

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



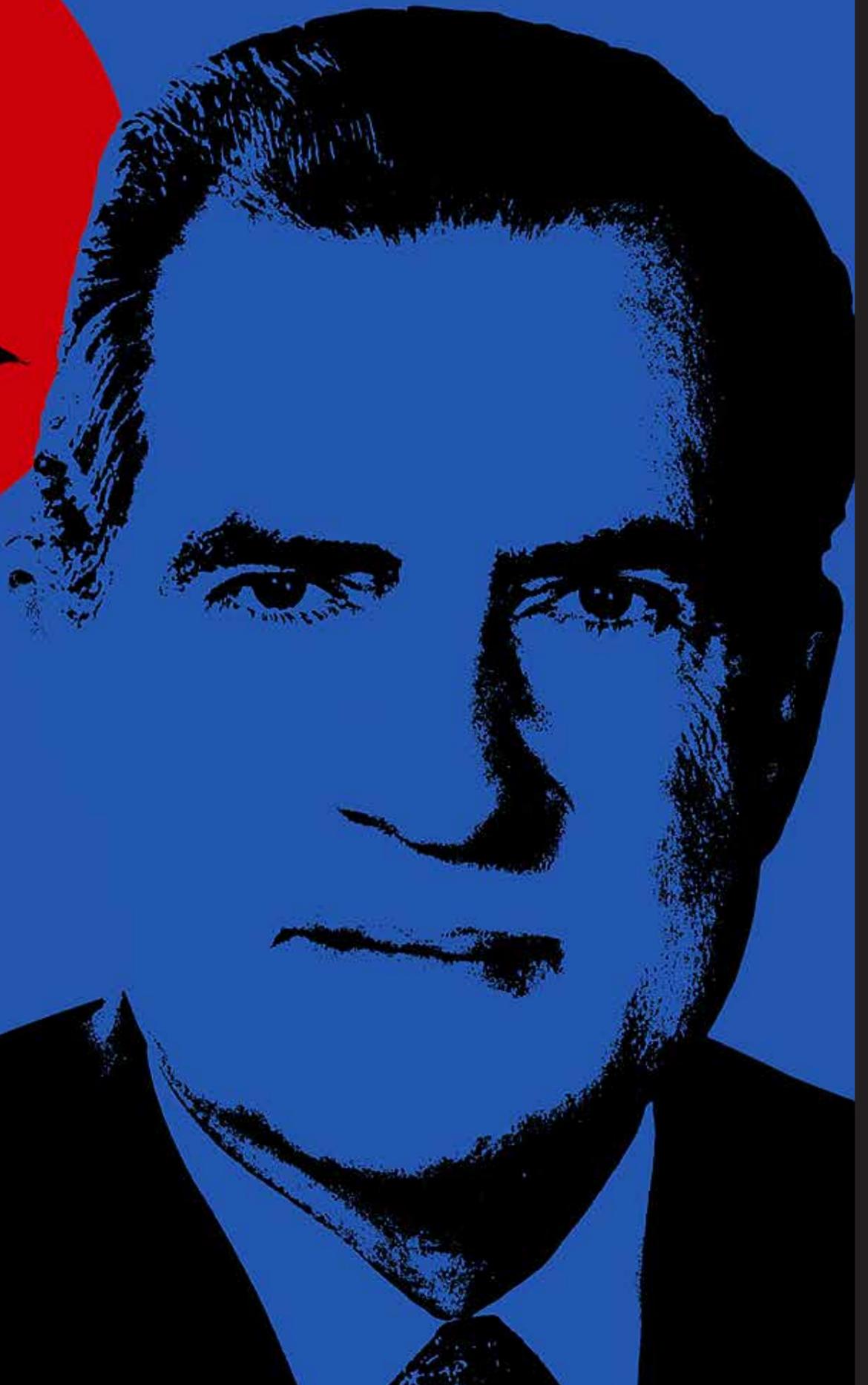
**Wiley: freedom of speech means
we have to learn to live with
offensive ideas and statements**

- Letters and debate
- Trump's strategy of tension
- Sir Keir's huge payout
- CPGB affiliation to Labour

No 1310 July 30 2020

Towards a mass Communist Party

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**Rapprochement in
reverse: there is
more to US-China
tensions than Trump's
xenophobia**

LETTERS



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

NEC candidates

To improve accountability and transparency within the Labour Party in the run-up to the party's national executive committee elections, the Labour Left Alliance took an important - and useful - initiative to invite left candidates wishing to stand for the party's NEC to attend an online hustings meeting on July 25. The invitation included the six candidates who had already been selected for the Centre Left Grassroots Alliance's slate (although none of these candidates acknowledged the invitation from the LLA or were present for the event itself). On the day 11 candidates attended and they spoke to an audience of 120.

The event itself should be applauded, as it contrasted with the process used by the CLGA to put together a left slate at such short notice that Labour Party socialists are now being asked to support: knowing and *hearing* what an individual stands for before deciding who to vote for is far better than being expected to back a slate someone else has chosen for you. From this perspective, it was good to hear the comrades who had taken the time to attend the LLA event - even though many of their comments, whilst delivered with passion, were somewhat contradictory and, at times, disappointing.

They were asked to provide a five-minute introduction and to give their views on the LLA's 'Action programme for the left'. Comrade Carol Taylor-Spedding, for example, correctly said she wanted to "call out" the perception that Labour has an ingrained anti-Semitism problem - yet she then stated that she was "devastated" when Rebecca Long-Bailey (who signed the Board of Deputies' 10 pledges to 'combat' anti-Semitism) lost the recent leadership race.

Similarly, comrade Alec Price, whilst promoting the cause and necessity of socialism, announced he does not support the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement, thus compromising the pro-Palestinian consensus. Comrade Roger Silverman spoke passionately of his personal experiences in relation to anti-Semitism and against the witch-hunt, but there was no suggestion that Jeremy Corbyn and members of his shadow cabinet, in attempting to appease the pro-Israel lobby and rightwing members of the party, may well have contributed to the intensification of the witch-hunt itself.

Comrade Mark McDonald (Jeremy Corbyn's ex-lawyer) energetically promoted the need to overhaul internal democracy, yet seemed hesitant to dismiss the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism. And, while it was moving to listen to comrades Ekua Bayunu and Joyce Jasmin Reed passionately speak about the party needing to lead the fight to combat racism and prejudice *per se* towards the Bame community, neither comprehensively addressed the LLA's action programme. Indeed, only comrade Chaudhry Qamer Iqbal did so, enthusiastically supporting the promotion of that programme.

Whilst some of the politics expressed at the event were positive and party members can now at least begin to get an insight into who they might consider voting for, there was no open acknowledgement that Labour, under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, had its problems. All comrades who spoke did so uncritically about the party's political trajectory throughout the previous four years, and Corbyn himself was uncritically praised by all. Even the party's 2017 and 2019 manifestos were promoted by some as "radical".

True, Corbyn did inspire many individuals to join Labour and for those new (and many existing) party members he did instil some

hope for a better future. But he also got lots wrong. Appeasing the pro-Israel lobby, for example, not only dampened down any potential leftwing influence, but contributed to many prominent and principled socialists being suspended from the party. If we are to learn, we must surely acknowledge that it is perfectly acceptable - indeed a duty - to criticise comrades from the left as well as the right.

Of course, nothing in the above prevents any Labour member giving critical support and providing appropriate 'ranking' to any of the candidates who attended the LLA's online hustings or, for that matter, any of the CLGA's already selected left slate. The LLA will decide by polling its supporters in the next couple of weeks which candidates they would like to see forming any supplemented left slate or whether only the candidates on the CLGA's current left slate should be considered. The LLA's conference next month will make that final decision as to what to recommend.

Crucially, of course, whatever left candidates are considered for the NEC, the process of openness and engagement with the party's membership throughout the election process remains key.

Bob Davies
Swansea

Vultures

Keir Starmer hasn't capitulated to an attack: he's shown that he's firmly onside - 'I'm with you, lads!' But, as Len McCluskey said in a slightly different context, they "refuse to take yes for an answer" and are out for more. Not just more money, it seems, but an all-out effort to drive the Labour Party to bankruptcy. The unions could perhaps stop funding Labour, but they're after McCluskey as well.

Where then would that leave Labour? This is the second 11 for British bourgeois democracy - they may be needed if the natives get too restless. Is there perhaps an Emmanuel Macron waiting in the wings?

But the vultures are circling and squawking with glee at what they see as their triumph. According to the *Jewish Chronicle*, "Labour is facing a legal bill of £5.5 million - and possibly far higher - as a result of the toxic legacy of anti-Semitism under previous leader Jeremy Corbyn ..." And in the same paper, John Ware defends the BBC: "You don't need much experience of television to know that the BBC's editorial processes simply don't allow for such mammoth corruption of the editorial process." So that's all right then.

They're not seeking revenge; after all, there is nothing to avenge. Maybe they will stop at driving all the socialists out of the Labour Party (rule of thumb for socialists: they think that a Palestinian is a human being - along with all the other human beings). Not everyone is a socialist, of course: we have the reports of Palestinians killed, children incarcerated, crops stolen or destroyed ... Then there is a little detail from the *Electronic Intifada* on July 23: "Israel systematically targeted and arrested activists distributing informative leaflets around the city, and detained Palestinians volunteering to disinfect public spaces, such as mosques." As I say, a detail. The full article is headlined: "How Israel obstructs Covid-19 care in East Jerusalem". You see, only human beings need protection from Covid-19.

There is some resistance to the

Starmer offensive. A GoFundMe drive to fund any defence that Corbyn might need has almost immediately far outstripped expectations. So there are socialists in the Labour Party - and perhaps those who have left in disgust - who are willing to 'kick against the pricks', if I can use a biblical expression (Acts 9:5).

And Corbyn has decided to fight back. Shame he left it so late.

Jim Nelson
email

Go on, George

In 2017, it took 749 votes to win a seat on Durham County Council for Chester-le-Street West Central, and 854 for the leader of the council to top the poll. The turnout was 1,870. George Galloway would get that just by being on the ballot paper.

The defeat of that leader would be heard from the *souks* to the *favelas*, from the Dalit colonies to the Rohingya camps, and from Kashmir to Crimea, to the scattered outposts of Diego Garcia. Armed with an impeccably local running mate in order to stop the target from slipping through, Galloway is just the man to do this. We would need only to get him registered to vote in County Durham, and preferably in Chester-le-Street, in time to be a candidate on May 6 2021.

Eric Joyce once described Galloway as having stepped beyond what was "reasonable and acceptable for Labour MPs". Any Labour electoral opponent of Galloway's, including the present leader of Durham County Council, has therefore been endorsed by Eric Joyce, and may look forward to being described as such. They would dance in the streets of the annexed Jordan Valley at Galloway's election - and not least at his election against this opponent.

David Lindsay
County Durham

Cancel culture

What an eminently sensible response from Anne McShane to those who pursue 'cancellation' of others they find to be illiberal, intrusive or offensive ('Without it

we can't breathe', July 23). But maybe the comrade should have pointed out a bit more clearly that one person's awful behaviour can be another person's radicalism.

There are, of course, many examples of that syndrome to be lifted up for appropriate examination. One such is how US radio and TV executives, when responding to the Dixie Chicks' outspoken criticism of George W Bush's plans for the invasion of Iraq, decided to ban the group's music from their stations - no doubt in their own minds doing so as an act of holy patriotism. Others around at the time may well have seen things a bit differently: ie, as proto-fascistic blacklisting; as being a hybridised form of state censorship; as incarnations of McCarthyism, once again let loose to rampage around at close to full throttle.

Of course, for any Marxist a string of questions is thrown up by matters such as these. So who is to be the arbiter of any transgressions of decency, morality, truthfulness or egalitarianism; of acceptability in relation to 'loyalty to your country of birth' or whatever the devil else? Conversely, as well as most dangerously, who are to be the recipients of any such double-edged silencing? At an even more distinctly philosophical level, what lies behind that peculiar mentality of cancelling out opponents?

