

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly **worker**



**Second independence referendum and Scotland's right to self-determination**

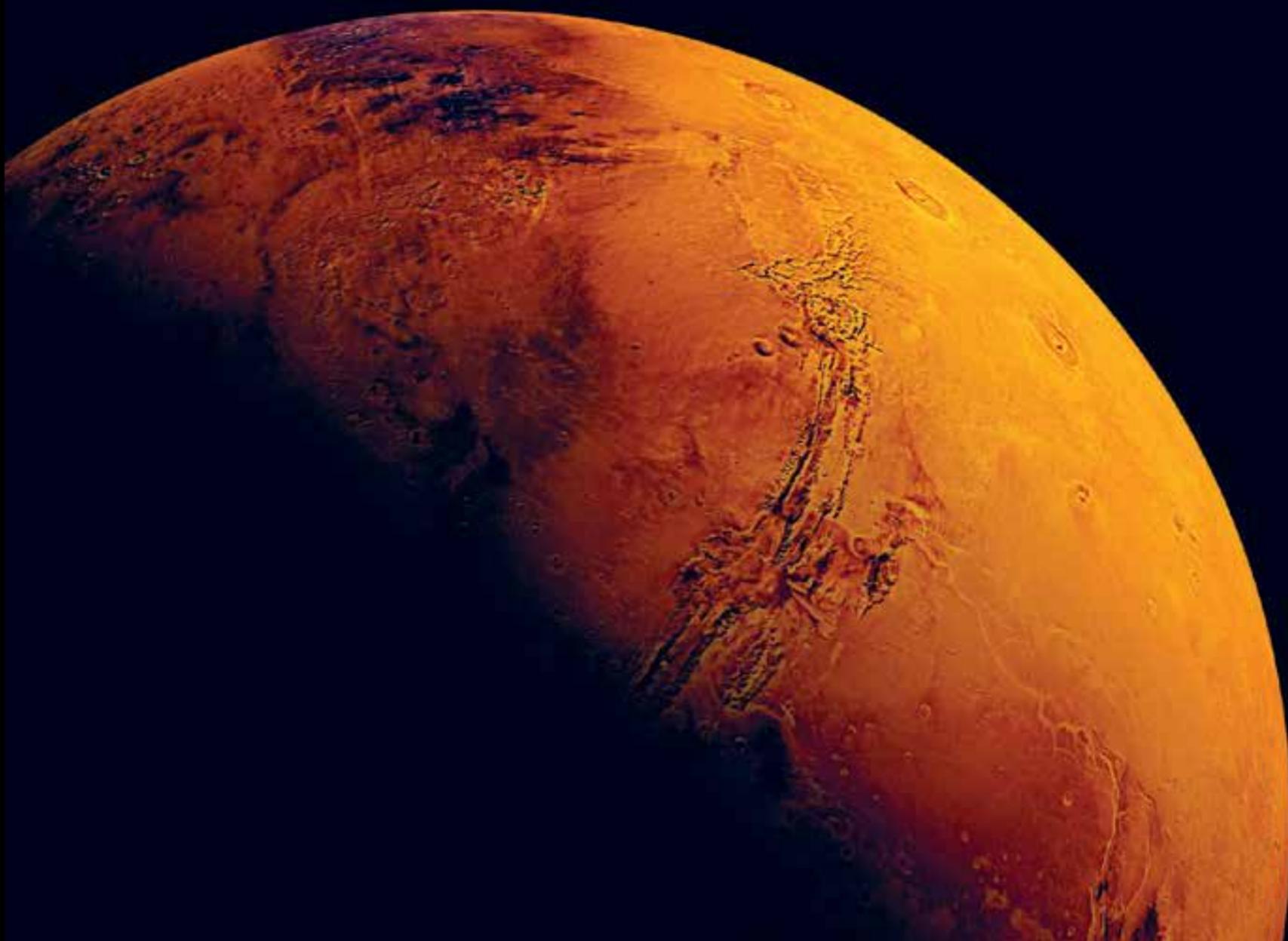
- Letters and debate
- Martin McGuinness
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- Russia 1917

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**MISSION MARS,  
OR MISSION EARTH?**



# LETTERS



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

## Frog into prince

Is it possible to transform the Labour Party into a socialist party? The recent formation of Grassroots Momentum and the exclusion of the left of the Labour Party from participation within its official structures will - I guess - cause members of Labour Party Marxists to rethink the group's aims.

The positive answer to the question is that the working class has an objective interest in socialism. The Labour Party is the political means to this end in the UK. It is funded, staffed and supported by its working class members. As long as there are class-conscious members of the Labour Party there will be the real potential for transformation.

The negative answer is that belief in the potential for transformation is based on at least three mistaken assumptions.

The first is that the Labour Party remains a 'bourgeois workers' party'. Whereas in the 1920s there were many class-conscious members organised as socialists in groups such as the Independent Labour Party, now there are a handful. Even the number of members with trade union consciousness are presently in decline. These days the left of the Labour Party seems more concerned to keep the latter alive than in developing class consciousness. This is consistent with the death of Labourism as a whole. Lenin's characterisation, based in part on an assessment of potential support for the October revolution, no longer applies.

The second is that the election of a reformist leader signifies a shift in awareness of the need to replace capitalism with a democratically planned, classless society worldwide. It is true that a leader who occasionally mentions the word 'socialism' is a lesser evil than one who rejects the doctrine outright. However, when 'socialism' is associated with a mildly redistributive programme based on mainstream Keynesian economics, it is arguable that the linkage misleads rather than informs. Ruling class hostility to such a programme is intense, but limited. This does not change the nature of the Labour Party. The latter continues to be a body committed to modest national reforms intended to manage working class discontent with capitalism. Corbyn's election was a reflection of opposition to austerity, not to capitalism as a whole.

The final mistaken assumption is to underestimate the continued influence of Stalinism on the consciousness of the leadership of the Labour Party. The fact that many members understand 'socialism' to be a welfare state, nationalisation and full employment cannot be explained solely by the evolution of social democracy. Many Labour leaders have been and continue to be admirers of the former Soviet Union and national regimes modelled on it, such as Cuba. This tendency continues in the shape of Seamus Milne and his allies and friends. It is no wonder, therefore, that a Czech comrade, a member of Momentum, recently described the internal bureaucracy of the Labour Party as more effective at suppressing dissent than that of

the old Czechoslovak Communist Party.

If I am right, turning the Labour Party into a socialist party is magical. It is like trying to turn a frog into a prince.

So how can Marxists then transform trade union consciousness into class consciousness? Perhaps it will continue to include debating and passing resolutions at branch or delegate meetings of trade unions and reformist political parties. Perhaps it will also include an active and attractive programme of Marxist education and propaganda within and outwith the labour movement. This could be targeted at productive workers, who are keen to develop their consciousness beyond the immediate experience of their oppression and exploitation. Most likely it will involve a continued critique of forms of political and economic organisation limited by bourgeois and Stalinist horizons.

This means the creation of Marxist political parties worldwide.

**Paul B Smith**  
Lancashire

## Liberal February

On February 16 2017 the parliamentary fraction of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation held a roundtable discussion entitled 'Liberal February and proletarian October', with leaders of the CPRF, other social and political figures and representatives of the mass media.

In the title itself the organisers crudely distorted the historical picture. Giving the main contribution, CPRF vice-president Dmitry Novikov MP expressed his opinion of the character of the February revolution: "Speaking of February 1917, one has to ask: what was it, an overthrow or a 'colour' revolution? Yes, signs of both were present. Conspiratorial liberal organisations were active, and there were links with the embassies of the countries of the Entente."

Leaders of the CPRF, blinded by hatred of liberalism, see the main source of present troubles in those politics, but not in capitalism itself. Such thinking does not allow the CPRF to acknowledge the revolutionary character of the events of February 1917. Claiming to defend Soviet traditions, in that way politicians forget the assessment given to February by Soviet historiography: the February revolution was the first victorious people's revolution of the imperialist epoch.

In the contributions of the CPRF leaders, Zyuganov and Novikov, there was not even one mention of soviets as organisations of revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, born of February. The general strike of Petrograd workers, the rebellion of soldiers and mass demonstrations of February 23-27 - precisely the things which led to the overthrow of tsarism - were beyond the frame of attention of the leaders of the parliamentary oppositionists.

Using the scaremongering propaganda of the present power about 'colour revolution' and 'liberalist plots', the fake historians of the leadership of the CPRF and the close 'patriotic' organisations which share its national/great Russian spirit 'forget' that the Cadets and their leader, Milyukov, did not at all strive for the removal of the

monarchy in Russia, but were only occupied with various hidden manoeuvres, with the aim of a possible transfer of the throne to a more obedient and less hated emperor than Nicolas Romanov.

The overthrow of tsarism, the proclamation of democratic freedoms, the freeing of political prisoners, the liquidation of shameful national restrictions, the winning of the eight-hour working day, from the viewpoint of the president of the central committee of the CPRF, Zyuganov, do not merit much attention. And this doctor of philosophical sciences, to reduce the value of those outstanding gains, says that the February revolution "cannot be called a revolution in the full sense of the word".

In fact joining with the orthodox Christian and monarchist assessment of the process of the revolution and its aftermath, some participants in the roundtable of the CPRF fraction also ventured to describe very specifically the role of the Bolsheviks in that revolution. In their opinion, Bolsheviks "were not at that time close to the events". And that was said about the party which organised strikes in the enterprises of Petrograd, arranged meetings for women's day on February 23 (March 8 new style) and called on February 27 for armed rebellion!

The thesis on the negative consequences of February came in Zyuganov's introductory speech. The leader of the CPRF declared that the October revolution "raised and solved essential questions of the social and economic arrangement of society". And at the same time, in the opinion of Zyuganov, "ended the chaos and further degradation born of February". Lowering the revolutionary value of the February revolution, interpreting the events of the first revolutionary process undertaken in 1917 Russia as a growth of "chaos and degradation" conquered by the October revolution, the leaders of the CPRF probably believe that they are enhancing the value of October. But such ritual glorification of October, without a class assessment of its premisses, without a scientific, dialectical analysis of the transitional growth of the bourgeois democratic revolution into the socialist, is only water to the mill of the ruling authoritarian regime in Russia today.

