any other way - you don't throw comrades under the bus whenever someone with an axe to grind asks you to." On the other hand, now she says that "I wouldn't have phrased the article the way it was phrased. Not because the argument or intention of the piece is racist, but because it obviously has been offensive to some, and the political argument of the article gets lost as a result."

At the same time, fellow AWL member Sacha Ismail complains at the inclusion of two candidates on the Forward Momentum slate - Sonali Bhattacharyya and Mick Moore - "whose election publicity made witch-hunting Workers' Liberty one of its central planks". It is an irony that members of the AWL - who have been giving ideological support to those witch-hunting other socialists in the Labour Party over spurious accusations of anti-Semitism, like veteran Israeli socialist and founder of Matzpen Moshé Machover and anti-racist campaigner Jackie Walker - have now become in turn victims of a witch-hunt. It seems the witch-hunters are now the witch-hunted.

In any case, it looks like the

opposition in Momentum is hamstrung before it has even left the gate. It is already watering down its own positions, and has a group driving it that has become toxic due to its social-imperialism and support

for the attacks on the genuine left in the Labour Party. It does not look like there is much hope at the moment for a reinvigorated Momentum that can play any useful role in the post-Corbyn period ●

Online Communist Forum



Sunday June 14, 5pm

Worker and soldier: a Jewish communist among Nazi troopers

Speaker: Nathaniel Flakin
author of *Martin Monath: a Jewish resistance fighter among the Nazis*
How German occupying soldiers in Paris were won to oppose the Nazi leaders in 1943

Sunday June 21, 5pm

A week in politics

Political report and discussion
To take part in these Zoom meetings, email Stan Keable at
secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

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

REVIEW

Victim of Zionist colonisation

Rashid Khalidi *The hundred-years war on Palestine: a history of settler-colonial conquest and resistance* Profile Books, 2020, pp336, £17.99

As part of their professional training, historians are warned against injecting their personal narrative into their account of events. Rashid Khalidi's book is a valuable violation of this taboo.

He is a historian, author of scholarly works on nationalism and colonialism in Palestine and the Middle East, and holds the Edward Said professorship of Modern Arab Studies at Columbia University. He is also a Palestinian-American scion of an old aristocratic Jerusalem family, with privileged access to his family's rich archives, and to direct oral eye-witness accounts by his older relatives. He himself witnessed some of the key events in the latter part of the period covered by the book, whether as a critical close observer or a marginal participant.

The result is a riveting, informative, powerful and brave book; a blend of objective historiography and personal memoir, including some relevant bits of family history. It is aimed at the general reader, not at academics; but the evidence provided in the main text, and especially in the footnotes, is rigorous and abundant. Even readers familiar with the main facts will find useful references to primary sources not previously known or available to them.

While not a conventional academic work, the aspect of history covered in this book is conventional: a chronicle of diplomatic, political and military events. For a social and economic history of the colonisation of Palestine the reader must look elsewhere.

The narrative is organised chronologically in six chapters, headlined as successive "declarations of war" against the Palestinian people. The first chapter covers the period 1917-39, starting with the Balfour Declaration and ending with the brutal suppression of the Palestinian uprising by massive British forces, aided by Zionist paramilitaries. Chapter 2 is focused on the 1947-48 war, resulting in the Palestinian Nakba (catastrophe). Chapter 3 deals with the 1967 war - which, while not involving the Palestinians directly as belligerents, had calamitous consequences for them.

The fourth chapter centres on Israel's 1982 devastating, deep invasion of Lebanon. The Palestinian resistance forces (which had been expelled from Jordan in the Black September of 1970) were now forced to move out of Lebanon and decamp to Tunisia and other remote places. The invasion culminated in the Sabra and Shatila massacre of Palestinian refugees by rightwing Lebanese gangs, with barely disguised Israeli encouragement. The author, accompanied by his young family, was then living in Beirut, where he was teaching at the American University. His scary personal account of the Israeli siege and massive bombardment of the city adds an extra dimension to the narrative.

Chapter 5 covers the years 1987-95, beginning with the first intifada and ending with the Oslo accords. The author was a close observer and occasional participant - albeit a marginal one in an advisory role - in the series of negotiations held (sometimes in parallel) in Madrid, Washington and Oslo, so his account of this period is of very special value. In my opinion, this chapter is a particularly important part of the book. I will return to this below.