Maybe pertinent above all else is how a lifestyle of that type, with those particular inadequacies contained within it, creates for that vast majority of our younger co-citizens a bubble masquerading as a virtuous paradigm - one actively accommodating their strong disinclination to embrace revolutionary politics. That failing on their part is only made more egregious by the faith lavished instead upon a flimsy spider's web of reformist dead-ends and certainly compromises - outfits such as Extinction Rebellion, Occupy and even Black Lives Matter taking top honours in many of those respects, dare it be suggested?

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

Online Communist Forum



Sunday August 2, 5pm

The legacy of the 2nd International

Despite weaknesses and contradictions, the resolutions of the Socialist International provide a useful resource for today's revolutionaries

Speaker: **Mike Taber**

Marxist historian and author

Sunday August 9, 5pm

A week in politics

Political report and discussion

If you wish to take part in these Zoom meetings, register at: [zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_TMmuVvroRNiwnGkfdpypxA](https://zoom.us/join/joinMeeting?meetingid=98054393&password=123456789)

Or email Stan Keable at secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk
Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk
and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk

Fighting fund

You can do it!

With two days remaining before the end of our July fighting fund, we still need £351 to make that £2,000 monthly target.

So far this year we have been doing very well indeed - we've reached that £2K milestone every month except one. But, unless a few comrades do the necessary in very short order, things don't look so good for July.

This week we received three £50 donations - two standing orders from JT and GT, plus DB's regular PayPal transfer. Another who clicked on that button on our website was AR, whose usual £5 was added to his equally usual £10 standing order (I think he only makes two separate payments so he gets a mention every month in this column!).

Other standing orders came from SS and GT (£15 each), as well as from JM (£10). All that amounted to £215 that came our way this week, taking the running total up to £1,647. Well, that £351 we need is a bit of a tall order in just two days, but

I suppose that makes a change from a standing order! (You never know - if I make a bad joke, someone might think it's funny and reward me with a nice donation!)

Leaving all that aside, it would be very handy if we actually got there again in July. I know our expenses are reduced while we're not printing (expect an update on that in the very near future), but we still need to upgrade that office equipment of ours.

Anyone fancy helping us get there? To ensure we reach that £2,000 target in time, you need to make your contribution either by PayPal or by bank transfer (sort code 30-99-64; account number 00744310).

Please help us out if you can ●
Robbie Rix

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

FREE SPEECH

Lost Tribe of Judah

We have to learn to live with offensive ideas and statements, argues **Eddie Ford** - whether they originate from Wiley and the Black Hebrews, mainstream Zionism or Judeo-Christianity



Black Hebrew in New York

I had not heard of Wiley till recently. Also, I must confess to being completely ignorant of grime music - my knowledge of the genre is entirely derived from outraged headlines in the press.

Clearly, Wiley (real name: Richard Kylea Cowie) is an extremely successful musician, songwriter, DJ and record producer. He is known as the "Godfather of Grime" and is regarded as a pioneer in the British underground music scene. Whether solo or as part of the crews, Pay As U Go or Roll Deep, he has had many hit singles and records - with his 11th album, *Godfather* (2017), peaking at number nine on the UK albums chart. That also won him an "Outstanding Contribution to Music" award by the *New Musical Express*. In 2018 he was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for his services to music - surely signifying his incorporation into the establishment.

But alas, it was not meant to be. Wiley is now in disgrace after a series of remarks on Twitter and then Instagram (owned by Facebook) that have been near universally denounced as anti-Semitic. Priti Patel, the odious home secretary, was offended by Wiley's "abhorrent" comments and attacked the networks for not immediately removing the posts in question. Feeling the heat, Facebook put a seven-day block on his account - as did Twitter - but that was not enough. On July 27 the UK's chief rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis, wrote to Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook and Jack Dorsey of Twitter, saying "your inaction amounts to complicity" and urged them to "take swift action to challenge the hatred that currently thrives on your platform". Then the great and the good started a 48-hour boycott of Twitter under the hashtag '#NoSafeSpaceForJewHate', including Greenpeace UK, Gary Lineker, Sir Alan Sugar and various MPs from all parties.

The inevitable happened, with Wiley's Facebook and Instagram accounts on July 28 being deactivated on the pious grounds that "there is no place for hate speech" on their platforms. Still not entirely happy, Patel said that from now on social-media companies "must act much

faster" to remove "such appalling hatred" - implement a zero tolerance policy. Unsurprisingly, Wiley's managers (A-List Management) have ceased representing him and the so-called Campaign Against Antisemitism reported the rapper to the police, who are looking at the "relevant material". A tweet posted in November from the account of Jeremy Corbyn, thanking the grime artist for his support in the general election, was deleted at the weekend.

Demanding yet more action was Labour MP Neil Coyle. He noted that Wiley's management seemed to act quicker than Twitter - emphasising once again that "legislation (including the Online Harms Bill) should ensure social media platforms are not used to spread hate". A sentiment seconded by Jess Phillips MP, who complained bitterly about how Twitter "left up such blatant anti-Semitism and hatred" that "hits all the dangerous beats" - like "Jews get things you don't get, they are in control, they think they're better". Eventually, Twitter succumbed to the barrage of criticism and permanently suspended Wiley's account, apologising for the fact that they "did not move faster". Wiley has now apologised for tweets that "looked anti-Semitic" but he is now a pariah and the overwhelming consensus is for more punitive legislation.

Real Jews

What exactly did Wiley say to provoke such condemnation? Though it is near impossible now to stitch together all the comments in the exact right order and proper context, the rapper basically unleashed his spleen on Jewish people - describing them as "cowards", "snakes" and "too touchy". He compared them to the Ku Klux Klan - immovable and beyond criticism: "There are 2 sets of people who nobody has really wanted to challenge #Jewish & #KKK but being in business for 20 years you start to understand why". Wiley doubtlessly includes his former management company as a sub-set of Jewish power.

He also declared that "Jewish people are the law", alleged that at the height of American slavery "78% of slave owners were ethnic Jews". But it was not just

Jews. He suggested that Covid-19 is a manufactured distraction or "lie", and feels there is an "Arab control presence around Africa" - in fact "Europeans and Arabs have got Africa in a headlock". But back to the Jews, Wiley complained that black people "have always been below them in their eyes" and asked, "Why do certain people from other races want us below them?" The remarks that particularly upset lots of people - maybe even sealed his fate - were "some people have gotten too comfortable on lands that don't belong to them". He went on to say that Israel "is not yours". In fact, he added, "Israel is ours".

Wiley's last few comments might mislead the naive, or just appear baffling - ie, Jewish people now living in Israel are occupying a land that does not belong to them, by which he does not mean that the Palestinians are the real or genuine inhabitants of Israel/Palestine. Quite the opposite. Either way, it is important to point out that Wiley's views are not simply plucked out of thin air. They actually stem from a coherent worldview, no matter how eccentric or ahistorical.

I am not talking about a Nazi or white-supremacist ideology, obviously, but of a religious movement that contains a whole number of different strands, factions and offshoots. Suffice to say, Wiley appears to be a convinced adherent of the Black Hebrew Israelites - sometimes also called Black Jews or Black Israelites. This movement has its origins in the late 19th century United States, essentially claiming that African Americans are the biological descendants of the "Lost Tribe of Judah" - based on the old myth that the Romans drove out all the Jewish people from Palestine after the defeat of the Jewish Revolution and the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. In other words, the Hebrew people did not go to Europe, elsewhere in the Middle East and so on, but rather to Africa - with white slavers taking the biological descendants of the Tribe of Judah to the highly profitable plantations of the Caribbean and the southern colonies in America.

Or, to put it another way again, Wiley subscribes to one of the many esoteric religions that sprang up amongst the

slaves and ex-slaves of the Americas: Voodoo, the Pentecostals, Mount Sinai Holy Church, the Holiness Movement, Nation of Islam, the Five Percenters and the Black Hebrews.

Black Hebrewism spread to the Caribbean, where they established synagogues. As a movement, it has had a very up-and-down history and has never been huge - there are about 200 congregations now. The oldest known Black Hebrew group is the Church of the Living God, the Pillar Ground of Truth for All Nations, established in 1886. The largest is the Church of God and Saints of Christ - founded by American William Saunders Crowdy in Kansas in 1896. Members believe that Jesus was neither God nor the son of God, but rather an adherent of Judaism and a prophet - and they consider Crowdy to be a prophet too.

This synthesises rituals from both Judaism and Christianity, adopting rites drawn from both the *Old* and *New Testament*. One of the various strands of Black Hebrewism actually ended up in Israel in 1969 - where they were initially denied citizenship rights. But that eventually changed in 2009, when Elyakim Ben-Israel became the first Black Hebrew to gain Israeli citizenship. Indeed, one Black Hebrew actually represented Israel in the Eurovision Song Contest and Whitney Houston has visited a group of them in the city of Dimona.

Obviously, we are dealing with a quite complicated 'political theology'. Of course, it has no real basis in actual history - but you can say the same about many other religions, full of disjunctions and contradictions. Wiley should not be viewed as somebody with mental health problems or an individual psychological aberration who is babbling on in a crazy way about Jews being occupiers, imposters, snakes, and so on. Yes, such comments are clearly foul on any number of levels. Yet we must understand that these views are connected to a religion of the oppressed.

At this point we quickly get into complex territory. Like many other people, Priti Patel says that Wiley's remarks are abhorrent and offensive. Hard to disagree. But the plain fact is that every Sunday all over Britain,

Europe, the US and many other parts of the world, preachers and priests open up a large book called the *Bible*. It is the easiest thing in the world to find whole passages in either the *Old Testament* or the *New Testament* containing all sorts of remarks - whether from the mouth of Jesus or Yahweh - that are also deeply abhorrent. The *New Testament* gets progressively more anti-Semitic to the point where the Jews are blamed for killing the Son of God - proclaiming before the Roman occupiers that not only are they guilty, but so are their children and their children's children down all the generations. That was the original blood libel from the Gospel of Matthew. Of course, that was used in medieval Europe to justify anti-Semitism - at the time a form of class warfare.

When it comes to the book of Joshua in the so-called *Old Testament*, you have Yahweh commanding the descendants of Moses to carry out genocide. The Ammonites, Hivites, Anakimites, Canaanites, etc, should be wiped out to a man, woman and child.

Criminalise

Of course, we should not take the *Old Testament* literally. It is not an active set of instructions that are still valid, requiring Jewish people now to wipe out all Ammonites, Canaanites or anybody else on the original extermination list. History moves on. Genocide is now frowned upon.

Nonetheless, in terms of freedom of speech, when Tony Blair drew up the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act, holy books were specifically excluded from prosecution. If you are a comedian or politician, you might be found guilty of promoting hatred. But if you are a preacher or anybody else quoting from one of these holy books, then it is an entirely different question. Blair did not want to go there and you can see why. In the *Koran*, an outraged Muhammad gives orders to wipe out three Jewish tribes in Medina that did not recognise him as the prophet - which surely qualifies as hate speech, like much in the *Bible*.

This might come as a surprise to Priti Patel or a large number of Labour MPs, but if you favour freedom of speech, you then have to accept that somebody will say something that is offensive to you. Some Christians say things that are deeply offensive to me, as do some Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Scientologists, etc. You just have to learn to live with it, whilst always remembering that there is a huge difference between saying something offensive and the equivalent of shouting 'Fire!' in the middle of a crowded theatre.

Communists are concerned about the latest developments. If Wiley's various social media accounts can get closed down for being offensive, then the same can happen to anarchists, socialists, Marxists, etc. Yet it is clear that we may soon see legislation that will actually *criminalise* postings that express unpopular or minority viewpoints - ideas regarded as extremely *unpolitically* correct. When this crackdown gets caught up with religion, it will be difficult for the state to disentangle those two questions. But that is what is going on right now in front of our very eyes ●

LABOUR



Keir Starmer: for him, money well spent

Palestine, payments and purges

Starmer is out to prove that Labour can be relied upon as a safe alternative party of government, argues David Shearer of Labour Party Marxists

Last week Keir Starmer gave his clearest signal yet that under his leadership the Labour Party can be relied upon to act as a loyal ally of US imperialism, particularly when it comes to the Middle East.

I am, of course, referring to the huge sum that Starmer agreed to pay out of Labour coffers to seven former staff members and John Ware, a prize-winning freelance reporter (his awards include the Commitment to Media Award from the Women's International Zionist Organization). The payment was to cover legal fees and reputational damages which resulted from the statement issued by the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn in response to the *Panorama* documentary, 'Is Labour anti-Semitic?'