In that way, in their assessment of February 1917, the pseudo-communist statist of the CPRF once again showed themselves as adherents of setting up 'quotas of revolution' (in around 1993 Zyuganov announced that Russia had made enough revolutions, and his 'communist' party no longer aims to make one) and of the unity of the national interests of the exploiting and exploited. Such an assessment of the February revolution aids the ideologues of the ruling regime, who repeat in connection with the centenary of the "Great Russian revolution" their chief teaching: the necessity to conserve stability of power, the necessity for the unification of society, the impermissibility of revolutionary methods to solve social contradictions.

We, representatives of the communist and workers parties, united in the organising committee, October 100, consider dishonourable the efforts of national-patriotic gentlemen to reduce the first victorious people's

revolution of the imperialist epoch to a 'plot of freemasons' and 'intrigues of foreign puppet-masters'. We do not accept the hypocritical lamentations about 'the end of the thousand-year Russian statehood' in February 1917. We are against underlining the destructive character of the revolution, while remaining silent about its undoubted achievements - thanks to which Russia, in the words of VI Lenin, "became the most free country in the world".

We bow our heads in homage to the memory of those who died in the days of the second Russian Revolution - workers, soldiers and peasants. By their blood they gained freedom for the people, who victoriously led our fatherland through February to October.

We once again call on honest communists who find themselves in the ranks of the CPRF to consider to what inglorious end their party is heading under such a leadership.

Glory to the heroes of revolutionary February 1917!

After Februaries come Octobers!  
Long live the future socialist revolution!

Power - to the workers!

**October 100**

Leningrad

## No conscription

On Saturday April 1 the Wakefield Socialist History Group are holding a 'British socialism and World War I' event at the Red Shed, Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1 1QX, starting at 1pm. One of the topics that will be being looked at is conscientious objection.

It is perhaps worth making a few remarks about the No Conscription Fellowship, which was founded by Fenner Brockway three months after the war had started. He was editor of the *Labour Leader* paper of the Independent Labour Party. When the war was announced in 1914, there were plenty of volunteers, but Brockway was looking towards the future. He knew "not everyone was enthusiastic about the war". This became "increasingly apparent, as the horrors of warfare became increasingly known" (according to Scott Lomax). By early 1915

the rush of volunteers became a "more cautious flow" and calls for conscription intensified. King George V wanted it. Lord Northcliffe, owner of *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* was also vociferous.

The conscriptionists seized on registration as a first step. The National Registration Act was pushed through parliament in a week in July 1915. Men who didn't register were fined or faced jail. So the NCF saw which way matters were heading. They began to make their voice heard. In addition to Brockway, they had Catherine Marshall (a veteran suffragette, into non-violence) as a key organiser. They had Bertrand Russell on their committee and they built links with Quakers and with the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

When conscription was actually introduced - originally for unmarried men - the NCF successfully campaigned for the legislation (the 1916 Conscription Act) to include a 'conscience clause'. This clause allowed men to claim exemption from military service on conscience grounds. Nationally about 16,000 men claimed this exemption. However, they had to attend tribunals stuffed with councillors, civic leaders and military representatives. Not surprisingly many claims were rejected!

**Alan Stewart**

Wakefield Socialist History Group

## Consistent?

In 2014 the vast majority of the left campaigned for a 'yes' vote, claiming that an independent Scotland would be able to reverse austerity and create a workers' state (I'm not making this up!). Then the same left campaigned for a 'yes' vote in the Brexit referendum, saying virtually the same thing: we had to leave the pro-business European Union to end austerity.

Now, with the spectre of a second referendum for Scottish independence looming over the UK, I assume the same left, to remain consistent, will have to campaign for a 'no' vote - they won't leave Scottish workers left behind after the UK workers' paradise leaves the EU.

**Steven Johnston**

email

## Fighting fund

### At the races

Probably the highlight of this week's fighting fund donations is the decision of comrade JM to contribute £60 of his "Cheltenham winnings"! He didn't say how much he won (or on what horse!), but it was enough for him to double his annual subscription payment. Mind you, JM has a history of generosity every time he renews his sub, so I suspect he might have contributed a little extra even if he hadn't been lucky at the races.

Apart from that, it was an excellent week when it came to standing orders - a total of £515 came in - thank you, TR, KB, MM, TB, SK and PM. The good thing about those monthly SOs is that if one particular week happens to fall at the wrong time of the month for regular donations, then at least that'll be compensated for in another week. That's what happened this week.

In addition to that there were two PayPal gifts - £20 from DN and £10 from LR: two who were among the 3,153 online readers of the *Weekly Worker* last week. So, all in all, our March running total increased by a more than useful £605 - which not only sees us shooting past our £1,750 target, but actually breaking through the £2,000 barrier as well! From memory, I think that's only the second time we've done that - and we still have over a week to go!

The £2,022 we've raised so far more than makes up for the two earlier shortfalls this year. Now let's see if we can't build up a nice surplus to make up for the odd bad month later in the year ●

**Robbie Rix**

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

# OBITUARY

## From guns to government

Kevin Bean unravels the enigma of Martin McGuinness - IRA commander and deputy first minister of Northern Ireland



Martin McGuinness at Colin Keenan's funeral in 1972

The obituary editors had plenty of time to prepare for the death of Martin McGuinness. It was clear from last December that he was in very bad health - a fact confirmed by his resignation as deputy first minister in January of this year.

This chronicle of a death foretold was reflected in the political comment and media obituaries which appeared in the days following the announcement of his passing. In many ways it was all rather predictable: the dominant theme emphasised McGuinness's transformation from 'terrorist' to 'peace-maker' and of the stages he had passed along the way from Irish Republican Army commander to deputy first minister of a state he had been pledged to destroy. Comments from former British politicians, and others who had dealings with him during the peace process, were studiously balanced, focussing on his 'positive contribution to the new Northern Ireland' that had emerged after 1998.

However, his earlier role as one of the public faces of the emerging Provisional IRA had its place too in the media narrative. Young but still sufficiently senior in rank, he became a member of an IRA delegation (including Gerry Adams) that was flown to England to negotiate with the Conservative government in 1972. Furthermore, interviews and journalistic reminiscences reminded us of Martin McGuinness's support for the "cutting edge of the armed struggle" in the 1970s and 1980s, and his justification that "the IRA's campaign was the only way to end British imperialism's control of Ireland and reunite the country".

These were usually contrasted with accounts of his (and Sinn Féin's) movement into constitutional politics and ministerial office following the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. This culminated in the quite extraordinary 'Chuckle Brother' relationship that Mr McGuinness enjoyed with Ian Paisley in government after 2007 - alongside other symbolic turning points, such as his handshake with Queen Elizabeth during her visit to Belfast or his condemnation of dissident republicans as "traitors to Ireland".

However, a number of commentators and political opponents had the bad taste to puncture this developing consensus. The *Daily Mail* and *The Sun* concentrated on his "murderous past" as the "butcher of the Bogside", whilst some Tories and unionists, with true Christian charity (in the case of Norman Tebbit), declared McGuinness "an unrepentant terrorist" and wished him an "an eternity in hell". This vehement hatred was directed less at what Martin McGuinness had become when he died and more at what he had represented in the 1970s and 1980s, when the Provisional campaign for the 32-county socialist republic was at its height.

The TV archive footage of a youthful McGuinness openly and proudly proclaiming his IRA membership reminds us not only of his own past, but also of the life experience of countless thousands of other young, working class republicans and the mass movement they built on the streets and in the jails to challenge the British state in Ireland. It is as a symbol of *that* movement and *that* historical moment that Martin McGuinness remains a hate figure for some Tory politicians and irreconcilable unionists.

Most establishment figures, however, took a different tack and recognised what they considered to be his political achievements in securing and consolidating Northern Ireland's new dispensation in the 2000s. According to Tony Blair, McGuinness played an "indispensable and key role" in that process, which saw the transformation of the Provisionals from a revolutionary republican movement into a constitutional nationalist party.

This aspect of his personal story too embodies a wider experience and a political journey made by other republicans. However, the difference was that McGuinness was a leading figure in the transition from 'guns to government'. Not only was he part of a Provisional leadership that defined the line of march away from revolutionary republicanism and towards rapprochement with the constitutional and political status quo, but, drawing on his political and military prestige as a committed republican, he ensured that his followers largely followed him

in that retreat. At key turning points he made important public speeches and interventions at *ard fheiseanna* that traded on this reputation to engender loyalty and support for the new line.

I have met countless republicans who said that for active members of the IRA in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s the phrase, 'If it's good enough for Martin, it's good enough for me', became axiomatic, as previously unthinkable positions - recognising the Northern Irish state, its legal and policing system, and entering its government - were adopted by the Provisionals. Martin McGuinness not only used persuasion and his established reputation to swing an argument, but was equally skilled in the black political arts of internal manoeuvre and outflanking potential opponents within the IRA and the republican movement more generally to secure the leadership's position.

Together with Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness kept the Provisionals largely together throughout all the stresses and strains of the peace process, and ensured that the dissidents who split away did so at different times and on different issues, so as to remain a largely marginal force. As Jonathan Powell, Tony Blair's chief of staff, acknowledged in his memoirs, having republican interlocutors who could keep the IRA together and bring most Provisionals on side was essential during the peace process and a key to the success of the British government's strategy.

It is perhaps this role within the republican movement that will gratefully be remembered by both the British state and his revolutionary republican critics as Martin McGuinness's greatest achievement - and an essential precursor to his more public roles in government with Ian Paisley after 2007. In this sense his life is of a piece that cannot be simply divided into an early violent phase and a later political career.