The sixth chapter is concerned with the period 2000-14. Israel, having been defeated by Hezbollah and forced to withdraw from south Lebanon after 18 years of occupation, now turned its merciless machine of slaughter and devastation against the people



Given the grossly unequal balance of forces winning public opinion is of great importance

besieged in the Gaza Strip - the most impoverished part of Palestine. And, as usual, Israel's imperialist allies and protectors gave it moral and material cover, affirming Israel's right to 'self-defence' and hypocritically calling on 'both sides' to refrain from violence. Those who condemned Israel as a colonial aggressor were smeared as 'anti-Semites'.

A final concluding chapter summarises the book and takes its narrative a couple of years beyond 2017, with a brief discussion of Trump's 'deal of the century'.

Forthright

While championing the rights of the Palestinian people - the victim of Zionist colonisation sponsored by the imperialist powers - Khalidi is not a one-sided propagandist. On the contrary, he is not only forthright in condemning atrocities committed by Palestinians, but is critical of the leadership of the Palestinian national movement for its disastrous strategy. This has veered from misconceived and counterproductive armed incursions into Israel from bases around it, to naive trust in the US. Armed operations, largely against civilian targets, were first mounted by the Palestine Liberation Organisation; and later, after the PLO abandoned armed struggle in favour of a US-mediated two-state 'solution', this strategy was adopted by Hamas. The author describes as "risible" the idea that "such attacks on civilians were hammer blows that might lead to a dissolution of Israeli society":

This theory is based on a widespread, but fatally flawed, analysis of Israel as a deeply divided and 'artificial' polity, which ignores the manifestly successful nation-building efforts of Zionism over more than a century, as well as the cohesiveness of Israeli society in spite of its many internal divisions.

The Palestinian leadership failed to come to terms with the fact that Zionist colonisation created a new Israeli settler-nation in Palestine:

Most [groups in the Palestinian

national movement] felt no sense that there were now two peoples in Palestine, each with national rights; to them Israelis were no more than settlers, foreign immigrants to their country. This position exactly mirrored that of most Israelis, for whom there was only one people with national rights in Eretz Yisrael, the land of Israel, and that was the Jewish people, while Arabs were no more than transient interlopers.

[According to this view] the Israeli Jews were part of a religious group only, not a people or a nation ... [Thus,] the single democratic state proposal did not recognise the Israelis as a people with national rights.

Khalidi is too much of an open-eyed historian to be a blind nationalist. He pointedly remarks that "the constructed nature of all national entities, enraging to apostles of nationalism, is self-evident to those who have studied its genesis in myriad different circumstances".

Chapter 5 is the most heart-wrenching part of the book. For over a hundred years, the Palestinian people have been subjected to Zionist dispossession and colonisation, supported by imperialist powers. They have suffered defeat after defeat. During almost the entire period they were at a huge disadvantage *vis-à-vis* their oppressors. The only exception was the first intifada. This truly popular mass uprising, led by grass-root committees, using no other weapon than sling-propelled stones - exactly the same as deployed by David against Goliath in the biblical story - put Israel on the back foot. The Palestinians had a relative advantage, not only morally, winning the sympathy of world public opinion, but also operationally. Israel found itself unable to control the Palestinian masses. Suppression of the uprising was exacting a very high price in Israeli military manpower mobilisation and morale. At this very point Israel found a solution: a proxy that would control the Palestinian masses on its behalf:

The intifada had brought Rabin and the Israeli security establishment to the realisation

that the occupation - with Israeli troops policing densely populated Palestinian centres simmering with anger - needed modification. The result of that realisation, the Oslo framework, was designed to preserve those parts of the occupation that were advantageous to Israel - while offloading onerous responsibilities and simultaneously preventing genuine Palestinian self-determination, statehood and sovereignty. Oslo I [the first Oslo accord of 1993] was the first such modification, with others added in subsequent years - all of them aimed at maintaining the disparity of power, irrespective of who was Israel's prime minister.

Oslo I also involved the most far-reaching modification, which was the decision to enlist the PLO as a subcontractor for the occupation - this was the actual meaning of the security deal Rabin made with Arafat, which my colleagues and I had announced to the American diplomats in June 1993.