Broadcast on July 10 2019, it had just about everyone being interviewed answering the question contained in the title in the affirmative - although virtually no supporting evidence was produced to back up the extraordinarily vague and unsubstantiated claims that were made by so many, including the presenter.¹

Immediately following the broadcast, Labour issued a statement. It claimed that many of the staff members interviewed had "personal and political axes to grind" and Ware's overall presentation amounted to "deliberate and malicious misrepresentation". This resulted in the legal action taken by Ware and the seven former staff members and the July 22 high court agreement to hand over an estimated £370,000 to the eight litigants (Labour's own costs could take the total up to £500,000).

Afterwards Starmer effectively agreed with the programme's title when he said that anti-Semitism had become a "stain" on the party and that those staff members who backed up the allegation had in fact given many years of "dedicated and committed service" to the party. Which makes you wonder, if they are so "dedicated and committed" to Labour, why they are now prepared to deprive the party of such huge amounts - raised to a great extent via the dues of ordinary members.

Continuing his implied condemnation of Corbyn, Starmer

went on to say that Labour was now "under new management". After all, "If we are to restore the trust of the Jewish community, we must demonstrate a change of leadership". In other words, under the former leader Labour was indeed 'anti-Semitic' - yet Starmer has given us no indication of what precisely needs to change in order to get rid of this "stain".

Following the settlement, Corbyn himself issued a statement saying he was "disappointed" by the decision to pay out such huge sums. This, he said, was "a political decision, not a legal one", which "risks giving credibility to misleading and inaccurate allegations about action taken to tackle anti-Semitism in the Labour Party in recent years". Corbyn said the party had been advised that it had a "strong defence" against any legal action - not least the evidence contained in the internal report that was leaked in April this year.

In a sense it is good that Corbyn can be seen to have taken some kind of stand - although it is not exactly a principled one, is it? If it is true that his leadership had been obliged to take such strong action to "tackle anti-Semitism in the Labour Party in recent years", that seems to go along with this whole idea that prejudice against Jews had indeed become a major problem in the party.

JLM

What about the *Panorama* programme itself? It did, of course, feature lots of interviews with former members of staff and current Labour rightwingers, including Jewish ones (although not a single anti-Zionist Jew was interviewed - more on this below). And near the beginning there was coverage of Corbyn's support for the Palestinian struggle and opposition to Zionism. Ware's views on this question are well established and go back a long way: eg, he wrote in *The Jewish Chronicle*: "So deeply into Labour's left has anti-Zionism morphed into anti-Semitism - itself a Corbyn legacy - that Jewish Labour members are avoiding meetings."²

It is clear that this 'morphing' of anti-Zionism into anti-Semitism includes those on the left who either cling to a hopeless two-state solution or call for a single Palestinian state

with equal religious rights for all its inhabitants.

What about the views of the former staff members? What was notable was the fact that, while they talked of their distress, no details regarding actual cases of anti-Semitism within the party were provided. Well, unless you take the case of Ken Livingstone, featured by Ware as the first example of 'anti-Semitism' to come to light under Corbyn. Livingstone's comments about the collaboration in the 1930s of German Zionists with the Nazis were "offensive" to Jews, it was claimed - although strangely the charge of anti-Semitism was quickly dropped in his case in favour of "bringing the party into disrepute". One of the ex-staffers said that Livingstone's suspension for three years was totally insufficient - surely such an 'anti-Semite' should be permanently expelled.

That brings me to those former staff members themselves. I stated earlier that no anti-Zionist Jews were amongst those who featured, but several were Jews with rather different political opinions. In fact it was soon revealed that no fewer than nine of the people interviewed were, or had been, leading members of the Jewish Labour Movement, including office-holders such as Ella Rose, JLM equalities officer, and Izzy Lenga, the international officer.

The significance of the JLM is that it is totally committed to Zionism, with strong links with the Israeli Labor Party - until 1977 every Israeli government had been led by the ILP, but it is not a left formation in any sense: it has been responsible for the systematic oppression of the Palestinians.

What about the Jewish Labour Movement itself? Originally founded in 1903 as Poale Zion, it was wound up in 2004. But immediately after the election of Corbyn as leader in 2015 it was refounded. According to Jeremy Newmark, who became the first chair of the newly recreated grouping until his resignation in 2018, in around September 2015 there was "talk about reforming the JLM" - specifically to make the Corbyn leadership as short-lived as possible.³

At its April 2019 conference JLM voted no confidence in Jeremy

Corbyn, who was just "unfit to be prime minister". In fact, it scurrilously alleged:

The leadership of the Labour Party have demonstrated that they are anti-Semitic and have presided over a culture of anti-Semitism, in which they have failed to use their personal and positional power to tackle anti-Semitism, and have instead used their influence to protect and defend anti-Semites.⁴

So is it seriously being suggested that those JLM members employed at Labour HQ wanted to see a flourishing party, to which they were so "dedicated and committed"?

It was so obvious what they were up to - especially after that notorious *Panorama* programme - that for once Corbyn came out openly and actually condemned those employed by the party who had joined in the smears against Labour as "institutionally anti-Semitic". But the question we have to ask is, why did Corbyn not call out the 'anti-Semitism' witch-hunt from the beginning? It was clear from the start that it was the Labour left and his own supporters who were being targeted by deliberately conflating, as John Ware did, anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism.

Instead so determined was team Corbyn to appease the right that it actually became complicit in the campaign - to such an extent that anyone who denied that the party was awash with anti-Semites was labelled a "denier" (and thus guilty themselves of anti-Semitism, of course).

Members

In reality, the whole campaign was totally false and those like the JLM knew it. In reality, they have the interests of Israel and Zionism at heart first and foremost. However, the UK establishment, in line with US imperialism, supports Israel for a different reason. It is not because it favours the strengthening of Israel in and of itself, but because it knows that its interests, as a colonial-settler state, are reliant on US imperialism.

But the problem is that Israel's standing as an upholder of 'democracy' has lost much of its traction with millions, including large

numbers of Jews. The expulsion of hundreds of thousands, the military occupation regime in the West Bank, the planting of settlements, the national law, the annexation of east Jerusalem and the Golan Heights and now possibly the Jordan Valley have caused deep disquiet. Indeed many liberal Zionists find themselves deeply troubled by the actions of the Israeli government.

And that is what the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' campaign is all about. It is about restoring traction by making criticism of the Israeli government impossible or at the very least problematic. In the new topsy-turvy world the racist ideology thereby becomes anti-racism, anti-racism becomes racism.

For Starmer, what matters is securing Labour's place once again as the UK's safe alternative party of government - and that means complying with the wishes of the US state department. So for him half a million is a small price to pay to achieve that end - no doubt he will be prepared to fork out further huge sums to the likes of former general secretary Iain McNicol, who is also considering legal action against the party.

And now Corbyn himself is facing legal action simply for suggesting that Ware and the JLMers should have been fought all the way in the courts. The threat against Corbyn sparked a fundraising drive that started with an initial target of £20,000, but within less than a week £300,000 had already been raised.

So who are all these people prepared to help Corbyn defend himself against legal action? No, these are not 'anti-Semites' defending their right to discriminate against Jews. They are conscientious Labour members who are both against the campaign to delegitimise Palestinian solidarity and for the simple need to state the truth ●

Notes

1. It can still be viewed at bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0006p8c.
2. thejc.com/comment/analysis/jeremy-corbyn-s-gold-standard-code-on-antisemitism-is-far-from-black-and-white-1.467877.
3. twitter.com/JewishLabour/status/771716373588353024.
4. politicshome.com/news/article/jewish-labour-movement-passes-motion-of-no-confidence-in-jeremy-corbyn-over-antisemitism-row.

LOCAL

Destroyed by fake 'anti-Semitism'

The pro-Starmer right has succeeded in bringing down Brighton and Hove's Labour administration, writes Tony Greenstein

In barely a week Brighton and Hove council has changed hands. Labour, which previously ran the council as the largest party, with 20 seats to the Greens' 19, has lost three councillors to the Zionist 'anti-Semitism' witch-hunt.

One, Anne Pissaridou, was suspended and assumed to have lost the whip, although it seems she has been kept in the group to sustain Labour's numbers. As for Kate Knight, she was immediately suspended for a series of social media posts which defended Jeremy Corbyn and poured scorn on the fake anti-Semitism campaign. Quite amazingly, it seems that simply retweeting a statement by the Jewish Socialists Group counts as 'anti-Semitism' under Keir Starmer's Orwellian regime. 'Anti-Semitism' now means anything Israel's supporters want it to mean. Free speech under Sir Keir has become one more casualty of the Zionist lobby. After being suspended, Kate promptly resigned from the Labour Party.

A third councillor, Nikki Brennan, who had been 'under investigation' for having taken part in a lobby of the council in October 2018 against its adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Association 'definition' of anti-Semitism, also resigned from Labour. She had been subject to considerable bullying by rightwing members of the Labour group. This left the Greens as the largest party, with 19 members, compared to Labour's 18. As for the IHRA 'definition', anti-Semites such as Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orbán, are quite happy with it. It redefines anti-Semitism as criticism of Israel and Zionism, as opposed to hostility to Jews.

What is outrageous is that this McCarthyite witch-hunt is being led by the Jewish Labour Movement - the overseas wing of the almost extinct Israeli Labor Party. The ILP, which for 30 years controlled every Israeli government, now has just three seats in Israel's Knesset and is tipped to lose them at the next election.

The ILP is the racist party which carried out the expulsion of three quarters of a million Palestinians in 1948 and created the structures of Israeli apartheid that exist today. It is a party which supports the deportation of Israel's black African refugees, because they are not Jewish, and supports the segregation of Jews and Arabs. Its 'sister party', the Jewish Labour Movement, is



Kate Knight: full of illusions in Corbyn

therefore in an ideal position to judge what is and is not 'anti-Semitic', don't you think?

Kate Knight was suspended for posting that there was no anti-Semitism crisis in the Labour Party. This was actually the view of 77% of Labour's membership in a poll conducted in 2018.¹ However, telling the truth does not make you immune from being called an 'anti-Semite'. Today, as we have always said, the witch-hunt is about criticism of Israel, not hatred of Jews - the traditional definition of anti-Semitism.

So now mere denial of being anti-Semitic is itself proof of 'anti-Semitism'. This is the kind of 'justice' that now operates under Keir Starmer, a former director of public prosecutions. It is unfortunate that Jeremy Corbyn, being the weak leader that he was, laid the basis for what Starmer is now presiding over. It was Corbyn who introduced the fast-track procedures for expelling people. It was pushed through Labour Party conference with the promise it would only be used for "egregious cases". In fact it is being used in every 'anti-Semitism' case. One can only hope that Sir Keir does not propose that in future, if someone pleads not guilty in a court, then that is considered proof of guilt!

The tragedy is that Jeremy Corbyn thought he could appease the Zionist lobby, who are the outsiders for western imperialism, by throwing people like Ken Livingstone and Chris Williamson to the wolves. He appeased and apologised, never seeming to realise that, the more he did so, the more they would come after him. As Mick McGahey, the miners' leader once said, "They'll stop chasing you, when you stop running." Corbyn never stopped running.

Labour's racist right are quite happy to destroy Labour councils if they think it will destroy the left in the Labour Party - even if that means handing over power to their political opponents, in this case the Greens. Historically there has never been any difference between Labour's foreign policy, such as support for Nato and imperialist wars, and that of the Tories. It is called bipartisanship. Zionism, which embodies that bipartisanship, is the policy of the Tories and ruling class and this is why Starmer is a self-declared 100% Zionist. As he told the *Times of Israel*,

I do support Zionism. I absolutely support the right of Israel to exist as a homeland. My only concern is that Zionism can mean slightly different things to different people, and ... to some extent it has been weaponised. I wouldn't read too much into that. I said it loud and clear - and meant it - that I support Zionism without qualification.²

The suggestion that Zionism "means slightly different things to different people" demonstrates why Starmer is a 100% racist. To him the Palestinians are invisible. The idea that Palestinians, who have been expelled from their homes, tortured, tear-gassed, bombed and seen their land and homes demolished, see Zionism in a "slightly different" way is obscene.