As with the movement he led throughout the troubles, you cannot have one without the other: the IRA volunteer and the politician were both the same, yet also radically different people - formed and ultimately defined by the historical events and dramatic circumstances that shaped them and Ireland in the last third of the 20th century ●

# ACTION

## London Communist Forum

**Sunday March 26, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Study of Ralph Miliband's Parliamentary socialism. This meeting: chapter 10 ('The sickness of Labourism'), section 3: 'The battle for the Labour Party'.

Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk); and Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk).

## Radical Anthropology Group

**Tuesday March 28, 6.45pm:** 'The role of gesture in traditional narratives'. Speaker: Lauren Gawne  
Organised by Radical Anthropology Group:  
<http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

## Remember JD Bernal

**Friday March 24, 6pm:** Public meeting, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. A celebration of John Bernal - socialist, scientist and peace campaigner.  
Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marx-memorial-library.org](http://www.marx-memorial-library.org).

## Global terrorism and peace

**Saturday March 25, 10.30am to 5pm:** Conference, Wesley's Chapel, 49 City Road, London EC1. Registrations and other info: [vijay@vmpeace.org](mailto:vijay@vmpeace.org). Organised by Uniting for Peace: [www.unitingforpeace.com](http://www.unitingforpeace.com).

## Defend Council Housing

**Saturday March 25, 12 noon:** Demonstration. Assemble Canada Water Library, 21 Surrey Quays Road, London SE16. Stop the demolition of council homes and community spaces.

Organised by Southwark Defend Council Housing:  
[www.facebook.com/southwarkdch](http://www.facebook.com/southwarkdch).

## Support our teaching assistants

**Saturday March 25, 12 noon:** Protest over pay cuts. Assemble Durham city centre for march to Miners Hall, Flass Street, Redhill, DH1.  
Organised by Durham TAs: [www.facebook.com/TAsDurhamValueUs](http://www.facebook.com/TAsDurhamValueUs).

## Race to war?

**Tuesday March 28, 6:30pm-8pm:** Public meeting, Old Fire Station, 84 Mayton Street, London N7.  
Organised by North London Stop the War:  
[www.facebook.com/nlondon.stwc.7](http://www.facebook.com/nlondon.stwc.7).

## Left leader for Unite

**Wednesday March 29, 7pm:** Campaign meeting, committee rooms 3 and 4, Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1. With general secretary candidate Ian Allinson.  
Organised by Ian For Unite: [www.ian4unite.org](http://www.ian4unite.org).

## Social histories of the Russian Revolution

**Thursday March 30, 6.30pm:** Meeting, Birkbeck, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1. 'The Ukrainian peasant insurgency in the revolutionary period'. Speaker: Dimitri Tolksch.  
Organised by Social Histories 1917: [socialhistories1917.wordpress.com](http://socialhistories1917.wordpress.com).

## British socialism and World War I

**Saturday April 1, 1pm:** Public meeting, Red Shed, Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1. Speakers: Dr Martin Crick (author of *The history of the Social Democratic Federation*) and Paul Bennett (Socialist Party of Great Britain). Admission free. including light buffet.  
Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group:  
[www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html](http://www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html).

## Another Europe is Possible

**Saturday April 1, 11am to 5pm:** National conference, Museum of Science and Industry, Liverpool Road, Manchester M3.  
Organised by Another Europe is Possible: [www.anothereurope.org](http://www.anothereurope.org).

## Remember Tony Benn

**Sunday April 2, 7pm:** Remembrance night, Seven Dials Club, 42 Earlham Street, Covent Garden, London WC2.  
Organised by Let's Celebrate Corbyn's Birthday:  
[www.facebook.com/Lets-celebrate-Corbys-birthday-278287529172743](http://www.facebook.com/Lets-celebrate-Corbys-birthday-278287529172743).

## Yemen: rise of a chaos state

**Wednesday April 5, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, Lechlade Road, Faringdon SN7. 'What's going on in Yemen Today?' Speaker: Jonathan Puddifoot (ex-director, Care International).  
Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

## A more dangerous world?

**Wednesday April 5, 6.30pm:** Public meeting, Wrexham Glyndwr University, Room B26, Mold Road, Wrexham.  
Speaker: Daniel Jakopovich (writer and anti-war campaigner).  
Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

## A Marxist history of Ireland

**Thursday April 6, 7pm:** First of a three-part series of talks, Brent Trades and Labour Hall, 375 Willesden High Street (Apollo Club), London NW10. 'The development of the Irish working class under British colonial oppression up to 1916'.  
Organised by Socialist Fight: <https://socialistfight.com>.

## CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

**SCOTLAND**

# Self-determination for sake of unity

The prospect of a second referendum on Scottish independence raises vital strategic questions, argues **Eddie Ford**

**A**mbushing Theresa May just as Westminster MPs prepared to give her the power to formally trigger article 50, Nicola Sturgeon announced on March 13 that the Scottish government will be seeking to hold a second referendum on independence - effectively marking the beginning of years of pro-independence campaigning and years of Westminster stonewalling.

The Scottish National Party leader and Scottish first minister stated that "the option of no change is no longer available", as the UK government had "not moved even an inch in pursuit of compromise and agreement" about a "special deal" for Scotland over Brexit - and that even a good deal would be "significantly inferior" to the status quo.

Although it operates as a minority government with 63 MSPs out of 129, the SNP manifesto for last year's Scottish parliamentary elections explicitly promised another referendum "if there is clear and sustained evidence that independence has become the preferred option of a majority of the Scottish people" - or, centrally, "if there is a significant and material change in the circumstances that prevailed in 2014, such as Scotland being taken out of the EU against our will". With Theresa May seemingly determined to go for a hard Brexit almost regardless of the consequences, and Scotland voting by 62% to remain in the European Union, there can be no doubt that there has been a "significant and material" change in the political situation. Quite logically, Sturgeon wants the vote to be held between autumn 2018 and spring 2019, before it is "too late" but after "the terms of Brexit are known".

Of course, much to the objection of communists, Scotland has no guaranteed right to self-determination - only Westminster can authorise a new referendum, and so Sturgeon has to apply for a so-called 'section 30 order' under the Scotland Act. Scottish Labour, the Liberal Democrats and Scottish Tories have all said they would oppose Sturgeon's referendum motion at Holyrood - but the result was always a forgone certainty. The six Scottish Green MSPs were pledged to give the SNP the necessary majority.

With total hypocrisy, May accused Sturgeon of playing "political games" and the SNP of having "tunnel vision" - talk about the pot calling the kettle black. She also dismissed Sturgeon's referendum

timetable, saying "now is not the time". Indeed, the Scottish government's move is "jeopardising" the UK's negotiations with the EU - a Downing Street spokesperson tried to reassure us that the British government would negotiate an agreement with the EU that would be "taking into account the interests of all of the nations" of the UK, "working closely" with the devolved administrations. Feel better now?

Jeremy Corbyn was not enamoured by the idea of a second referendum either - the first one was "billed as a once-in-a-generation event", he complained, claiming that "there is no appetite for another referendum". However, he added, if the Scottish parliament votes for another referendum then Labour "will not block that democratic decision" at Westminster - which is surely the correct approach.

Meanwhile, Sturgeon told Holyrood on March 21 that Scotland's future should not be "imposed upon us". Any attempt to block or obstruct the referendum, she warned, "runs the real risk of undermining the democratic process" and would "shatter beyond repair any notion of the UK as a respectful partnership of equals" - although that is hard to see how a monarchical state could ever meet that description in any case.

## Illusion

Now seems the obvious time to prepare for a second referendum, especially given that opinion polls are twitching - albeit unevenly - towards pro-independence, which in some respects is a bit surprising, given the steep fall in the price of oil and general Brexit uncertainty. Indeed, some polls before Sturgeon's March 13 announcement put the 'yes' and 'no' votes nearly neck and neck, with Ipsos Mori on February 24 actually having 'yes' ahead by one percent - quite a turn-around.<sup>1</sup> There are also a relatively large number of undecided, meaning that about a third of people are at least partially open to persuasion either way.

Interestingly, showing the volatile or highly changeable nature of public opinion, the latest poll by BMG published on March 20 showed that 17% of those who voted both 'yes' in 2014 and

'leave' last year now want

Scotland to stay in the UK, compared with only 8% of those who both voted 'no' and 'remain' switching to back independence now. We should not forget that six months before the first referendum, the margin was 30:70 in favour of 'no' - Alex Salmond was incredibly successful in turning round opinion towards independence. In other words, there is everything to play for.

Of course, we all know what happened to the Labour Party during the referendum - it became virtually indistinguishable from the Conservatives in the dreadful Better Together campaign, getting dubbed "red Tories" (that was probably too generous). Alastair Darling, the man in grey, was reduced to doing an uninspired double-act with the Tories, effectively becoming their agent in Scotland. Consequently Labour was punished for its sins in the general election, ending up with only one Scottish MP in Westminster. It is worth noting that Gordon Brown, who is credited with tilting opinion back towards 'no', did so from a *Labour* platform - not Better Together. The Labour Party mattered for the Tories last time round, but it clearly does not matter in the same way now.

Not that this has prevented Brown from another attempt at playing saviour of the union, this time by advocating a "patriotic" Scottish "third way" between the separatist "absolutism" of the SNP and the "inflexible, die-hard" Tory government in Westminster - which, Brown says, you could call "federal home rule". This "federalist option", maintained the former prime minister, would involve Holyrood being given a raft of new powers after Brexit. He proposed that the Bank of England becomes the Bank of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to "reinforce the fact that the pound is for everyone". Very nice.

SNP reaction to Brown's ideas was predictably scornful. Angus Robertson, the SNP's deputy and Westminster leader, described Brown's federalism as "Brown-hog day" - yet again we are seeing Gordon Brown "being wheeled out when the union is in trouble". His proposal could only work if voters actually believed Labour was likely to be in power to deliver it and, as Robertson put it, the Labour Party "is not in a position to deliver a pizza at the moment". The chances of a big Labour revival in Scotland seem as far away.