The reasons why Arafat agreed to this sell-out - exchanging the achievements of the intifada for the illusory promises and humiliating conditions imposed by Israel - are a combination of hubris, naive trust in American goodwill and a jealous desire to reassert leadership of the Palestinian movement and wrest it back from the popular committees.

The rest, as the saying goes, is history. From their high point of popular resistance, the Palestinian people descended back to being the victims of intensifying oppression. Divided between the world's biggest prison camp - that is, the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip - and the West Bank, policed by the PLO on Israel's behalf, their situation is worsening by the day.

In this situation it is difficult to look to the immediate or medium-term future with any degree of optimism. Khalidi manages to find some hopeful signs in the growing support for Palestinian rights in world public opinion. I would like to share this hope: it may at least be possible to mobilise it to prevent the very real danger of another nakba: a major ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.

Moshé Machover

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

**Covid-19:
not a 'good
result'**

Johnson's criminal incompetence

By global standards, writes Eddie Ford, the government's handling of the pandemic has been appalling

Last week we reached the grim milestone of 40,000 officially certified deaths from Covid-19. Given that at the start of the pandemic there was talk of 20,000 being a "good result", this is a shameful statistic for a supposedly 'first world' country.

Of course, we all know that the total numbers of deaths will turn out to be considerably greater. We cannot be sure whether the pandemic is beginning to level out or is at the threshold of a downturn that will be followed by a second spike. Therefore it is worthwhile looking at a recent *Financial Times* study of data from 19 countries.¹

The analysis shows that, far from having something to boast about, as Boris Johnson likes to claim, the British government's response to the pandemic has been truly appalling - coming at the top, or very near the top, in every set of grim statistics. The UK's excess mortality "remains the highest, whether younger people are excluded or the analysis is limited to pensioners" - registering 59,537 more deaths than usual. This means that the UK has the second highest rate of death for any country - wipe the smirk off your face, Boris. The US comes ninth, behind the UK, Spain, Italy and Belgium.

Regardless, the *absolute* number of excess deaths in the UK is the highest in Europe, and second only to the US which has a far higher population - 330 million compared to Britain's 67 million. Having said that, Brazil could well have the honour of coming second to the US, as its statistics are notoriously unreliable (and it is doing everything it can to make them even more unreliable in order to cover up the truth). Jair Bolsonaro himself at the weekend ordered the health ministry to stop releasing its total numbers of Covid-19 infections/deaths and, incredibly, removed whole swathes of data from an official government site.

When it comes to excess deaths compared to the historical average, the UK is the worst in Europe and behind only Peru internationally. Failure everywhere you look.

Remarkably, casting an even dimmer light on the British government's performance, both Israel and South Africa this year have actually had *fewer* deaths than you would normally expect. It is actually even more surprising, as it was widely predicted - not without reason - that Covid-19 would have a devastating impact on the 'third world'. Then there is the example of Denmark, which has seen only very modest excess deaths of 100 people since the beginning of 2020 - a 5% increase on the average - yet it also recorded 500 coronavirus fatalities.² That means 400 people who did not die from coronavirus are alive now who, in any normal year, would have perished!

The *FT* study appears to be confirmed by the latest figures released on June 9 by the Office for National Statistics, showing 63,629 excess fatalities. This could include everything from undiagnosed Covid-19 deaths to fatalities caused



Squandering lives

by not receiving proper treatment in hospitals or GP surgeries for various maladies. Overall, the ONS statistics show that the rate of excess deaths is falling, but it has remained 20% higher than the five-year average for England and Wales - with 1,653 excess deaths in the week to May 29. At the peak of the crisis in mid-April, there were almost 12,000 more deaths per week than normal.

Meanwhile, on average, the continent is returning to normal levels of mortality - effectively having no excess deaths in those countries previously hit the hardest by Covid-19. England, on the other hand, is still ranked as having "moderate excess" by the European Mortality Monitoring Project. Another damning verdict, especially when you consider that it is far from impossible that 100,000 deaths could be reached by the end of the year - if not earlier.