It is like saying that Jews saw Nazism in a "slightly different" way from the Nazis. It is an absurd comment from the ruling class dummy who now leads the Labour Party. That Corbyn appointed Starmer as his shadow Brexit secretary, despite his participation in the chicken coup,³ is testimony to his lousy judgement.

Independent

What the three councillors should do now is work together as an independent socialist group on Brighton and Hove

council. Given that she is suspended, Anne Pissaridou would do well to resign from Labour. They have more chance of remaining councillors and being re-elected in 2023 by working together than remaining separate.

Kate Knight has led the campaign in her Moulsecoomb and Bevendean ward against the attempt of the government to turn the local primary school into an academy. There has been fierce resistance by local working class parents against no less than three academy trusts, which have been forced to pull out by determined resistance from parents and the National Education Union. One of them - the New Academy Trust - has complained: "Opposition for New Horizon's sponsorship of Moulsecoomb from parents, staff and Brighton politicians has been strong, with protests and even a mock funeral being staged."⁴

One of the two other Labour councillors in the ward is Daniel Yates - a fanatical non-Jewish Zionist and racist, who as leader forced the council to adopt the Zionist agenda of redefining anti-Semitism as criticism of Israel. Yates has played no part in the anti-academy campaign. Previously he chaired the local Health and Wellbeing Board, which was charged by NHS England with implementing cuts in the health service.

This is the same Daniel Yates who told *The Argus* that he was "ashamed of being a Labour city councillor" following Anne Pissaridou's actions in sharing posts deemed to be anti-Semitic - even though she apologised for "any distress I have caused to the Jewish community". After all, "This happened several years ago, before I was a councillor, and the posts I shared do not reflect my views."⁵

But merely forwarding posts was enough for Yates. Note that he was not ashamed that the Labour government supplied weapons to Saudi Arabia. Nor was Yates ashamed that socialists and anti-racists are suspended by Labour at the behest of Israel - the world's only apartheid state. A state whose own prime minister declares that Israel is not a state of all of its citizens, but only of those who are Jewish.⁶ But that is, of course, what a 'Jewish' state is all about and what the IHRA misdefinition of anti-Semitism is designed to protect.

The real agenda of people like Yates is demonstrated by the reaction of Keir Starmer to the news that

Rachel Reeves MP, a member of his shadow cabinet, tweeted in support of a statue to commemorate Lady Nancy Astor, an ardent Hitler supporter, a member of the pro-Nazi Cliveden set, who cheered the Nazi takeover of the Rhineland in 1936.

Astor had once told MP Alan Graham, "Only a Jew like you would dare to be rude to me", and also commented that it would have to take much more than Hitler giving a "rough time" to "the killers of Christ" before she could support the launch of an "Armageddon to save them", according to the book *The Kennedys at war: 1937-1945*. Strangely enough, Starmer refused to even discuss Reeves' support for Astor and neither the Board of Deputies of British Jews nor the Campaign Against Anti-Semitism were at all bothered by this genuine example of anti-Semitism - after all, Rachel Reeves is a signed-up Zionist.

Like Kate Knight, Nikki Brennan has been a long-time campaigner over housing issues and against homelessness. She too is an active, campaigning councillor. Both have a chance of being re-elected in their own right as part of an independent socialist group that challenges the increasingly ineffective Labour group led by Nancy Platts. Platts is a former Corbyn supporter, who is desperately trying to appease the right wing of the group and the local Zionists.⁷

It is likely that more Brighton councillors will be subject to the 'anti-Semitism' witch-hunt, as the right seeks to eliminate supporters of Corbyn from the Labour group. The right has no qualms in handing over power to the Green Party - despite the fact that when they last ran the council Brighton's Greens were no different from the Tories or Lib Dems.

The Greens, when they were in office last time around, sought a conflict with refuse workers (which they lost). They also imposed on Brighton, with the support of the Tories, the white elephant called the 'i360 viewing tower' - otherwise known as 'the eyesore'. The i360 is a tall, vertical column with a pod containing people, which goes up and down. It was claimed that it would make Brighton £1 million a year and the Greens were gullible enough to believe it. But the original £36.2 million loan to finance it has now gone up to £38.9 million - some 5% of Brighton council's overall budget.

All of this is, of course, of no consequence to Daniel Yates. Having the Greens take power is a small price to pay for getting rid of socialists and anti-racists.

My advice to the remaining socialists in the Labour group is to think very carefully about whether or not they should form an arrangement with a new Independent Socialist Group - or indeed whether they should join it ●

Notes

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USA

Strategy of tension

Forces supposedly opposed to an authoritarian takeover are helping to pave the way for it, writes **Daniel Lazare**



Street fighters without a viable strategy

During the ‘years of lead’ in Italy, Germany and elsewhere, roughly 1968-82, talk spread of a “strategy of tension”, in which security agencies secretly encouraged violence on both the right and left as a means of paving the way for an authoritarian crackdown.

It was all very dark and mysterious. But now Donald Trump is engaging in such a strategy of his own, and this time the process could not be clearer. The goal is to send heavily militarised federal police into places like Portland, Oregon, and drive protestors into a frenzy. When they burn, smash and loot in response, the next step is to package the scenes into short and punchy campaign ads aimed at middle class suburbanites. Then come more cops, more protests and more ads claiming that either Democrats are backing the protests or are too chicken-hearted to come down on them the way they should.

If the ads can convince voters that events are spinning out of control, then they can convince them that tough measures are justified and that Trump is the man to do it. As a logician might put it, ‘Federal police: stepped-up street violence: scary campaign ads: surge of support for tough measures: more support for Trump: more federal police.’

Each new injection of camouflage-uniformed feds armed with pepper gas and rubber bullets kicks up such circular reasoning to a higher level. When you couple it with growing fears that a broken-down electoral system will result in “a constitutional implosion and an explosion of violence” in November, as Masha Gessen recently put it in *The New Yorker*, then it is no wonder why the mood in America is so jittery.¹ The greater the anarchy, the more Trump seems to benefit; and, the more he benefits, the more he seems to be pushing for a final showdown in the fall.

Conditions grew even more chaotic

last weekend, as street fighting spread from Portland, Oregon, to Seattle, Los Angeles, Oakland, Omaha and Richmond, Virginia. With guns proliferating on both sides, shootings are growing more common. In Austin, Texas, a protestor approaching a car with an assault rifle in hand on Saturday night was shot and killed when someone inside fired back. In Louisville, Kentucky, three people were injured when a gun accidentally went off during a face-off between hundreds of heavily-armed black militia members and a far-right white militia known as the Three Percenters. The latter says its goal is “restoring the founding principles of our constitutional republic” and, curiously enough, the black militia, which calls itself the NFAC - the Not Fucking Around Coalition (!) - claims to be constitutionalist as well.

“Once it gets to that point where it looks like the government is non-responsive to the will of the people, the constitution says to [form a] militia to address the grievances of the people,” NFAC leader John Jay Fitzgerald Johnson - known to his followers as Grand Master Jay - told a Louisville TV station. “I didn’t write it,” he said. “They wrote it. We just abide by it.”²

In Aurora, Colorado, meanwhile, shots rang out, as a jeep raced through a crowd of protestors attempting to block a local highway, while in Weatherford, Texas, Black Lives Matter demonstrators chanting “No KKK, no racist USA” faced off against an unruly mob of cursing and shoving whites armed with confederate flags, AR-15s, and at least one sign reading “All Lives Matter”.³

All of which is typical of a country in which people think they cannot be free if they do not have heavy-duty military ordinance strapped to their chest and everyone claims loyalty to the same sacred text. Trump revels in such craziness, and rightwing media

hounds love it too, which is why ultra-conservative radio hosts cannot stop railing away at “vicious, violent, hate-filled, anti-American protestors”, to quote Rush Limbaugh.

Meanwhile, the only thing Joe Biden has done in response is to issue an insipid 154-word statement accusing Trump of attempting “to sow chaos and division”. The statement went on: “Of course, the US government has the right and duty to protect federal property.” But it should do so “without trying to stoke the fires of division in this country”.⁴

Wow! You just can’t hold Biden back, can you?

Two factors

There is an eight-letter word that neatly sums up America’s predicament, as global warming pushes temperatures above 35 degrees and crime rates soar too (Sunday July 26, saw eight shooting deaths in New York City alone). Covid-19 is out of control, with 1,079 deaths registered on July 27, the economy is faltering, while unemployment is officially at 11%, but, more realistically, is around 20%. Politically, events are at a complete dead end, which is why Trump is taking the initiative.

Two factors are at work. One is Trump himself - a man who has always been a good deal smarter than liberals have been willing to admit. Yes, he is an ignoramus who has probably never read an entire book in his life. But he has an instinctive feel for the dark underside of the American psyche - no doubt because he is part of it himself - and, like any good rightwing demagogue, he knows what makes lower-middle class Americans tick and why limousine liberals like Hillary Clinton fill them with absolute fury. Conceivably, Bernie Sanders could have sliced through such populist baloney by appealing to the real class interests of Trump supporters. But Biden,

a man who once assured wealthy campaign contributors that “nothing would fundamentally change” if he became president, is unable to move beyond meaningless bromides about a president’s duty to “bring us together instead of tear us apart”, to quote from his July 21 Portland statement. If Democrats think they can take back the White House on the basis of such clichés, they should think again - assuming, that is, they have any grey matter left with which to think at all.

The other factor is Black Lives Matter, which is plainly faltering. Like all too many leaderless, single-issue protest movements in recent years, BLM’s spectacular rise is giving way to a protracted and uncomfortable denouement, in which racial divisions worsen rather than improve. BLM’s rejection of the ‘All Lives Matter’ slogan is particularly inexplicable, since, rather than undermining the idea that black lives matter, it actually reinforces it. But, in an act of purest racial sectarianism, Alicia Garza, one of BLM’s three founders, assailed the “tired trope that we are all the same” in 2014, and called on activists to acknowledge instead that “non-black oppressed people in this country are both impacted by racism and domination, and simultaneously benefit from anti-black racism” (her emphasis).⁵

This is not some chance remark that Garza issued on the run, but an essay that lays out BLM’s principles and beliefs - and one that can only cause sympathisers to shake their heads in dismay. An illegal central American immigrant on the run from the border police, a native American on an impoverished reservation, a white worker fired by Amazon for trying to organise a union - such people are all victims of capitalist oppression, and the idea that they benefit from anti-black racism is absurd. Worse, at a time of spiralling class conflict, such sentiments can only alienate non-black workers,

which undoubtedly has something to do with why the right now seems to be gaining an edge.

BLM is also bourgeois. Along with other black-oriented activist groups, it was a recipient in 2016 of a \$100 million grant from the Ford Foundation and other philanthropies. Since the May 25 murder of George Floyd, according to one rightwing website at least, it has benefited from more corporate largesse in the form of donations from firms like Amazon, Microsoft, Airbnb, Unilever, Nabisco, Dropbox, Fitbit and Tinder.⁶ Political movements need money, needless to say, but BLM’s relentless wooing of corporate interests at a time of rising economic polarisation shows where its class loyalties lie. The idea of appealing to the working class to join in a common struggle against racism and police brutality is as alien to its way of thinking as it is to Biden’s.

When neo-confederates in small-town Texas embrace ‘All Lives Matter’, while BLM protestors reject it, it shows how confused the ideological scene has become and how Black Lives Matter protests are contributing to the growing disarray. And if disarray benefits anyone, it is an increasingly militant ultra-right.

This is why things are looking good for Trump. Forces supposedly opposed to an authoritarian takeover are helping to pave the way ●

Notes

1. [newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/what-could-happen-if-donald-trump-rejects-electoral-defeat](https://www.nytimes.com/news/our-columnists/what-could-happen-if-donald-trump-rejects-electoral-defeat).
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4. Joe Biden, ‘My statement on the Department of Homeland Security presence in Portland’, July 21 2020: medium.com/joe-biden/my-statement-on-the-department-of-homeland-security-presence-in-portland-92006ab96bba.
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6. dailysignal.com/2020/07/07/these-18-corporations-gave-money-to-black-lives-matter-group.

GLOBAL

Rapprochement in reverse

There is more to US-China tensions than Trump's xenophobia, argues Paul Demarty

It is clear that Sino-American relations are reaching, or are already in, a historic crisis, with trans-Pacific amity at its lowest ebb in at least half a century.