In fact, we should not discount the possibility of a serious *Tory* revival north of the border. Many comrades on the left have been brought up in recent times to believe that Scotland is inherently radical and

progressive - an eternal 'Tory-free zone'. But those of us with longer memories, or at least the ability to read books, know that, apart from the central belt, Scotland was able to return a Tory majority back in the 1950s. With the SNP hell-bent on independence, and the Labour Party rent with division, the objective conditions might well exist for an improvement in Tory fortunes - though whether it happens or not is an entirely different question.

Obviously, the national question in the UK is now bound up with the EU question. There were some on the left who voted 'no' in the last referendum because they thought it would take the Scottish national question off the agenda once and for all, thus opening a space for working class politics. But this was always an illusion - the national question will not just go away. On the other hand, large sections of the left were swept up (despite previous programmatic statements) and intoxicated by nationalism: the Socialist Workers Party, Scottish Socialist Party, Socialist Party Scotland, etc. We see the same lack of strategic thinking or vision with those, mainly the same people, who voted 'no' or Brexit/Lexit in the belief that somehow socialism would be advanced by Britain leaving the EU and/or the UK itself breaking up - something stressed repeatedly by *Socialist Worker*. What this does is treat the socialist project as an entirely *negative* and unappealing exercise: the nastier things get, the better things get for us and socialism. First Balkanisation, then us. Such an approach is totally unscientific and very dangerous, but the likes of the SWP are perversely determined never to learn any lessons.

We were also told *ad nauseam* by the SWP that Brexit would "shatter" the Tory Party - yet another illusion to add to all the others. We might have "Brown-hog day", but we also have SWP-hog day, which is even more wretched.

## Self-determination

As mentioned above, Scotland has no constitutional right to self-determination. Sovereignty lies with Westminster, not Holyrood. From the communist viewpoint, it is an elementary democratic right that nations have the right to self-determination. That does not mean that communists feel obliged to advocate separation - far from it. As a point of principle, in every way possible, Marxists fight for working class unity - something that is not predicated on the level of oppression, how big or small a country is, who attacked who first, or how terrible a history this or that country might have. We have no favoured nations or peoples. Rather, it is a political calculation to advance principled working class unity on all occasions. With regards to Scotland, that means communists are against separation, but support its right to self-determination - no contradiction or paradox. Any more than supporting abortion rights means we demand that all women who get pregnant should have a termination.

Under certain circumstances, though it might sound counterintuitive, separation can further working class unity - but most of the time it has the opposite effect. VI Lenin, growing up in the prison house of nations, supported the right of nations to self-determination - even if his preference right up to 1917 was for a centralised republic rather than a federal arrangement. That does not mean that Lenin advocated independence for Ukraine, Georgia, Latvia, Estonia, etc - unless they voted for it, which

was a different matter altogether. After all, an alternative name for the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party could have been the Social Democratic Party of the Russian empire - ie, it wanted to unite and organise the different national sections of the working class who lived within the existing boundaries of the tsarist empire, not split them up into ever smaller groups. Ditto for Rosa Luxemburg's Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania - the name signified not monarchist sympathies, but the desire to unite the Polish and Lithuanian working class against the existing (tsarist) state.

Colin Fox of the SSP is now saying that Nicola Sturgeon has got her timing all wrong, but this is utter nonsense - he has been itching for a second referendum ever since the failure, as he would see it, of the first one. It does have to be said that the SNP's basic argument, and thus by extension the SSP's, does not really work: we did not vote for Brexit; therefore we want to leave the UK in order to stay in the EU. So it is all right to be in a union with other EU states, but not in a union with England and Wales.

As for Gordon Brown's "federal home rule", we counterpose our own demands for a federal republic - for two main reasons. Firstly, the democratic republic involves a rupture with, or overthrow of, the existing constitutional monarchy *system* - we have no desire to simply replace Elizabeth II with an elected president, which would leave Britain as a mere quasi-democracy like the USA, France, Germany or Russia. Hardly what communists aspire to. Engels damningly called the French second republic a continuation of the Bonapartist monarchy, and what the hell is Donald Trump? No, we want a real democratic republic (ie, rule of the people, by the people, for the people), as that for us is the *form* that working class rule will take in Britain, and therefore necessarily involves a whole raft of far-reaching radical measures, which both massively extend democracy and involve draconian inroads into the sacred rights of property.

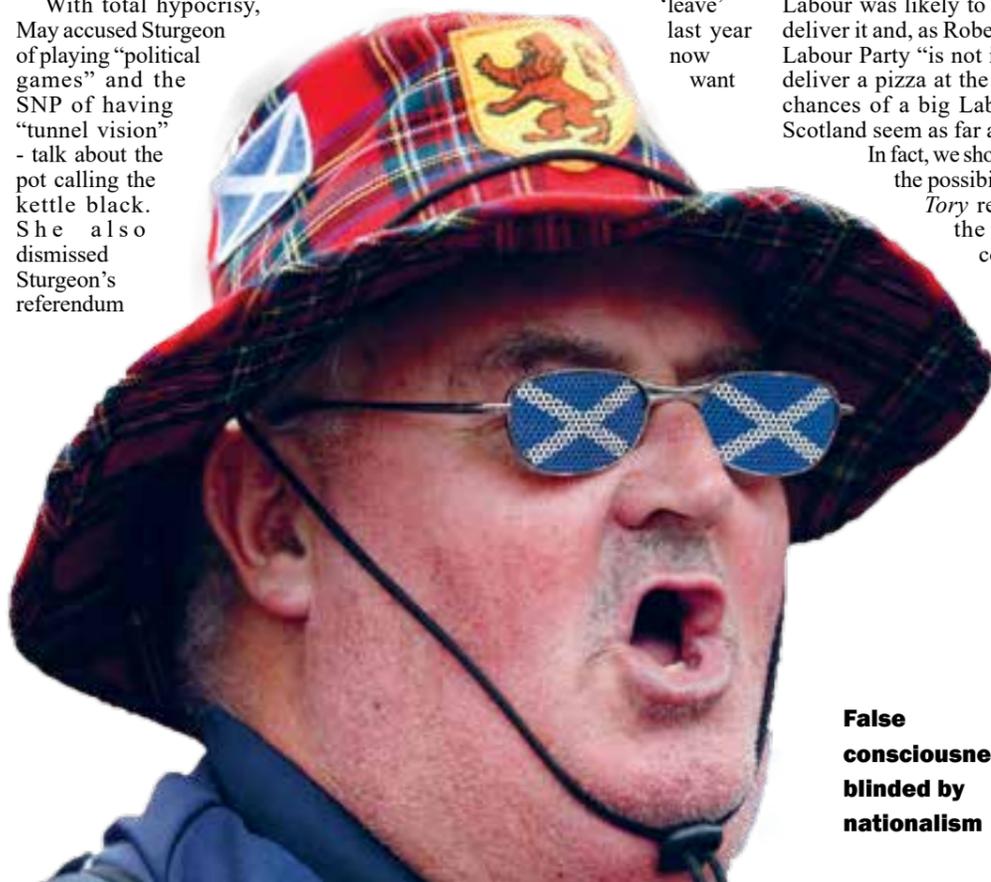
Secondly, we raise the demand for a *federal* democratic republic because it meets the current, legitimate aspirations of the peoples of Scotland and Wales to self-determination and simultaneously embodies the principle of working class unity. As Engels said in his *Critique of the Erfurt programme*, a federal republic would be "a step forward" in the British Isles. Socialist revolution is, almost by definition, the act of a united working class. Communists do not deny that we have a distinct general preference for centralised states, both today and under socialism. But the existence of a living national question in Scotland and Wales prevents us from immediately advocating a democratic centralist state in opposition to the present monarchical unity of the kingdom of England, the kingdom of Scotland, the principality of Wales and the province of Northern Ireland. We do not invent national grievances where there are none; nor do we ignore them.

For its part the position of the CPGB, as expressed in its *Draft programme*, could not be clearer. The working class must take the lead in the struggle for democracy in general and the democratic republic in particular. Without that socialism is impossible ●

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## Notes

1. <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Scotland/scotland-pom-mar-2017-tables.pdf>



**False  
consciousness:  
blinded by  
nationalism**

AGM

# Decisive victory needed

Peter Manson reports on the annual general meeting of CPGB members

The annual general meeting of CPGB members took place in London on March 19. While financial reports were heard and members of the Provisional Central Committee were up for re-election, most of the day was taken up discussing global and national perspectives for our movement and the role communists need to play.

The first session featured a discussion on the political and economic state of play internationally, which was introduced by PCC member Mike Macnair. Beginning with the economy, his conclusion was that what we are seeing is a "limited recovery", where efforts have been expended on averting the negative effects of the downturn rather than creating stimulus - he contended that we have recently witnessed a departure from the 'natural' pattern of the capitalist boom and bust cycle. However, an upturn is now on the cards - in the US at least - which could have a global knock-on effect. Partly this would result from the "military Keynesian stimulus" expected under Trump.

In a sense, then, we could see something of a typical Republican administration, which combines military stimulus and tax cuts. However, under Trump there could also be "tariff protectionism", which would lead "in the opposite direction". And if such a policy were actually implemented it would surely be replicated elsewhere.

As for a possible reorientation in US geopolitics, comrade Macnair now thought that this would probably not be the case. Previously he had argued that such a reorientation might even be in US interests,<sup>1</sup> but now he believed that Trump was pulling back on much of what he had proposed during the presidential election campaign. There was likely to be a continuation of the close alliance with Israel and Saudi Arabia, not to mention the war of words with North Korea. Nor did it seem that Trump would be substantially rewriting the US relationship with Russia, for example.

While the US remains the global hegemon, it remains in decline, especially when it comes to *productive* industry. So, although the "objective dynamic" was pointing towards a new great power war, neither Russia nor China can hope to become a real rival. But we are already seeing war in the periphery and can expect more 'failed states'.