Quite rightly, a number of scientists have spoken out against the British government's bumbling response to the crisis. One of the latest is John Edmunds, a professor in epidemiology and population health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and one of the 100 or so attendees of the

government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage), which has a culture of semi-secrecy. He came out with the obviously true observation that the government went into lockdown too late - maybe by a week or two - and is now coming out of the lockdown too early. With an "untested" test-and-trace regime, he said, the government is "taking some risk here" - its relaxation of the lockdown being essentially a "political decision". No disagreements from me on that one.

Many in the scientific community, Edmunds argued, "would prefer to see the incidence driven down to lower levels" before any further easing of restrictions, as there are still 8,000 new infections every day in England - which, looked at internationally, is a "very high level of incidence". There is disagreement between Sage scientists, with some arguing that contact tracing should start immediately symptoms are reported, whilst others say that "false alarms" could discourage people from complying with the instruction to isolate. The latter group of scientists seem to be in the minority.

Whilst on the subject of contact tracing, the government's test-and-trace system is "not fit for purpose",

according to the 'Independent Sage' pressure group. This is a group of 12 senior scientists, set up to shadow the official Sage and chaired by Sir David King, who was the government's chief scientific advisor between 2000 and 2007. In a new report, Independent Sage says the virus will only be contained if 80% of contacts of infected people are traced - something it describes as "impossible" under the current system. For them, a radical restructuring is necessary, with responsibility handed over to local public health directors.

Independent Sage is also concerned about the steady erosion of trust in the government, particularly after the Dominic Cummings affair, which in its opinion is likely to have a major effect on compliance - there has been no serious attempt so far to engage with local communities, for instance. This top-down attitude from the government is building up trouble for the future.

Race and class

The Covid-19 crisis has underlined not just the Tory government's farcical incompetence, but also revealed deep structural problems in the UK state, for which you have to blame Labour governments going back to Tony Blair as well. In short, successive governments had a policy of 'just in time' hospitals, running on the basis that they must have at least 94% (or similar figure) of beds filled at all times. This inevitably led to disaster when an unexpected event like Covid-19 came along.

Furthermore, the Tory government ignored the results of Exercise Cygnus in 2016, going back to when Jeremy Hunt was health secretary (although he is now pretending to be some sort of prophet). The exercise dramatically exposed the huge gaps in Britain's possible response to any pandemic, with the national health service about to "fall over" due to a shortage of ventilators and critical care beds - and, crucially, testing facilities. Exercise Cygnus's "terrifying" findings have never been officially published - the government criminally choosing *not* to prepare the country for such an eventuality, leading to the needless deaths of untold thousands. Boris Johnson should be put on trial, with Jeremy Hunt standing right next to him in the dock (and me in the jury, hopefully).

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the charge of racism with regards to black, Asian and ethnic minority (Bame) deaths from the likes

of Stand Up To Racism and others, especially in the Labour Party and the liberal media. There can be no doubt that Bame communities have had considerably greater numbers of deaths than the average among the general population. Up to four times higher, in fact, depending on which particularly ethnic group you come from. Then again, a pensioner is *34 times* more likely to die compared to a working-age British adult - there have been just 401 deaths amongst those under 45, meaning one death for every 100,000 people in that age group.³

Clearly, the main explanation for the disproportionate number of deaths is *class*. Bame people on average occupy social positions at the bottom end of the working class. Not an absolute, of course, there are plenty of Bame doctors. On this matter, the Institute of Housing has published a very useful study in its journal, *Inside Housing*. It found a very close correlation between bad housing and deaths - at the top of the league is Newham, followed by Brent, Tower Hamlets, Camden then Leicester: all places with a very high Bame population. Bad housing essentially means tightly packed living areas with multiple occupancies, meaning you have to share a bathroom or a toilet - which in turn increases your chances of dying from Covid-19. The IoH report also factors in homelessness, which includes 'sofa surfing' - going relatively rapidly from one type of temporary accommodation to another, whether a friend's flat or a hostel. Every time you move, you could be exposed to infection, or to passing on the infection.

The poorer you are, the more insecure your lifestyle is likely to be - therefore the more likely you are to go down with Covid-19, and the more likely to die from it. In other words we are faced with a structural problem, not a problem of attitude or prejudice. So we need to introduce the question of class into the Covid-19 debate: otherwise you will have no real idea about what is going on ●

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