The golden jubilee of Richard Nixon's visit to China in two years' time is much in people's minds just at the moment, but in a rather ironic way. The tit-for-tat between the two powers escalates; the western press sheds floods of crocodile tears over the Chinese clampdown on anti-Beijing protests in Hong Kong, Britain is strong-armed into cutting the Chinese tech giant, Huawei, out of its 5G network rollout, and both sides close each other's consulates on anti-espionage grounds.

Mike Pompeo's speech at the Richard Nixon presidential library in California brought together the American angle on all this. Nixon's goal with his turn to China, according to Pompeo, was to set the world's most populous country on the road to 'freedom'; but the reality of subsequent history has been the emergence of China as an independent world power that uses its economic strength to reinforce the tyranny of the Chinese Communist Party, and vice versa. So the Nixonian strategy is a failure. Where Ronald Reagan's attitude to the USSR in negotiations was, apparently, 'trust, but verify' (assume good faith, but double-check just in case), the appropriate attitude to China today is 'distrust, but verify'. A country that steals intellectual property, exploits favourable trade arrangements and insists on single-party rule at any cost *cannot* be trusted.

Much of Pompeo's spiel comes from his boss, of course. Sinophobic ravings are a core part of the Donald Trump cabaret act, and have been since his earliest campaign statements back in 2015. Trump's primary line of attack is, of course, that China is taking advantage of 'unfair' international institutions to exploit the United States, with the result that American workers are tossed on the scrap-heap by the offshoring of production. Trump promised these workers that he would 'make America great again', by which he meant that the USA would not be taken advantage of on his watch - either by the Chinese flooding the market with artificially cheap goods, or Mexico 'sending their rapists'.

As always with Trump, however, his 'unacceptable' ravings are not so far out of the political mainstream as you might think from the outrage coming from his liberal foes. So far as the supposedly perfidious Mexico goes, the Obama administration was content to ramp up deportations extensively as part of hostage negotiations to get Congress to agree a bipartisan immigration bill (which, of course, failed). He merely had the good manners not to make racist statements while doing so, which was good enough for your average MSNBC anchor.

So it seems with China - indeed, the pattern is very closely followed. Trump gets criticism for calling Covid-19 "the Chinese virus" and "kung flu" (quite apart from disastrously mismanaging it). He is accused by liberal media and celebrities of generating hate crimes against Asian-Americans. But at the same time outrage has followed every twist in the Hong Kong saga, for example. It was notable this side of the pond that liberal media outlets sided with rightwing Tory rebels to raise the alarm about Huawei.



Richard and Pat Nixon walk the wall

It may be surmised, then, that there is a continuum between the establishment mainstream and the Trumpite ultra-reactionaries on the China issue; but at the same time there are contradictions (see the various technocratic objections to Trump's tariffs, for example). To get to the bottom of this, we must go where Trump dares not tread, but sends Pompeo instead - into history.

Nixon in China

'It took a Nixon to go to China' goes the conventional wisdom of American politics - meaning that only someone on the anti-communist *right* could have pulled it off without seeming like a crypto-red themselves. There is another sense in which this is true. The China turn is one of the most audaciously cynical pieces of *Realpolitik* in modern history. It took, precisely, a cynic, a power-monger, to do it. It was the sort of diplomatic masterstroke you could expect from a man who raided psychiatrists' offices and ultimately resigned in infamy for dirty tricks on the campaign trail.

In 1969, Nixon came to office with a lot of problems before him. His reputation as, in Pompeo's words, a "fierce cold warrior" jibed uneasily with the 'hot' war he inherited with the National Liberation Front in Vietnam. He would have known as well as anyone else that Vietnam was a quagmire, and that - with discreet support from both the Soviets and the Chinese, then competing for leadership of 'official communism' worldwide - Ho Chi Minh and his comrades could more or less fight forever, while, sooner or later, the Americans would have to call it a day.

Nixon and his most famous advisor, the formidably intelligent and equally ruthless Henry Kissinger, tried a number of stratagems to break the deadlock, including reprehensible crimes like the carpet-bombing of Cambodia. Meeting the Maoists was a strategic gamble to shift the balance of power in the east Asian theatre; Kissinger went first, in 1971, and then Nixon the following year. But it was

too little, too late, so far as Vietnam was concerned.

While the meeting of Tricky Dickie and the Great Helmsman provided one of the great 'What the hell?' photo opportunities, it was after Mao's death that the initiative really began to bear fruit. As Deng Xiaoping manoeuvred himself into effective control of the Chinese Communist Party, the country's foreign policy began to change dramatically. A theory was adopted to the effect that Soviet 'imperialism' was a bigger threat than the US variety (which was, after all, a paper tiger ...). In revolutionary situations from Portugal to Angola, Maoist factions started to act as provocateurs that attempted to shrink the Soviet sphere of influence, to the benefit of the USA.

In return, the Americans assisted the integration of China into the global economy. Industrialisation gathered pace. If the phrase was not already taken by a disastrous policy of Mao's, Deng may well have boasted of a "great leap forward"; but it was not forward towards communism - merely to more 'development'. The result the regime called "socialism with Chinese characteristics", but was a peculiar hybrid of capitalism and Stalinist command-economics. Foreign investment soared, and cheap Chinese consumer goods - branded and licensed in many cases by western companies, or part of larger American-centred supply chains - plugged the standard-of-living gap in western societies created by real wage stagnation and rising unemployment over decades.

When western, and especially American, authorities fret about the strategic threat posed by China, it is something like this they have in mind: the way it has become an industrial powerhouse with eager sponsorship from its international partners, including the USA, and worries that it may 'develop' its way *out of* this situation of dependence altogether - or may have done so already. China's ability to conduct its own global strategy, notably in Africa, has raised the alarm, along with its impressive

economic growth and ability to muster state and private resources to back up that strategy.

Nowhere is this clearer than in computing and semiconductors. The 5G controversy in Britain was interesting, partly because it shows how tight a rein the USA keeps on the other five eyes, but also because it exposed plainly that four decades of aggressive financialisation of the US economy have left it *unable* to produce communications equipment quite as important to the wars and spy capers of tomorrow as oil. As one of many countries to which the business end of computer manufacture is outsourced, China has practical access to the most sophisticated chip designs available. Unlike most other 'well-behaved' outsourcing centres, it is notoriously light-fingered with those designs. Wholly capitalist when it comes to enriching themselves at the ultimate expense of superexploited workers in dangerous factories, the party elites are 'principled communists' when it comes to American intellectual property. On a long enough timescale, we would expect dependence on foreign designs to disappear entirely, as local expertise grows and China's own breakthroughs accumulate.

Yet it should be pointed out that dependence on the States - in this area and in most others - has not been overthrown, nor is Pompeo's panic about the prospects of the free world really plausible. China remains subordinated to the dollar. It is enormously dependent on exports, and especially to the United States and many of its allies. Deng famously cautioned against "tweaking the tiger's tail" (paper or otherwise); but, even if Xi Jinping were given to such timidity, it would hardly do any good with a Sinophobic gasbag in the White House and every sign that he is a straw in the US strategic wind, on this front if no others.

More generally, global capitalism has a worrying habit of veering sharply into negative-sum competition between states and, if 'America first' is the watchword in the US, then

'China second' is an unwise maxim to pursue in the People's Republic; and so, *mutatis mutandis*, in Modi's India, Abe's Japan, Johnson's Britain ... In the earlier days of Trump's presidency, when he first levied tariffs on China, the response from Beijing was almost patronising. We were treated to the bizarre sight of 'communist' ministers lecturing a US president on the mutually enriching benefits of free trade between nations. That attitude has chilled considerably, and the evidence of Hong Kong, the South China Sea and all the rest is that - however hopeless attempting to pull the tiger's tail is in reality - Xi's administration is now out of options.

It would seem, then, that China is in something like the position of Germany at the close of the 19th century. In some respects - especially industrially - highly competitive with a declining global hegemon, it is nonetheless militarily weak compared to it (the gap is far bigger in the Chinese case), and unable in practice to build an imperial power base in the world at large that could allow it, really, to rebut forcibly the hegemon's attempts to see off its rivals. A test of strength like World War I - only far more apocalyptic - cannot be ruled out.

Where the comparison falls down is the lack of a contemporary equivalent of the pre-World War I United States - a *real* hegemon in waiting, capable of picking up the pieces when the leading power finally bankrupts itself. We therefore expect that the final reckoning of the 'American century' is a while off yet; its military power is so overwhelming that its closest economic-military rival (China) - never mind military-strategic pipsqueaks like the European Union - is dependent on its good graces. But that is not to say that the US can forego pressing its advantage.

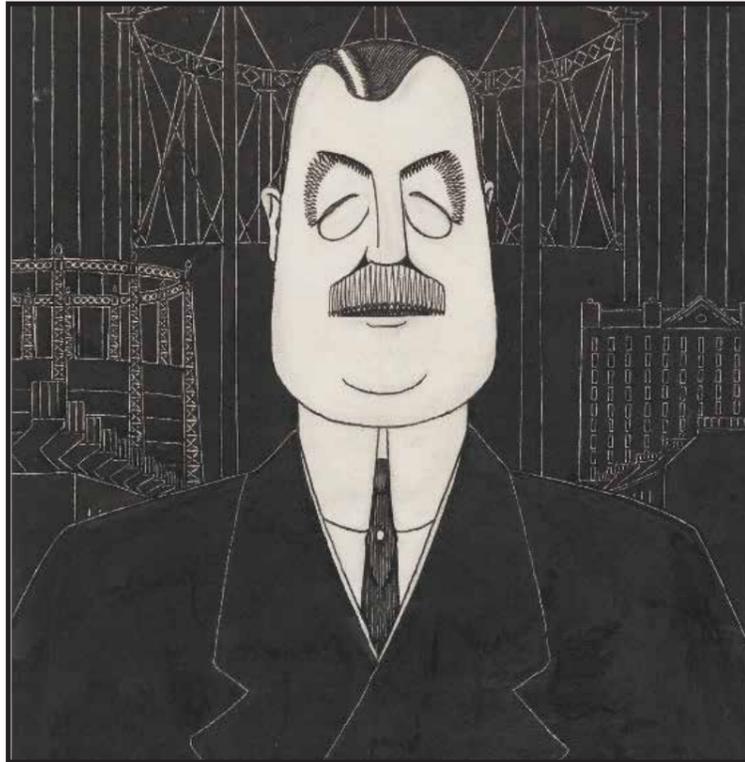
Whether Trump gets himself four more glorious years or Joe Biden gets a long snooze in the Oval Office, Pompeo is right - the 'Nixon in China era' is over ●

CENTENARY

Remained a live issue

Labour Party affiliation had been hotly debated at the Communist Unity Convention, the founding congress of the CPGB, held on July 31-August 1 1920. After a robust and democratic exchange of views, it won a slim majority (100 votes to 85) to become party policy. One month after the party's formal application was submitted, the Labour Party's terse reply came back. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was negative: the CPGB would not be allowed to affiliate. That, it should be noted, despite the fact that the British Socialist Party, the biggest component that went into forming the CPGB, had been a Labour Party affiliate since 1916.

The rejection was published in the CPGB weekly, *The Communist*, and in the accompanying article the editors underlined their view that affiliation was only a tactic. It was not a key principle and would not stymie the work of communists. The article advanced the idea of the Communist Party standing its own candidates against Labour in elections, for



Arthur Henderson by Powys Evans, pen and ink, 1924

example.

That said, the Labour Party's rebuff was not to be the end of the matter. The CPGB demanded that the Labour leadership come clean. It needed to openly explain to its mass working class base *why*. What were the political reasons for excluding the CPGB - a new organisation which, although relatively small, contained in its ranks many outstanding and well known militants?

Thus, the reply of the party's leadership - the Provisional Executive Committee - posed a series of questions to the Labour leaders. In the interests of transparency in the movement, these were published in *The Communist* to allow the question of CPGB affiliation to be discussed in the wider movement. This was not to be some gently diplomatic exchange of polite viewpoints, however. Whatever else the Labour leaders knew about the CPGB, they were very aware that the new political entity was no debating society.