Turning to Brexit, comrade Macnair thought we were at the "phoney war stage" - and we are still completely in the dark as to its economic consequences. We could even see the end of the European Union (which could turn out to be the policy of the new US administration, by the way - the one area of international politics where Trump does not appear to have retreated).

What about the prospects for the working class movement? Unfortunately the left is still dominated by the "old popular front policy". Yes, we need to challenge Trumpism, etc - but in ways that do not amount to defence of the status quo. In that sense it was significant that the Hands Off the People of Iran campaign is to be revived - with the backing of the CPGB. Hopi stands against both an imperialist attack on Iran and the reactionary Islamist regime in Tehran; it constitutes a "small contribution" to the revival of the working class movement.

In the following debate, various questions were raised. Phil Kent wondered whether we were at last seeing the "unwinding of the post-war



Theresa May: stealing Ukip's policies

settlement under US hegemony", while Paul Demarty thought that, while, as comrade Macnair pointed out, US productive industry is in decline, it is still very much in the lead when it comes to "abstract" commodities like software.

Moshé Machover, a non-CPGB friend of the *Weekly Worker*, pointed out that the US pro-Israel policy had acted as "a hidden subsidy to the US arms industry", while another supporter, Kevin Bean, commented on the global shift to nationalism, which he thought has "almost a pre-1914 feel".

Simon Wells asked whether increased military spending would push up inflation and perhaps hold back a rise in shares, while, for her part, Tina Becker asked, in view of comrade Macnair's comments, whether it was still possible that the ruling class would attempt to get rid of Trump. Was impeachment still on the agenda or has Trump shifted enough to no longer be seen as a threat by US capital?

Answering this, Farzad Kamangar noted that impeachment would require the Republicans to "rebel in large numbers", but in fact they can "live with" most of Trump's policy statements - on women, abortion, etc. Comrade Kamangar went on to point out that it is not true that the most reactionary governments, like that of Trump, provide the best conditions for working class organisation. What tends to happen is that elements of the left look to make alliances with liberals instead of prioritising our own organisation.

In reply to Paul Demarty, the comrade pointed out that US superiority when it comes to software should not be underestimated: it gives the US a distinct advantage in relation to the speed of any military response. In this sense in particular, the likes of China cannot compete.

In his response, comrade Macnair dealt with the question of hi tech: it is true that it enables speedy action - to launch an invasion, for instance. But that does not produce results on the ground. As for impeachment, he thought that some of the motivation for it may have gone, now that Trump has changed tack on Russia and may be retreating over protectionism. But he does not seem to be retreating on 'anti-Europeanism'.

The difference between Obama and Trump, he concluded, was that we now have "an overtly racist and sexist administration". He reiterated the need to develop our own independent working class politics. In that sense he agreed with comrade Kamangar, who said that the conditions for developing Hopi - one of our contributions to strengthening such politics - were now a lot more difficult.

## National

In the afternoon session Jack Conrad introduced the discussion on perspectives in Britain. He had previously thought that Brexit just would not happen: not only is it not in the interests of British capital, but from the point of view of the US the UK had played a more than useful role within the EU. He had imagined "president Hillary Clinton" summoning the new prime minister to tell her, "Stop this nonsense", but with Trump things are rather different. However, they are still not cut and dry: sooner or later the ruling class will get its act together and he expected Brexit to remain "the dominant issue" for years.

He made "another prediction": Theresa May's slim majority will eventually lead her to go for an early general election. But in the meantime, there are the problems of Scotland and Northern Ireland provoked by the unexpected Brexit vote. On the one hand, Nicola Sturgeon is going for a second referendum on independence; on the other, a withdrawal from the EU would reopen the question of the border in Ireland.

Turning to Labour, comrade Conrad did not buy into the idea that the UK Independence Party was set to replace Labour as the main opposition party - May had "stolen Ukip's clothes", after all. But he accepted that Labour was in a parlous state, mainly thanks to the right continuing to sabotage the new leadership.

In this sense, he thought that Jeremy Corbyn's "clever manoeuvring" was totally the wrong approach: while one side in the civil war was using lethal weapons, the other preferred "doves". Instead the leadership ought to be aiming to deselect the right, so that the Parliamentary Labour Party came into line with both the new leadership and the mass of members. However, he thought there would be

no challenge to Corbyn while an early general election is still a possibility - the rightwing careerists want to keep their seats, not continue to expose the party as being totally divided. Not that this would prevent a Tory victory of 1931 proportions, he added.

Looking back to Corbyn's first victory in 2015, comrade Conrad stated that most of the left had been caught out by it. Those like the Socialist Party in England and Wales had declared that Labour was now irrevocably a bourgeois party and the job of the left was therefore to create a Labour Party mark two - the thinking behind SPEW's Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. Now - without admitting it had been wrong in its previous assessment - SPEW has tried to back-track and 'suspend' Tusc's election contests, but unfortunately the RMT union had vetoed the attempt! So much for the 'vanguard party'!

Corbyn's conciliationism towards the right explains the behaviour of the Jon Lansman leadership of Momentum, continued comrade Conrad. But the problem is that using Momentum not to defeat the right, but merely as a means of mobilising for the party, would "kill it off".

As for Grassroots Momentum, it is united by its opposition to the Lansman leadership, but on just about nothing else. Mostly the comrades believe that the priority must be a Labour government. After all, "Any Labour government is better than the best Tory government", they believe. While comrade Conrad thought that the chances of a Labour victory under Corbyn were right now "around one percent", he added that if, by a miracle, Labour was elected without the decisive victory of Marxist forces, then that would still only lead back to another Tory government.

He reminded comrades of our perspective: to transform Labour into a united front of the whole working class. At this stage our task was "fundamentally propagandist" - we are not at the stage of "mass agitation".

In the debate Steve Carter reminded comrades that the new method of electing the Labour leader brought in by Ed Miliband was intended as a means of strengthening the right - it backfired badly. In relation to an early election he thought that Theresa May would

attempt to use it to see off Ukip once and for all, after which she would have a "free hand" - including a possible retreat over Brexit.

Comrade Macnair also thought such an early general election "might happen", despite May's denials. But in regard to Brexit she is "in it so deep", she will find it very difficult to back off. On Labour he identified one of the main problems for the Labour left as the "lack of a Communist Party".

Comrade Becker commented that the problem for both the official Momentum and its Grassroots counterpart was not just the absence of coherent politics, but the denial of a "proper democratic process". However, Momentum does give those like Labour Party Marxists some space to put forward what is necessary.

For his part, comrade Bean thought that, while May could use a general election to get a mandate on Brexit, there was "no urgency" from her point of view - Labour will "still lose" in 2020. Comrade Demarty added that the window for an early general election was "still open", but "for how long", he wondered. And what if there were an economic downturn between now and 2020?

William Sarsfield commented on comrade Conrad's statement about the need for propaganda: it was extremely difficult to talk to people in Momentum about socialism, he said - which emphasised how necessary such propaganda was. In this he thought that Hopi was exemplary - "the type of politics we need". For him the "central question" was the reorganising of the Communist Party.

Vernon Price commented that the Labour right has "101 tricks" up its sleeve to suppress democracy and do down the left. Nevertheless it was the right thing for groups like LPM to stay in Momentum in order to fight for the Labour Party we need.

In response to the debate comrade Conrad said that, "however unreceptive" some comrades in Momentum were, we can engage with them. And, of course, by carrying reports by LPM comrades in the *Weekly Worker*, we were performing a service by enabling others to learn lessons.

Unlike comrade Macnair, he thought May could still change tack on Brexit. Yes, she is "making noises" about a hard Brexit, but they are in conflict with the noises coming from important sections of capital. He stressed again that an early general election was by no means ruled out - the Tories would dearly love to take advantage of the state of the Labour Party and substantially increase their majority. After all, "events happen".

As it is, if Corbyn loses heavily, it will be regarded as a disaster by many Momentum stalwarts. They have no idea of the need to rebuild and transform Labour - just a terror of a Tory victory. He added that the centenary of the Russian Revolution gives us the opportunity to re-examine the truth on such questions.

After this session the AGM heard reports on the CPGB's finances before ending with the election of the Provisional Central Committee. The current five PCC members were unopposed, and their individual re-election was endorsed unanimously by those present ●

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## Notes

1. See 'The new president and the new global order' *Weekly Worker* January 26.

## NETHERLANDS



Many parties to choose from

# Shift to hard right

Jos Alembic and Richard Hoogstraten analyse the results of the Dutch elections and where they leave the Socialist Party

The March 15 general election has, once again, radically altered the face of the Dutch political landscape and it is still unclear where the country is heading.

The Labour Party was annihilated in a collapse that can be compared to that of the Christian Democrats in 2012. Meanwhile, the Conservatives of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) maintain their position as the most prominent of the bourgeois parties on just over 21%, fending off challengers from both the left and right. Yet none of those challengers managed to pull away from the rest, with the remaining five major parties scoring between 10% and 15% of the vote.

Amidst this political instability, the Socialist Party launched its most leftwing campaign in years, hoping to enlarge its share of the vote by drawing popular discontent towards its strong anti-austerity programme and campaign for affordable healthcare. But it did not enjoy much success: while the SP is now the biggest force on the left, it actually lost a seat, its support falling marginally to 9% and reducing it to 14 seats.

Just a week before the elections took place, it looked as though no clear winner would emerge from among the wide variety of middle-sized parties. But in the final few days of the campaign the diplomatic crisis with Turkey pushed the VVD up at the cost of the rightwing nationalist

Party for Freedom (PVV). This means that the VVD, as the only remaining sizable party in parliament, now dominates the coalition formation process. Not only this, but the election has produced a huge shift to the hard right: the Socialists, Labour and Greens combined got less seats than Labour had before. Instead, a significant part of the electoral space that was once filled by the Labour Party has gone over to right-of-centre parties like Democrats 66 (D66), reflecting the way Labour itself had succumbed to rightwing policies when it was in government.