It had not arrived on the political scene to neatly lay out

its ideological stall, then passively wait for working class punters to happen along. It represented an active challenge to the politics of the existing workers' movement: to some trends, an *existential* one. It would seize every opportunity to educate and mobilise masses of working class people to join the fight for socialist revolution and the overthrow of all existing exploitative social relations. It was fashioned to play its part in turning the world upside-down.

Palpably, this did *not* chime with the Labour Party's leadership and their template of incremental reform, class collaboration and achieving a benign 'socialist' British empire. The politics of the early CPGB were as much an anathema to Arthur Henderson - Labour Party secretary - as they are to the current leader of her majesty's loyal opposition.

Further correspondence and renewed applications ensured that CPGB affiliation remained a live issue for the working class movement ●

William Sarsfield

Ourselves and the Labour Party

The Communist
September 16 1920

One of the first items that had to be considered by the executive committee of the Communist Party ... was the resolution in favour of affiliation to the Labour Party. This was done in the communication embodying the whole of the objections, methods and policy of the party as decided upon at the Convention ... [Later] it became known that the decision of the [Labour Party] executive was against our application and that a reasoned statement would be forwarded to us ... we print it here:

September 11 1920

Mr Albert Inkpin, secretary,
Joint Provisional Committee
of the Communist Party, 21a
Maiden Lane, Strand, WC2.

Dear Sir

Your letter of August 10, in which you inform me that at a national convention held in London on Saturday and Sunday, July 31 and August 1 last, the Communist Party was established, was placed before the national executive of

the Labour Party at their meeting at Portsmouth on Wednesday last, the 8th inst.

My executive fully considered the resolutions adopted by the convention defining the objects, method and policy of the Communist Party, as set out in your letter. They also considered your application for the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party.

After full consideration of the resolutions and your request, it was resolved that the application be declined, and I was instructed to inform you that the basis of affiliation to the Labour Party is the acceptance of its constitution, principles and programme, with which the objects of the Communist Party do not appear to be in accord.

Arthur Henderson
Secretary

The reply, it will be seen, is a definite refusal to our request for affiliation on the ground that our objects do not appear to be in accord with those of

the Labour Party.

To be quite frank, we never supposed they were. Our worst enemy will not accuse us of ever pretending they were. But we thought the Labour Party was a body so wide in its scope, so eclectic in its outlook that it could embrace in its ranks every section of the conscious working class movement, and even give them freedom to express their particular point of view from its platform. Such a procedure would, of course, be illogical in any party which was tied down theoretically to a rigid line of policy; but we conceived the Labour Party as something different from this: as something that was striving to express politically the half-formed aspirations and ideas of the surging mass of organised workers in this country.

In such a party we conceived we held a place. Perhaps we were mistaken. We prefer to think the executive of the Labour Party is mistaken. But certain it is, that, affiliation or no affiliation, the Communist Party will not depart by a hair's breadth from its pursuit of those

objects which it has set out to attain, whether they meet with the approval of the Labour Party or not.

The Communist Party is a political party striving to use parliament - while parliament exists - as one among other means for helping forward the social revolution whose consummation is the sole object of its existence. Inside the Labour Party our power to fight elections whenever or wherever we thought fit would unquestionably be hampered. Those of us who advocated affiliation were prepared to forego this freedom in return for the greater opportunity we obtained of a hearing for our views among sections of the workers who really count in this country. Outside the Labour Party we lose the opportunity, but gain the freedom. We can fight where we like, and whom we like. We can oppose Labour candidates as freely as we oppose ordinary capitalist candidates and, since the Labour Party executive admits that our objects are not in accord with their own, they cannot have the slightest cause for complaint. So be it. It is their funeral, not ours.

It is not clear yet whether the

embargo will be held to apply locally as well as nationally. In accordance with the resolution in favour of affiliation carried at the convention, our branches, where affiliated, have been advised to hold on until action is taken compelling them to withdraw. Whether such action will be taken we do not know, but we expect our branches to act in accordance with instructions which will be issued, from time to time, by the Provisional Executive.

In any case, whatever happens, this matter must be considered in its proper perspective as a comparatively minor matter of tactics and judged accordingly. It is the communist principle that counts, and from that we will not swerve. This decision will serve but to consolidate our ranks. We appreciated the loyalty of the comrades who accepted the finding of the convention in favour of affiliation to the Labour Party, although disagreeing from it, and did not waver. In the day of non-affiliation the others will be no less loyal ●

The great taboo

The Communist
September 30 1920

The Provisional Executive of the Communist Party has instructed the secretary to send the following reply to Mr Arthur Henderson's communication refusing our application:

September 23 1920

Dear Sir,

Your letter ... stating that the Labour Party executive had declined the affiliation of the Communist Party was considered at the last meeting of our Provisional Executive. In reply, we were directed to request that the reasons for this decision be more explicitly stated, in order that the relations of the two bodies may be more clearly defined and understood.

The affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party is declined on the ground that its objects "do not appear to

be in accord" with the constitution, principles and programme of the Labour Party - a decision which, as you have no doubt noted, had been warmly applauded in the columns of the capitalist press. But the working men and women of this country, to whom both the Labour Party and the Communist Party appeal, will look for a more reasoned explanation of this decision than is given in your letter of September 11.

The object of the Communist Party, as set forth in the resolutions of our national convention already sent you, is "the establishment of a system of complete communism wherein the means of production shall be communally owned and controlled". Does the Labour Party executive rule that the acceptance of communism is contrary to the constitution, principles and programme of the Labour Party?

Or is it the methods of the

Communist Party to which exception is taken? Those methods are the adoption of "the soviet (or workers' council) system as a means whereby the working class shall achieve power and take control of the forces of production", and the establishment of "the dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessary means for combating the counterrevolution during the transition period between capitalism and communism". Does the Labour Party executive decisively and categorically reject the soviet system and the dictatorship of the proletariat?

Does it propose to exclude from its ranks all those elements at present in the Labour Party who hold these means to be necessary in order to achieve the political, social and economic emancipation of the workers, and does it impose acceptance of parliamentary constitutionalism as an article of

faith on its affiliated societies?

The Communist Party, in deciding to make application for affiliation to the Labour Party, did not suppose that the whole of its principles, methods and policy would find acceptance on the part of those who at present constitute the executive of the Labour Party. But it understood the Labour Party to be so catholic in its composition and constitution that it could admit to its ranks all sections of the working class movement that accept the broad principle of independent working class political action, at the same time granting them freedom to propagate their own particular views as to the policy the Labour Party should pursue and the tactics it should adopt. And, having regard to the past history of the Labour Party, particularly during the war and since the peace, that belief was justified.

Since when has the practice of the Labour Party changed in this respect? Is the affiliation of the Communist Party declined because it claims the same measure of freedom as has been granted to responsible leaders of the Labour Party during the last six years? And do the members of the Independent Labour Party - who constitute a large section, if not an actual majority, of the Labour Party executive - deny the Communist Party the liberty of action inside the Labour Party that was claimed and exercised by them and their organisation during the period of the war?

These are questions that arise out of your letter of the 11th inst. They are questions we are entitled to submit, and feel justified in asking for a reply to ●

Yours fraternally
Arthur MacManus, chairman
Albert Inkpin, secretary

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An ideal state

Levi Rafael of the US-based *Marxist-Leninist Worldview* blog takes issue with Mike Macnair and the CPGB

Mike Macnair is one of the leading voices of the *Weekly Worker* - the polemical organ associated with the CPGB, which is one of the mouthpieces for the so-called 'anti-Stalinist left'. The ideology of this grouping is based around a reaction to the bureaucratic practices found in many Trotskyist and other self-proclaimed Leninist groupings, as well as a reaction against the bureaucratised workers' states of the USSR, eastern bloc, etc.

However, besides 'Stalinism', the CPGB seems particularly intent on polemicising against Trotskyism. One can very justifiably admit that criticism of bureaucratic workers' states, as well as dogmatic Trotskyist groupings, is something that should happen and, given the general lack of major victories with these movements, it is fair to say that something different needs to be done.

Unfortunately, however, like most 'anti-Stalinist' left trends, the answer that Mike Macnair and the *Weekly Worker* give is yet another capitulation to the Fukuyama consensus - a sort of subconscious acceptance that there really is 'no alternative' to liberal democracy and capitalism. In particular, they are interested in reviving the legacy of Karl Kautsky - the once orthodox Marxist thinker who broke with revolutionary Marxism after World War I and the October revolution. In fairness to Macnair and the *Weekly Worker*, Kautsky's legacy has likely been given unfair treatment by contemporary leftists and historians. I say 'likely', however, because I must admit to being particularly biased against Karl Kautsky, and I consider myself to be ambivalent on the positive legacy of Kautsky even in his 'revolutionary' days.

In a 2007 article, 'What is workers' power?',¹ Macnair calls for a total rejection of the theoretical legacy of the Third International - even of its foundational pre-Stalinist congresses. For Macnair, the reason that the left remains unorganised, or else falls into dogmatism or bureaucratism, is because of the turn away from the theoretical heritage of the Second International, as embodied by Kautsky. This is in direct contrast with Trotsky, who considered the first four Comintern congresses to be foundational for the entire communist movement.

The political implications of this return to Kautsky are broad. In this article, I will focus on the different conceptions of the dictatorship of the proletariat contested here. Macnair, speaking in the vein of Kautsky, argues that we should scrap once and for all the goal of trying to build workers' soviets, or councils, as organs of proletarian democracy.

Democratic

Instead, appealing to 'orthodoxy', he argues that the dictatorship of the proletariat should simply take the form of a "democratic republic". According to Mike Macnair, if workers' states became bureaucratic, it was to the extent that they departed from this model of democratic republicanism. From his rejection of workers' council democracy in favour of democratic republicanism (with no class specified as the basis for this democracy) flows his other political implications - in particular his rejection of the transitional programme, as exemplified by the early Comintern, as well as by Trotsky, and his advocacy of a return to the 'minimum-maximum' programme of the Second International.

Though he has been rather unclear

on the topic, Macnair seems to even reject the prospect of nationalisation of all large and medium-scale industry, and seems to think that the question of expropriation and planned economy is unimportant next to the prospect of a "democratic republic". In this piece, we will focus on refuting his objections to the workers' council form of state.

Unlike Kautsky, Mike Macnair and the CPGB (PCC), for the most part, have a positive evaluation of the October revolution that overthrew the Russian provisional government and established a soviet republic. That is, they seem to support the revolution up to the point that actual power was won and transferred to the soviets. On this question, Macnair and his ilk seek to revive the pre-1917 Bolshevik slogan for a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry". In this formulation, the dictatorship of the proletariat (power in the hands of workers' councils) was supposed to be a provisional, temporary government that would rule until a bourgeois-democratic republic had consolidated itself. Instead, the soviets were made permanent bodies of state, not simply provisional organs. In 1918 the bourgeois Constituent Assembly was dissolved, eliminating the last non-soviet state body. Instead of this, Macnair and his ilk seem to think that the Russian Revolution would have been better if the Bolsheviks and the soviets had taken power only to relinquish it to a bourgeois state. The chances that such a bourgeois state would have been a "democratic republic" is dubious at best.

But let us look at Macnair's objections to the workers' council form of state. His first objection seems to be predicated on the belief that advocates of workers' councils

- Lenin and the Bolsheviks included - had a naive belief that decentralised councils of workers could take over state power. Macnair argues that the apparent failure of these soviets to hold on to power is what led to the bureaucratic degeneration of the soviet state.

I would be the last to deny that bureaucratic degeneration took place very quickly after the seizure of power. In fact, Lenin himself admitted this fact early on, making extensive comments on the problem at the 1919 8th Bolshevik Congress. The point was also made explicit in the official 1919 RCP(B) programme. But was this process engendered, not by the isolation and economic backwardness of the Russian Soviet Republic, but by the impossibility of workers' councils to hold on to state power?

Macnair's argument is that it is impossible for workers' councils to develop their own centralised, representative bodies. He takes aim at the ultra-leftist and anarchist caricatures of workers' councils to 'prove' that everyone is in fact wrong about workers' councils, and that the actual soviet regime was closer to his ideal of a "democratic republic". Why? Apparently because the soviets were governed by centralised representative organs after all, and were not just autonomous factory councils with no coordinating body.

That such a criticism falls way off the mark should be apparent to any Leninist. Leninism never shared the anarchist or libertarian ideal of totally decentralised factory committees as soviet power. Factory committees and other workers' organisations certainly did (and should) form the basis of a workers' council state, but a soviet state presupposes that these grassroots workers' committees find unification in centralised soviet

bodies at the local, regional, national and international level.

Let us look at Macnair's argument further. He writes:

In the 1918 constitution of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR) the local soviets were ordinary local authorities elected in cities and villages, by geographical suffrage on the basis (in cities) of one deputy per 1,000 population. The franchise was restricted to "(a) those who earn a living by productive and socially useful labour (as well as persons engaged in housekeeping, which enables the former to work productively); viz, wage and salaried workers of all groups and categories engaged in industry, trade, agriculture, etc and peasants and Cossack farmers who do not employ hired labour for profit; (b) soldiers of the Soviet army and navy; and (c) citizens belonging to categories listed in paragraphs (a) and (b) of the present article who have been to any degree incapacitated."

This is a structure radically unlike the common far-left image of soviets/workers' councils as delegates of factory committees. It is equally unlike the soviets of 1917 - delegates of factory committees, soldiers' committees, trade unions, workers' political parties, etc.

Macnair here contradicts himself, and his attempt to portray soviets as 'democratic republican' assemblies of the people falls flat. The fact that the franchise was restricted to those who earn a living by productive and socially useful labour presupposes that the base of soviet power is in the factory committees: ie, the mass

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organisations of the workers organised around large-scale industry. However, this is really beside the point. Macnair is trying to argue against a straw man here by lumping all his “economist” enemies into a single camp that interprets “factory committees” as a decentralised system of autonomous units.

This is certainly the anarcho-syndicalist and ‘autonomous Marxist’ interpretation, but it is not the Leninist view. Lenin argued that centralisation presupposed the coordination of *relatively* autonomous units, without disturbing the “unity of fundamentals” of democratic and socialist centralism. Arguing that workers’ organisations - particularly those grouped around some sort of human labour or activity - should form the basis of the proletarian state is not a negation of centralism.

In Yugoslavia, for example, where self-managed enterprises formed the foundation of its state, ‘self-management’ did not imply decentralisation (contrary to Macnair’s false characterisation of Yugoslav enterprises as “cooperatives”). These enterprises were united, through elected delegates at all levels, to “producers councils”, which organised social and economic planning on the municipal, regional, national and federal levels. Nor did the Yugoslavian franchise, based on work units, “disenfranchise” large swathes of the workers, as Macnair claims (more will be said about this demagogic trick). Central governing organs at all levels of Yugoslav society included one half of delegates elected from workplaces and institutions, and the other half was elected on a territorial (‘normal’ in the bourgeois understanding) basis.

But Macnair betrays his anti-soviet bias when, unable to convincingly turn the Russian soviets into ‘democratic republican’ constituent assemblies, he moves on to dismiss the very soviets that he tried to prove, to his imaginary decentralist Leninists, had nothing to do with factory committees:

The point is that the ‘classic image’ of the soviet/workers’ council form, as applied to a state, as opposed to an organ for struggle, would disenfranchise a large part of the proletariat as a class ... The proletariat as a class is defined in Marxist theory by its separation from the means of production, not by being at any particular moment employed, or employed in industry. The unwaged, including ‘housewives’ and pensioners, are part of the proletariat.

Distortion

Here we have one of Macnair’s most odious ‘arguments’ - one that is no better today than when Kautsky used it against the soviets then. The first point is a demagogic distortion of the Marxist theory on the alienation of the proletariat from the means of production. It is a testament to Macnair’s arrogance that he would try to lecture serious Marxists on this point, but, of course, no other Marxist really meets Macnair’s dubious criteria, except maybe Kautsky. Every budding Marxist who has only read the *Communist manifesto* knows that the modern proletariat was created by the violent separation of the peasantry and early petty bourgeois from individual means of production, leaving a class totally dependent on wage-labour and without any means of production of their own.

This is the condition of the proletariat when they are employed, and when they are a pensioner. *Even when the proletariat is employed in a factory, they are still separated from the means of production!* So dismissing the franchise based on labour, a means of ensuring the proletarian character of the state,

because of the ‘separation’ of the worker from the means of production is without foundation. Even in a soviet type of state, with nationalised industry, the proletariat will not ‘own’ the means of production it works with. These means of production will be the property of society as a whole, but in order to transform the relations of production, they must be operated under the management of democratic workers’ organisations, of which factory committees, labour unions and workers’ soviets are examples.

The objection about housewives and the incapacitated is equally off the mark. This is because Mike Macnair seems to exhibit some belief that a workers’ organisation needs to be a “factory committee”. But what defines a factory committee is not that it is based on a “factory”, but that it represents workers in *any* organisation of work or activity. Not only factory committees, but committees based on warehouses, mines, stores, restaurants, theatres, farms, hospitals, military units, universities and schools, research and development centres, laboratories, public-works projects, power plants, etc. etc - all of these will form the basis of the workers’ council state.

The provision in the original Soviet constitution stipulated that all forms of activity that were productive and/or useful to society would find their representation in the soviets. Just as there is no basis to believe that only “factory” workers would be enfranchised by such a system, there is also no basis for even arguing that only the proletariat would be enfranchised by such a system. The mass of the petty bourgeois, insofar as they performed work either as owner-operators or as skilled administrators and professionals, would find their representation in these organisations, along with the entire proletariat.

Nor does this system even imply a restriction on universal suffrage. I would argue that from the standpoint of history, disenfranchising the bourgeoisie will most likely be necessary. But I will concede that it is not essential to the dictatorship of the proletariat. What is essential, however, is that to the extent that the bourgeois will be allowed to participate in the soviets, it will be on the condition that they perform honest work, as administrators or accountants, in the common work of the socialist state. But this supposes the ability of the working masses to monitor the work of these employed bourgeois, and so their enfranchisement must depend on the extent to which the workers ensure that they work and do not exploit or sabotage.

The point about housewives is perhaps worth more serious consideration than the rest, but here again even Macnair admits that the soviet franchise based on labour did not exclude housewives, but actively incorporated them into the system. So much for the exclusion of masses of workers by the soviets! For “housewives”, the home is just as much a place of labour as the factory is to the employed worker. Again, Macnair misses the point by focusing on “factory committees”, instead of recognising that the workers’ council franchise is based on *all forms of labour* useful to society.

The other important point is that, while not forcing them or driving them away from the soviets, a proletarian regime should do everything in its power to eliminate the very existence of “housewives” as a caste of society, just as much as slavery and serfdom would naturally be prohibited. One of the major changes that the workers’ regime must set as its tasks - one that is ignored by Macnair’s “democratic republic” - is the liberation of women from housework by the development of socially owned, worker-managed restaurants, nurseries, public pantries,

laundries, cleaning services and other forms of socialised domestic labour. It is a most elementary task for the workers’ council type of state to liberate women from domestic labour, and bring them into a position of genuine social equality in socialist labour. So much for the “disenfranchising” of housewives in a soviet state.

One positive aspect of soviet city planning was the creation of the *mikrorayon*. This was the fundamental neighbourhood unit in most soviet-type states. A combination of bureaucratic rule and low economic development prevented most from realising their full potential, but the *mikrorayon* was designed to revolutionise home life by socialising housework. Apartment buildings were to be situated so as to be in direct proximity and walking distance with daycares and schools, as well as public restaurants, stores and services. But such bold city planning presupposes a state that has deeper authority in the sphere of “civil society” than is allowed for in a democratic-republic.

And what about the unemployed? Charlie Post gave an excellent refutation of this canard, rightfully calling it “demagogic” on the part of Kautsky, and therefore equally demagogic when repeated by Macnair:

Kautsky’s argument that a republic based on workers’ councils would exclude significant groups of workers was demagogic and wrong. The councils organised the unemployed, and clerical and retail workers. The SPD-USPD provisional government that came to power after the kaiser abdicated in November 1918 systematically purged women - over half of whom were employed during the war - from paid labour.²

Anyone familiar with the record of organising of unemployed councils by the Communist Party USA in the 1930s will recognise the absurdity of the claim that communist-led soviets would exclude the unemployed! Unemployed councils are also workers’ organisations, and have a history of being organised not by ‘democratic republican’ social democrats, but by communists fighting for soviet power.

And, just as Macnair conveniently ignores that the soviets set as their task the elimination of female domestic labour, so too he ignores the task of universal labour conscription. Part of the tasks of any proletarian state must be to eliminate unemployment. True, this may not be able to happen at a single stroke, and a proletarian state may have to manage unemployment, depending on the state of the world market that it operates in. To the extent that they will exist, unemployed councils will connect the unemployed to the soviets, just as the factory committee connects the factory worker and the farm co-op connects the farmer to the state. Incidentally, universal labour conscription is another task that requires a workers’ council-type of state: ie, one elected on the basis of organised labour, as opposed to merely territorial representation.

It is also worth noting that Macnair’s democratic republic does not take account of how residential qualifications disenfranchise homeless and transient people.

Class character

One cannot escape asking Macnair why exactly a democratic republic is superior to a workers’ council republic in bringing the unemployed, housewives, etc into the state. As Post demonstrated, the ‘democratic republican’ governments of Weimar and post-February Russia, with their “universal suffrage” that was “above classes”, excluded far more people from effective governance than the

councils did. It was the communists who practically invented the idea of unemployed councils - something that ‘democratic’ labour organizations never did.

Under bourgeois democracy, organised on a territorial basis, each elector is assumed to be an isolated citizen, a yeoman proprietor ‘independent’ of all class relations. This kind of democracy was organised to exclude workers, who people of Thomas Jefferson’s ilk deemed to be too dependent on the power of their exploiters to be considered reliable citizens. Likewise, ‘true’ democratic republicanism was not beyond restricting the franchise to exclusively white men, sometimes with property qualifications. Only the male yeoman, with his own farm or his own workshop, was deemed to be worthy of the privilege of citizenship.

Macnair may object that he is the furthest thing from a Jeffersonian democrat. I do not intend to brand him as such. But what his ‘democratic republicanism’ ignores is how even the most ‘democratic’ republic is a form of state that is adapted to bourgeois rule just as much as constitutionalist or monarchical ones are.

Thus, not only the worker, but subsequently the unemployed, the impoverished farmer, ruined shopkeeper, the CEO, etc are all ‘citizens’ - each possessing ‘equal right’ to be elected to their town council or their national congress. Never mind that they are unemployed and must spend their precious hours searching for food and work instead of politics. Never mind that they must work 10 hours a day. Or that they are a modern-day slave to their husbands and are confined to domestic servitude and patriarchal violence. If the citizen lacks the ‘virtues’ of the independent yeoman, it is either the fault of their character or the fault of their sex.

In contrast, the proletarian state, of which the workers deputies’ council is the classic form, openly proclaims its class character and therefore openly recognises the reality of all social relationships in capitalist society. Basing itself on the organisations of those formerly oppressed by capitalism, the soviet penetrates into all realms of society. It acknowledges the existence of the unemployed and organises them into their own councils to actually bring them into politics. Unions of housewives are organised in the communities to bring them into political participation, and the state uses the planned economy to socialise the food and child-rearing services, and liberate the woman from domestic slavery.

Macnair goes on to say that the workers’ council form of government is only capable of working on a local scale, and that it cannot solve the problems of accountability or the centralisation of democratic forms:

To repeat, then, what we have to fight for is the political principles - election and recallability, abolition of judicial review, accountability, freedom of information, and so on - not the merely organisational form of the workers’ council.

And so, from Lenin’s *Proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky* we have retreated to ‘formal’ democracy as the solution to the problem of accountability. Macnair says that we cannot have a ‘mere’ workers’ council, but must most importantly have elections, recallability, etc. Here we have nothing short of capitulation to bourgeois democracy, plain and simple. The primary difference between proletarian and bourgeois democracy is precisely around the attitude towards this ‘formal democracy’.

On the contrary, the emphasis should be reversed. What is needed is not *merely* elections, accountability, judicial review, freedom of

information, etc. What is needed is that these features of formal democracy must be brought directly into contact with first the proletariat and then all the working people. And the best form of government for bringing these essentials of democracy to the working people is the workers’ council.