Following the election, there are a couple of possible coalitions, the most likely of which will see the VVD in alliance with D66, Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) and the Christian Union (CU) - a coalition that would enjoy a safe 76-seat majority.

### Results

With such a drastically changed parliament, it is worthwhile taking a closer look at the results for the various parties. The most glaring and serious change obviously came with the collapse of the PvdA (Labour), which dropped from 38 seats in 2012 to just nine, out of the 150 available - its lowest number since it was founded in 1946. Partially this reflects the end of the two-party contests of previous elections, when many voters either backed Labour to keep out the Conservatives or the other way round, but they ended up with both in a coalition in any case. Labour had attracted voters

on a wide political basis: from both old-style social democrats, who were told that the party's less than radical policies were a result of a necessary compromise; and social liberals, who voted PvdA to keep out the rightwing VVD. This year though, disappointed social democrats decided not to vote at all, and Labour fell drastically in the polls from just under 25% (38 seats) in 2012 to less than 6% (nine seats) this time.

While the Conservatives fell from 41 seats to 33, they are still well placed. Despite the unpopularity of the last government, the party succeeded in positioning itself as the last line of defence against a right-populist takeover, attracting tactical votes from some who would have preferred to vote for a different party. On top of that the political crisis surrounding Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's attempt to strengthen his hand in the forthcoming Turkish presidential elections increased the prime minister's support. Together these factors have strongly consolidated the Conservatives' position. The party is left standing clear of its rivals in a splintered political field.

While the Socialist Party is now electorally the biggest party on the left, its lead over the Greens (GroenLinks) was just 0.3% - both have the same number of seats. But, in contrast to the Greens, who presented themselves as a safe pair of hands, it does not look like the SP will be approached to take part in the new coalition.

There was another interesting

phenomenon, which is that the support base of the SP seems to have shifted a lot: 57% of SP voters did not vote for the party in 2012.<sup>1</sup> One explanation for this could be that the SP exchanged voters, so to speak, across the spectrum, attracting many former Labour supporters, whilst losing others to the PVV, CDA and Greens.

The Greens themselves have seen a rather spectacular growth, gaining 10 seats - their best score in their 27-year existence. This growth can mainly be attributed to their stylish political leader, Jesse Klaver, whose message of 'hope' and 'change' can be compared to Barack Obama's 2008 campaign - in fact they both used the same advertising agency! At heart though, the Greens are little more than social liberals, who believe in market solutions. They recently supported a change in funding for higher education, whereby students, as in the UK, now have to accept large debts in order to go to university. A few years ago they also backed drastic cuts to healthcare, an increase in VAT and a rapid rise in the retirement age. For the next period GroenLinks proposes to raise healthcare costs for those on low incomes, to raise VAT on meat and to levy a charge on those driving during rush hours - a direct attack on workers under the guise of 'green' politics.

Where Geert Wilders' PVV got 15 seats in 2012, this time it adopted a bolder anti-Muslim platform, picking up more support from those parts of the electorate that came under

heaviest attack from the previous PvdA-VVD coalition, and now has 20 seats. But, of course, this gain is far less than anticipated - a fact that has been attributed not just to the Turkey crisis, but also to Wilders' absence from most of the debates. However, while he is perceived by many as 'anti-establishment' because of his strong anti-Muslim stance, in fact the PVV has been very consistently voting for Conservative policies since its inception. But in many municipalities the PVV scored solidly, in many urban seats actually topping the poll. Next year, when it contests local elections across the country for the first time, a further shift to the far right can be expected.

Two other traditional parties also gained slightly: the CDA Christian-Democrats went from 13 to 19 seats, while the D66 liberals increased their seats from 12 to 19. Of the small parties the Christian Union remained stable on five seats; the single-issue party for elderly people, 50Plus, saw a doubling from two to four; the Partij voor de Dieren (Animal Welfare Party) saw an increase from two to five seats; and the fundamentalist Christian SGP remained stable at three.

We also saw two new parties enter the fray: DENK, a pro-Turkey group, which defends the interests of those from a petty bourgeois migrant background, picked up three seats. The Forum for Democracy, a party headed by an eccentric columnist

which presents itself as the intellectual alternative to the PVV, won two. This takes the number of parties represented in parliament up to 13.

Two conclusions can be drawn from these results. Firstly, the ruling coalition has taken a beating, although Labour much more so than the Conservatives. Secondly, the other political parties have not been able to make substantial gains. A new coalition will need four or five parties, with the added complication of the existing party distribution in the senate.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the decline of traditional political parties has given rise to various single-issue groups that have just a few seats in parliament.

## New direction?

Previously the Socialist Party had consistently been moving towards the centre, but over the last couple of years it has been shifting towards the left, reversing the previous trend of increasingly watered-down election programmes. The shift was mainly fuelled by the leadership elections of the 21st congress, which was held in 2015, surprising many who consider themselves to be on the left and sharpening contradictions within the SP. It is worth recalling the leadership election race, together with what it means for the activist party base and the composition of the membership.

The Socialist Party started out in parliament as a tiny two-seat fraction in 1994 and saw its main strategy as broadening its electoral support through increasingly compromised election platforms. Of course, having adopted this more 'moderate' course and gained larger electoral support, the party attracted a new membership with a more left-liberal vision.

Over the last decade we have seen a generational shift, with the result that many of the old Maoist cadre that founded the party in the 1970s have been marginalised. Jan Marijnissen had led the party since 1988 and was the main driving force moving it away from its Marxist-Leninist legacy toward a 'new left' role. The idea was to fill the gap left by Labour's move to the right - a policy which reached its zenith in 2006, when the SP won 25 seats, but failed to participate in a coalition.

After Marijnissen stepped down from his role as leader of the parliamentary fraction in 2008, a period of uncertainty set in, resulting in a drop to 15 seats in the 2010 and 2012 elections and a fall in membership from its peak of 50,740 in 2007 to 39,550 today (although this fits in with a more general downward trend in Dutch politics: the SP is still the third largest party after Labour, which has 46,162 members, and the Christian-Democrats, with 48,775).

This period came to an end in late 2015 at the 21st congress, when Jan Marijnissen stood down as party chairman, making room for former union leader Ron Meyer. Under him we have seen greatly increased engagement in the party - as a union activist, he had been responsible for setting up the cleaners' union pretty much from scratch over the course of a few years, and this new organisation is now one of the most militant components of the trade union movement.

This engagement has been most visible in the campaign to end the current method of financing the healthcare system. Introduced in 2006, it has put insurance companies at the centre of healthcare financing. The SP has proposed to replace this system, which has put many people in financial jeopardy, by something very similar to the NHS. A petition calling for "No profit at the expense of patients" has gathered the support of more than 250,000 people so far, and this campaign has single-handedly put healthcare on the agenda as one of the main topics in the elections, forcing other parties to nod in the direction of the SP.

But, where Ron Meyer was the candidate favoured by the party leadership, Sharon Gesthuizen ran as a second, independent, candidate, representing the more 'moderate' wing in the party. She ran on a superficially pro-democracy and small-business-friendly platform, and called for the party to adopt a more explicit anti-racist policy.

This liberal faction arose from the party's policy, in the 1990s and 2000s, of trying to target 'moderate' voters and shifting programmatic demands in that direction. But since 2006, after the party was thankfully denied participation in the governing coalition, and again after 2015, when a more activist route was taken, this part of the membership has been drifting away.

The liberal faction was defeated at the 21st congress and, besides Ron Meyer, a number of other leftwingers were elected to the leadership (the SP eschews traditional names for its organs, but the leading body could be viewed as a kind of politburo). Patrick Zoomermeijer and Arjan Vliegthart, for example, are explicitly on the far left. Patrick has a Trotskyist background and recently visited the Committee for a Workers' International Seattle councillor, Kshama Sawant, while Arjan has cited Fidel Castro favourably in the *NRC Handelsblad*, one of the main 'serious' centre-right newspapers. This resurgence of the left has also found reflection amongst the party's MPs, with Sadet Karabulut referring to herself as a "Marxist-Leninist in a modern way" last October in *Trouw*,<sup>3</sup> while Sandra Beckerman also has a Trotskyist background.

The Meyer leadership has changed other things too. On the level of common parlance, words like 'comrades' and 'class struggle' have come into use again, though they are not employed in a fully rounded manner. For example, Emile Roemer started his election speech live on television by exclaiming, "Comrades!" While this is more radical in terms of style, it has not found reflection in terms of theoretical depth.

In the branches the influence of the new course has also been felt. There has been a strong focus on the aforementioned campaign on healthcare, with members tirelessly collecting signatures for the petition and mobilising people to national demonstrations, such as the 10,000-strong rally in The Hague on February 18. Not a huge number, even by Dutch standards, but a doubling in size compared to a previous demonstration in October and reflective of a growing popular base.

On the national level efforts have been made to support branches in other ways. For example, a national calling team was set up to contact all potential activists for the election campaign. The information gathered was then directly transmitted to the local branches, which were able to contact these people. In the last few months, this in itself has resulted in almost a thousand new members for the party.

The national line of focusing on single issues has been fruitful organisationally. Where before there was a labyrinth of different campaigns, now healthcare is the overwhelming priority. Paradoxically, this also allows branches to focus more on local issues, while the national canvassing from the leadership helped a lot of branches which did not canvass very much at all.

So, organisationally speaking, the local branches have gained a lot from the new leadership's focus on trade union-like activism. This has been pushed as the best way to build the SP, with the aim of becoming the biggest party in terms of membership.

## Election programme

The new election programme, which was drafted for the 21st congress in advance

of the 2017 elections, represented a major left shift. Although hard-line positions, such as leaving Nato, remain notoriously absent, gains have been made in other areas. Unfortunately, little of this has had to do with a strong, organised left in the party and much more to do with the aggressive political style of the new chairman. To illustrate this, only three motions were accepted at the congress that had not originated with the organising committee.