In his draft programme of 1919, Lenin highlighted two characteristics that separated proletarian democracy from formal bourgeois democracy:

Bourgeois democracy that solemnly announced the equality of all citizens in actual fact hypocritically concealed the domination of the capitalist exploiters and deceived the masses with the idea that the equality of exploiters and exploited is possible. The soviet organisation of the state destroys this deception and this hypocrisy by the implementation of real democracy ...

The more direct influence of the working masses on state structure and administration - ie, a higher form of democracy - is also effected under the soviet type of state, first, by the electoral procedure and the possibility of holding elections more frequently, and also by conditions for re-election and for the recall of deputies, which are simpler and more comprehensible to the urban and rural workers than is the case under the best forms of bourgeois democracy; secondly, by making the economic, industrial unit (factory) and not a territorial division the primary electoral unit and the nucleus of the state structure under soviet power. This closer contact between the state apparatus and the masses of advanced proletarians that capitalism has united, in addition to effecting a higher level of democracy, also makes it possible to effect profound socialist reforms.³

What this all reveals is a fundamental weakness in Macnair’s ‘democratic republicanism’.

Democratic republicanism that does not provide a clear basis for the political rule of the proletariat will be unable to begin socialising production and gradually abolishing class divisions. Lenin argued that one of the main characteristics of the dictatorship of the proletariat was not mainly the use of force against the exploiters, but more fundamentally the gradual establishment of a socialist form of labour discipline:

Proletarian discipline is not discipline maintained by the lash, as it was under the rule of the serf-owners, or discipline maintained by starvation, as it is under the rule of the capitalists, but comradely discipline, the discipline of the labour unions.⁴

And, lest Macnair argue that this was some sort of syndicalist slip of Lenin’s later years, let us look back at his mentor, Kautsky, and how he argued about the task of organising labour discipline on the “day after” the social revolution:

But the discipline which lives in the proletariat is not military discipline. It does not mean blind obedience to an authority imposed from above. It is democratic discipline, a free-will submission to a self-chosen leadership, and to the decisions of the majority of their own comrades. If this democratic discipline operates, in the factory, it presupposes a democratic organisation of labour, and that a democratic factory will take the place of the present aristocratic one.

It is self-evident that a socialist regime would from the beginning

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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seek to organise production democratically. But, even if the victorious proletariat did not have this point in view from the beginning, they would be driven to it by the necessity of ensuring the progress of production. The maintenance of social discipline in labour could only be secured by the introduction of union discipline into the processes of production.⁵

Even for the old Kautsky, the dictatorship of the proletariat was defined by creating a new form of cooperative labour discipline that "presupposed" those very factory committees that Macnair dreads. The value of these committees is not that they are from factories. The value is that these mass organisations, connected directly as they are with all forms of human labour, are able to lay the foundation for the self-discipline of labour. For the soviet (unlike the democratic republican) state sets itself the long-term social task of the abolition of the state in general. This presupposes not only, and not even mainly, public ownership, but above all the development of a democratic work discipline that will later render all forms of political democracy obsolete.

People's state

Macnair's criticism of Trotsky's defence of the USSR as a workers' state, because of the transformation of property relations, is nothing new and adds no significant arguments for the opponents of Trotsky on this score. The ex-Trotskyists who subscribed to the 'state-capitalist' interpretation of the Soviet Union and other communist-led states were ultimately horrified that Trotsky could argue that a workers' state could still exist as such, while having an authoritarian, bureaucratic regime, because it was based on nationalised property relations.

The problem with all of these critiques, whether they came from the 'state capitalist' school of the likes of Tony Cliff or CLR James, or the 'bureaucratic collectivism' narrative of the likes of Shachtman and Burnham, is that all ignored the point that Trotsky made about analysing the USSR: not by *a priori* norms of moral imperatives about a workers' state, but by the actual material foundations.

What this means is that a state like the USSR has to be understood in the development of its social relations. Critics like Macnair and Cliff can certainly pull out plenty of material from Marx, Engels and Lenin to demonstrate that a workers' state was envisioned as a higher form of democracy, and that this form of democracy was absolutely vital if the proletariat was to be able to actually control its own state, and ultimately for its state to wither away into a mighty system of producers' and consumers' cooperation. Trotsky did not disagree with this, and even defends this interpretation of a workers' state in his 'bad' book *Terrorism and communism* (Ernest Mandel, a staunch defender of Trotsky's theories on bureaucratic workers' state, called it his "worst book"). It should go without saying that Trotsky defended the interpretation of a healthy workers' state as one that minimises bureaucracy, and is based on the mass participation of the entire population through democratic workers' councils. But the point is that there is no cosmic law of the universe that says that a workers' state must be 'healthy' in order to be a workers' state.

Trotsky often used the analogy of a diseased man who faced terminal illness if he did not treat it. Such a disease could be totally devastating to the body of the man: it may even render him completely bedridden and unable to function. It may deform him beyond recognition, or cause him to waste away to skin and bones. Nevertheless, no matter how sick this

person is, he still remains a human being.

The ideal workers' state is certainly one based on mass democracy and genuine workers' power, very unlike the Stalinist method of bureaucratic rule. It could even be convincingly argued that a workers' state that continues to be ruled in a bureaucratic manner will eventually degenerate into a capitalist state. But there are absolutely no guarantees that a workers' state will necessarily be a 'healthy' one. It could even be argued that a fully 'healthy' workers' state is very unlikely to come into existence at first, since such a state will inevitably have to struggle with aggravated social contradictions left over by capitalism, as well as the world market. But to dismiss a workers' state because it is 'sick' is to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

Trotsky criticised as idealist the attempt to define a workers' state based on certain *a priori* norms, instead of studying its actual development. He likened this to the bourgeois categorical imperative of Kant, which was based on timeless moral standards. Such an approach represents a rupture with the materialist method of Marx, who studied things in their living development. A serious Marxist should not dismiss a state once it becomes 'unhealthy' and 'bureaucratic', but should instead look at the contradictions within such a state that have caused it to become unhealthy. Only in this way, by learning from failure, will communists be better able to maintain a truly healthy, democratic and anti-bureaucratic state of the workers in the future.

This is not to say that we should refrain from criticism of the bureaucratic practices of unhealthy workers' states. Trotsky argued that his demand for a revival of soviet democracy was not merely sentimental - the need for workers' democracy was a life-and-death question for the soviet state, especially in the field of planned economy and the success of the five-year plans:

The socialist culture will flourish only in proportion to the dying away of the state. In that simple and unshakable historic law is contained the death sentence of the present political regime in the Soviet Union. Soviet democracy is not the demand of an abstract policy, still less an abstract moral. It has become a life-and-death need of the country.⁶

But it is interesting that Mike Macnair should put forward the "democratic republic" as an antidote to Stalinist authoritarianism. When Stalin fully consolidated his power over the Soviet state, he inaugurated his rule with the adoption of a new constitution which promised to be the "most democratic in the world". The franchise based on occupation was abolished in favour of the universal suffrage of an atomised population. The dictatorship of the proletariat was considered to be no longer necessary, and the Soviet state was declared to be a "state of the whole people". Essentially, the 1936 constitution marked the transition of the Soviet state to a "democratic republic" - a state based on universal suffrage and blind to class relations:

What do these changes signify? Firstly, they signify that the dividing lines between the working class and the peasantry, and between these classes and the intelligentsia, are being obliterated, and that the old class exclusiveness is disappearing. This means that the distance between these social groups is steadily diminishing. Secondly, they signify that the economic contradictions between these social groups are declining

... are becoming obliterated. And, lastly, they signify that the political contradictions between them are also declining and becoming obliterated. Such is the position in regard to the changes in the class structure of the USSR.⁷

Of course, the opposite phenomenon was happening in the USSR. Despite the growth of industrialisation and the subsequent numerical growth of the Soviet proletariat, class antagonisms within the country were reaching a new crisis, with a peasantry resentful of proletarian rule because of the disastrous collectivisation of their farms, and an intelligentsia that was gaining in material and cultural privilege and was becoming increasingly detached from the control of the workers. But, to consolidate its bonapartist position, the Stalinist bureaucracy was able to draw on the ideology of democratic republicanism to posit a state that claimed to be both democratic and above class antagonisms. Such a state could thus justify the dissolution of workers' councils elected on the basis of occupation, because such a political device was explicitly designed as a tool of proletarian dictatorship and socialist construction. Now that classes were "obliterated" and socialism was 'basically' constructed, proletarian dictatorship could give way to a democratic-republican 'people's state'.

Trotsky noted the bonapartist character of this 'democratic' revision of soviet democracy:

To be sure, the reformers decided after some waverings to call the state, as formerly, soviet. But that is only a crude political ruse dictated by the same considerations out of regard for which Napoleon's empire continued to be called a republic. Soviets in their essence are organs of class rule, and cannot be anything else. The democratically elected institutions of local self-administration are municipalities, dumas, zemstvos - anything you will, but not soviets. A general state legislative assembly on the basis of democratic formulas is a belated parliament (or rather its caricature), but by no means the highest organ of the soviets.

In trying to cover themselves with the historic authority of the soviet system, the reformers merely show that the fundamentally new administration which they are giving to the state life dare not as yet come out under its own name.⁸

Lenin warned in *State and revolution* that all states claiming to be 'free people's states' were bonapartist dictatorships that obscured class antagonisms in order to consolidate power. But now the 'free people's state' had become the official Stalinist doctrine, alongside 'socialism in one country'. Before then, it had been an axiomatic tenet of Leninism that a 'people's state' was an impossibility, because every state is an organ of repression for one class to use against all others. Therefore, to the extent that a state exists, the 'people' - that is, the entire population without distinction of class - do not rule. Only under communism, with the real and not bureaucratically proclaimed elimination of all classes, will it be possible to speak of the people as a unified entity engaged in cooperative production and consumption.

Foundations

Perhaps Mike Macnair would object that it would be ridiculous to consider the Soviet Union under Stalin to be a genuine democratic republic. But the fact remains that his negation of the workers' council form of state in favour of such a republic makes the same error: namely, it obscures

the class relations upon which a democracy is built.

Macnair seems to be arguing that only the proletariat are capable of democracy, but, as we noted earlier, this ignores how democracy was once based on the ideal of the independent yeoman (not to mention the slaveholders and independent citizens of Athens). Communists should put emphasis on organisations like workplace committees as the basis of a proletarian state not because of some fetishism of localised councils, or for syndicalist reasons. The workplace committee is the workers' response to the yeoman farm, the replacement of the individualised economic unit that forms the basis of bourgeois democracy with collective organisations of working people operating modern industry.

These workers' committees not only draw the workers into participation in state affairs by bringing the state closer to the workers. Most importantly they gradually lay the foundation for a new type of social discipline based on freely associated labour - the only factor that, coupled with the international socialisation of wealth, will actually abolish classes and establish a form of labour discipline free from coercion.

Macnair and the CPGB (PCC) base their politics on a reaction against bureaucratic practices found in many Marxist and Leninist organisations. This trend is particularly notorious with Trotskyist groups which put forward dogmatic demands on their membership, and for that reason very often split into ever smaller sects. Having spent many years in Trotskyist parties, I am all too aware of this phenomenon.

What can be alluring about Macnair and the CPGB is that they seem to offer a fresh new critique of bureaucracy, both in Trotskyist parties and in sovereign workers' states. But everywhere their answer is simply 'extreme democracy' or 'democratic republicanism' and a return to the theory and practice of the Second International. But what Macnair seems not to understand, and what I have experienced first-hand for years, is that the problem with Trotskyist organisations is not that they advocate a workers' council form of state. The problem is not that they put forward a transitional programme. The problem is usually that they do none of these things. Trotskyist parties will put forward 'transitional programmes' that really amount to the minimum-maximum programme, with basic demands for healthcare and labour rights right next to the demand for a world socialist state. And serious discussion about establishing a workers' council republic is usually dismissed as irrelevant theorising, when one should instead be tailing the latest protest trend.

What is needed to revitalise the left is not democratic republicanism, but a programme seriously oriented to establishing a workers' council republic, with transitional demands that connect immediate democratic demands with the beginnings of such a state ●

Notes

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