We should keep in mind though that the leadership has developed a habit of denying a vote to members on motions they look set to lose. Thus it has become quite hard to measure the actual influence of informal factions and the degree to which amendments are in line with the leadership's preferred course.

The programme is intended to serve for a period of four years and as such only comprises short-term demands. This allows the leadership to argue against more radical motions by claiming that, while such aims are, of course, in line with the party's goals, they are not appropriate for a short-term election programme. In general though, it is a leftwing document and certainly the most daring set of proposals we have seen in a long time. As such we should welcome it and applaud the direction it is taking the party.

One of the most striking demands in the programme is featured in its flagship chapter, 'Take power'. It calls for the democratisation of medium to large-sized companies by obliging them to create a works council with the same degree of power as the board. Furthermore, the salaries of the company management would be subject to the consent of this works council. Whilst obviously not calling for the revolutionary takeover of the means of production by factory soviets, it is a major step towards empowering workers and could have its place in a minimum programme - the minimum basis on which a communist party should be willing to take on power, breaking the grip of capital over society.

Additionally, healthcare and education should be democratised, states the programme. Consumers and workers should enjoy far-reaching influence over the operation of these institutions, and both should be entirely separated from market mechanisms. These show large similarities to the public transport policy put forward by Jeremy Corbyn and, combined with the slightly less radical, but broader democratisation policy, they show that the margins of what is possible within bourgeois democracy are certainly being pushed.

Economically the party still clings to Keynesian theory, arguing that large-scale government investment will in the long term generate more growth than the concomitant increase in debt. On the basis of this reasoning a rise in the minimum wage is demanded - increased worker spending will lead to more rapid economic growth. But, while all this is, of course, presented as making gains for the working class, it shows a deep uncertainty about the party's own strength: it still needs to pretend to work for the national interest instead of directly championing the advance of the working class. The danger is that those propagating this nonsense will start to believe it.

Furthermore, while the party treats the petty bourgeoisie as a natural ally in the struggle against large capital, in profiling them as equally 'hard workers', it thus obscures class antagonisms. There is no proposal to erode workers' rights in favour of small companies, but the programme aims to strengthen small capital's position against that of big capital, and create a national investment bank that will promote its development. As the Netherlands is a country where the petty bourgeoisie is particularly strong, and the working class is relatively weak, this is an understandable concession. It would be preferable to change the

premises of this alliance, but for the moment the working class has little to bargain with. And sadly a motion to defend cooperatives as alternative, democratic and worker-based economic organisations did not make it onto the congress agenda.

We should appreciate the fact that the party principally defends the interests of the working class and does not water down its call for workers' rights in exchange for petty bourgeois support. We should note that the defeated liberal faction was in favour of making such concessions, with MP Sharon Gesthuizen, who is now leaving parliament, submitting a bill in parliament which would have made it easier for small companies to dismiss workers.

## Prospects for communists

The party has long since abandoned Maoism and Marxism-Leninism, but has maintained many of its previous organisational aspects. Factions, for example, while not explicitly forbidden, are highly discouraged. This explains why the liberals have not been able to organise effectively: a culture of debate is lacking, which gives the leadership a free hand, while some rank-and-file members feel encouraged to question the loyalty of those who raise criticisms.

The only 'faction' then is that of the leadership, which feels free to adopt changes, particularly of nuance and style. Its main aim is still to participate in a coalition - along with parties that represent the interests of capital. This time around, the leadership was hoping for a coalition consisting of the SP, the Greens, the Christian Union or Christian-Democrats, Labour and the Animal Welfare Party. Amongst this 'dream team' only the Animal Welfare Party and the SP itself have explicitly opposed neoliberal policies.

So, for communists and those party members who argue for a complete break with capitalism in order to move to a society based on the *stated* values of the SP - summarised as solidarity, equality and human dignity - a big task lies ahead of them. Where to begin?

To start with, the SP needs to be taken seriously. There are far-left groups outside the party, but with only a few hundred members between them they are completely and utterly irrelevant. The party is where (young) workers look if they want to become active and take matters into their own hands in order to change things. The SP therefore, for better or worse, represents the most class-conscious workers within our movement. To refuse to be part of it is effectively to put yourself outside the struggle for working class power.

Secondly, we need to decide where we want to go with the party - a question of programme. The Communist Platform, a group of Marxists in the party, has published a proposal for a minimum programme on the basis of which the party could realistically campaign to break capital's hegemony and begin to establish genuine workers' control over society.<sup>4</sup> This programme should not be seen as set in stone: we can and should debate the direction we want to take, but a set of proposals like this can, we believe, offer a useful framework.

Third is the organisational aspect: if we are to make an impact on the course of the party, we need to take leadership seriously, build our branches, educate the membership and communicate horizontally between members as far as possible. This is largely a trial and error-based experience. What room do we have to organise? How do we effectively bring together those members who want to support this endeavour? How do we introduce higher politics at branch level, where it has been thus far non-existent?

What we ought to aim for is a party capable of carrying out the

task of breaking with capitalism. We need a party that is much more than a parliamentary apparatus. The SP contains important elements of this already - it is highly active in organising people in the neighbourhoods to fight for their interests all year round. But we need more, much more. If we are to organise against capital, we need to organise the working class as a *class-collective*. That is, we need a party-movement: a mass movement, consisting at the very least of hundreds of thousands that are active in trade unions, cooperatives, social clubs, communal centres, etc. A movement with its own mass media, banks and other facilities. If we can organise such a movement, with the SP at its head, it is not a question of *if* we can change society, but *when* it would be most opportune to do so. The question would not be one of seats in parliament in order to get into the next coalition, but of winning a clear majority for our proposals amongst the whole class.

Last but not least, the European question. So far the SP has been somewhat Eurosceptic. With good reason, of course, as the European Union has been a project for carrying out neoliberal policies. We ought to change that vision. The Netherlands in itself cannot simply ignore international politics and economics and declare itself socialist. We need to think about this at the very least on a *continental scale*. We need to redefine 'Europe', giving it a working class content, by bringing together all the entire left across the continent to form a Socialist Party of Europe, with branches in the Netherlands, Germany, Greece, Portugal, the UK ... On that basis we can start organising on a much larger scale - synchronising our activities, harmonising our programmes, uniting our efforts. While we remain divided, capital will break us: united, there is no-one that can stop us.

## Conclusion

The Netherlands has made another sharp turn to the right - that much is clear. Rightwing parties now have a large majority in parliament and the Conservatives are set to dominate the process of forming a coalition.

For the left, the coming months must be spent planning opposition strategies against what is to come. That is uncertain, but one thing is for sure: the working class will not benefit, whatever government emerges. The Socialist Party should stop obsessing over participating in a government coalition in order to bring about change. The Greek experience should have taught us that no left-led government, however well-meaning, can in isolation break with neoliberal politics. If we are to effectively change society, we need to start thinking about a programme that carries us beyond capitalism and a party-movement that is capable of leading that fight. The party desperately needs to reinvent itself in order to win the masses for a leftwing alternative to the capitalist order.

Communists in the Socialist Party should foster, encourage and develop the leftwing tendencies that are already present in the party. Only a strong and well educated cadre can help it grow beyond its current limitations. The ball might be in the court of the bourgeoisie, but the coming period of opposition and struggle offers us a chance to reflect on the way forward and emerge stronger than we were before - armed with a powerful vision of a real alternative to the neoliberal status quo ●

## Notes

1. See <http://nos.nl/artikel/2163332-tk17-bekijk-de-uitslagen-per-gemeente-en-vorm-je-eigen-coalitie.html>.
2. For a more in-depth explanation of Dutch political structures, we refer to Piet Potlood's commentary on the previous election: 'Overcoming a false dichotomy' *Weekly Worker* September 27 2012.
3. [www.trouw.nl/democratie/-sommige-turken-hier-kunnen-m-n-bloed-wel-drinken--a452c8e0](http://www.trouw.nl/democratie/-sommige-turken-hier-kunnen-m-n-bloed-wel-drinken--a452c8e0).
4. <http://communisme.nl/programma>.

**SPACE**

# Mission Mars, or mission Earth?

Donald Trump's budget for Nasa contains no swingeing cuts. There will, though, be a change of focus - away from Earth and, instead, towards deep space and sending people to Mars. **Jack Conrad** says we would be well advised not to welcome such a hugely expensive diversion



Neil Armstrong's "giant leap for mankind" did not end the space race. The US is, and is set to remain, the space hegemon, for the foreseeable future. Donald Trump has just signed the bill authorising Nasa to spend \$19.5 billion in 2017-18 (it passed through Congress with bipartisan support<sup>1</sup>). Nasa will not suffer the swingeing cuts being imposed on other science and medical agencies. There are, however, changed priorities. Nasa will be focused on deep space, not the Earth.

Trump has cancelled the Asteroid Redirect Mission - it aimed to bring an asteroid into moon orbit, not only with a view to studying it, but developing the technology necessary to head off an asteroid that threatens to hit the Earth (65 million years ago an asteroid smashed into what is now the Gulf of Mexico, sent a huge plume of ash and debris into the high atmosphere and led to the extinction of roughly three-quarters of all animal species, including the dinosaurs<sup>2</sup>). No less myopically, Trump wants to cut the exceedingly modest Earth science programme by \$100 million. The DSCOVER, OCO-3, PACE and CLARREO Pathfinder missions are to be axed - all devoted to monitoring global warming.<sup>3</sup> But, when it comes to the militarisation of space, Trump will, presumably, seek an expansion (overall he proposes a 10% increase in the defence budget).

Last year alone, under Barack Obama, the US spent a grand total of \$40 billion on its space programme. Russia, China, India, the EU and Japan all try to compete and each country now has "fully independent capabilities"<sup>4</sup>. Russia, of course, remains a major player, with regular manned flights, rocket launchers, satellites, etc, although only spending roughly \$8.6 billion annually. China has, however, gone to extraordinary lengths to make it into the big league. In October 2003 the Shenzhou 5 spacecraft orbited the Earth 21 times. Yang Liwei became the

country's first astronaut. In September 2011 China established its first space laboratory (abandoned in 2013) and plans for putting into orbit the Tiangong permanent space station are on schedule for 2020. Displaying an impressive confidence in the future, Chinese officials have talked of a moon base in the 2030s - the stepping stone for an eventual manned landing on Mars. Admittedly, this owes rather more to science vagary than science fact. China's Mars time frame lies somewhere between 2040 and 2060. Nevertheless, towards such ends, China now outspends Russia. Its space programme now comes in at around \$11 billion annually. Despite that, US expenditure on space more than equals the rest of the world put together.<sup>5</sup>

Private capital has already established a lucrative space industry and Trump is keen on promoting joint ventures. His bill contains a stipulation that Nasa cannot acquire space flight services from a "foreign entity" unless there are no Nasa vehicles or US commercial providers available (since the end of the Shuttle programme the US has been forced to rely on Russian launchers). It also directs Nasa to "look into ways to boost the private space industry"<sup>6</sup>. NewSpaceGlobal, Catapult Satellite Provider, Deep Space Industries, Virgin Galactica, Boeing, Blue Origin, Excalibur Alamz, Space X, etc, are busily working on reusable launchers, "big data" transmission satellites and

**Oval Office, March 21:  
Donald Trump signs  
law giving Nasa the  
go-ahead for manned  
missions to Mars in  
the 2030s. Exploration  
robots would be a  
hundred times cheaper**

small, cheap, "disposable" satellites.<sup>7</sup>

Space tourism is being mooted as the next big business opportunity - that despite Richard Branson's VSS Enterprise crashing in 2014 and the death of the co-pilot. A cash-strapped Russia has, meanwhile, been selling the super-rich rides to the International Space Station. Each ticket costs a cool \$40-45 million.<sup>8</sup> The 2008-12 great recession notwithstanding, there is a huge pool of surplus capital available, and hence ever more obscene examples of 'how to spend it' - conspicuous consumption.

There are other, far more ambitious, commercial plans afoot. Planetary Resources has a number of well connected billionaire investors and proposes to land highly sophisticated vehicles on mineral-rich asteroids, where, using 3D printing techniques, machines will "create tools, construction equipment and self-replication activities in space".<sup>9</sup> The Obayashi Corporation makes the case for a space elevator (an idea that has been around since 1895, when the celebrated Russian scientist,

Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, wrote a paper suggesting the construction of a super-high Eiffel Tower, from where humans could escape the Earth's gravity). The space elevator would be anchored somewhere

on the equator and have a 60,000-mile-long tether, made from something like graphene, secured by a geostationary counterweight located in near space. A climber would

journey up the stationary tether and after 7.5 days release their 20-ton payload into orbit. This would "give a 95% cost advantage" over competitors who still depend on rocket launchers.<sup>10</sup> The money needed for the space elevator, however, remains something of a mystery. Nevertheless, it is a serious suggestion.

The same cannot be said for private plans for colonising Mars. Eg, the Dutch-based company, Mars One, proposes to begin *one-way* trips to the red planet commencing in 2025. Many thousands have applied, the official website giving an almost immediate figure of 200,000 ... and there is an associated list of - cynical - sponsors. The proposition is that the first Mars colonists will finance their impossible existence by constituting themselves as the human fodder for a reality TV show to be broadcast back on Earth.<sup>11</sup>

At least in terms of the next one or two decades, it is the US alone which must be taken seriously when it comes to moon bases and manned Mars missions. Delivering a keynote policy speech, at the John F Kennedy Space Center, on April 15 2010, Obama committed his administration not to the moon, but Mars: "By the mid-2030s," he boldly declared, "I believe we can send humans to orbit Mars and return them safely to Earth. And a landing on Mars will follow. And I expect to be around to see it."<sup>12</sup> Trump has, of course, reaffirmed America's commitment to "human space exploration" and getting to Mars. Whether he will live to see it is another matter. After all, at 70, he is Obama's senior by 15 years.

With the successful test flight of the Orion space capsule, on December 5 2014, launched by a Delta IV rocket, America put in place the most important element needed to fulfil its Mars mission (though it still awaits the Space Launch System rocket). Orion superficially looks like the Apollo capsule used for the 1961-72 moon



programme. But Orion is designed for long-duration, deep-space missions. A habitat module will be attached, along with a laboratory, water storage units, etc, for the 16-month round trip to Mars.<sup>13</sup> Much of the add-on hardware is derived from the International Space Station. There will, therefore, be ample room for living, eating, washing, sleeping and exercise areas.

Before undertaking any return to the moon, let alone a Mars journey, Nasa has set a series of intermediary goals and stages. In November 2018 the next, unmanned, Orion test flight is scheduled. But, instead of being launched by a Delta IV, it will be put into earth-orbit by the Space Launch System. The successor to the giant Saturn V, SLS is the most powerful rocket ever built. Even its basic version is designed to lift a 70-ton payload.<sup>14</sup> Then, at least according to Nasa, in 2021, comes the first manned Orion mission: a figure-eight loop around the moon, an asteroid flypast, etc. However, there is already talk of going for a four-astronaut manned mission on the first SLS launch.

Nasa then faces a strategic choice: 'back to the moon first' or 'straight to Mars'. Within the US space 'community' two rival lobbies jockey. It has to be said, though, that the moon is an obvious initial destination. Here, only three days away from Earth, a permanent base could be established. Helium-3, platinum, rare earth metals and other scarce resources might well be extracted for commercial purposes. Some - for example, Newt Gingrich - even talk of a 13,000-strong colony and the moon becoming the 51st American state.<sup>15</sup> With such an outpost up and running, the engineering, endurance and survival techniques and equipment needed for Mars can be tested and perfected with relative confidence.

Obviously, Donald J Trump - if he avoids impeachment - will want to establish his indelible mark on history. It almost comes off the pages of Niccolò Machiavelli: "Nothing brings a prince more prestige than great campaigns and striking demonstrations."<sup>16</sup> Telstar, Alan Shepard, the 1969 Apollo landing, Space Shuttle, Orion, a return to the moon, mission Mars - all resonate with American national mythology. When captain James T Kirk of the USS Enterprise spoke of space being the "final frontier", he not only referred to his 23rd century present, but America's post-colonial past.

## Frontiers

After 1783 and the Peace of Paris, Americans "shifted" from being a seaward-orientated people, with European preoccupations and a reliance on Atlantic supplies. Instead of being a European outpost, they increasingly looked west and taking hold of the interior - "that vast, tempting, unexplored wilderness".<sup>17</sup> From then on the US welcomed successive generations of poor and downtrodden Europeans to its shores ... and ever expanding frontier lands.

While many migrants settled in the great cities of the east and north-east as proletarians, others headed west: "To the west, to the west, to the land of the free" (19th century English folk song). The native population was either exterminated or driven from the best land by wave after wave of these incomers - trappers, traders, adventurers, prospectors, loggers ... but above all small farmers. Alike Jeffersonian populism, Abraham Lincoln's Yankeedom and Hollywood epics turned this class into a national icon: hence Daniel Boone, Davie Crockett, Bill Cody and the films of John Huston and Clint Eastwood. Dominant American ideology still lauds individualism, movement, expansion and internal colonisation ... and in search of the final frontier has now projected itself into the vastness of space.

Announcing his mission Mars, Obama invoked JF Kennedy and his

famous May 25 1961 speech: "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before the decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth."<sup>18</sup> Kennedy spoke during the cold war. And in that atmosphere of artificially generated superpower rivalry every success for the Mercury, Gemini and finally the Apollo programme - annual cost around 1% of US GDP - generated rapturous popular enthusiasm. Of course, the US always possessed a huge technological and material advantage over the Soviet Union. Indeed, arguably, from the 1960s onwards, the USSR fell economically "under American hegemony".<sup>19</sup>

Kennedy was not around when Apollo's Eagle module touched down on the Sea of Tranquillity. He died in Dallas, Texas, on November 22 1963, shot down by an assassin's bullet. So it was Richard Nixon, the 37th president, who, on July 20 1969, was responsible for "the most historic telephone call ever made from the White House". He addressed Armstrong and Aldrin on the moon ... and an estimated 600 million TV viewers.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, getting to Mars is undoubtedly going to prove hugely expensive. Mainstream estimates vary from \$100 billion to \$250 billion over the timespan of the whole project (though I have come across figures as high as \$1 trillion<sup>21</sup> and as low as \$50 billion - the latter coming from the free marketeer, Robert Zubrin, co-founder of the Mars Society<sup>22</sup>).

Despite the inevitable criticisms of the costs of Orion and mission Mars, Nasa, for its part, is banking on the undiminished popularity of all things space. Generations of science fiction writers - from HG Wells to Kim Stanley Robinson (and long-running TV and film series from *Star Trek* to *Star Wars*) - have created a ready audience for America's version of bread and circuses. No wonder Donald Trump's continued commitment to the proposed Orion mission to Mars has generated popular applause.

Not least due to sci-fi, space is still commonly thought of as ripe for human colonisation. It is the new America. Supposedly space is humanity's destiny, but one for which the US claims a special responsibility. It is, after all, the quintessential frontier nation. Moreover, without moving into space there is the supposed risk that problems here on Earth will continue to multiply. According to Rick W Tumlinson, co-founder of the US-based Space Frontier Foundation, unless we humans make the leap into space colonisation, we will "begin to slide into a new dark age".<sup>23</sup>

## Germs and labour

In my opinion all this is bunk. The suggestion that space is the modern equivalent of crossing the Atlantic Ocean and 'discovering' the New World in 1492 is altogether unconvincing. The Americas, perhaps even before the end of the last ice age, supported abundant human life. Estimates of first habitation vary widely - "from 11,500 to 50,000 years ago".<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, whenever people first arrived, they flourished and settled everywhere, from Alaska in the far north to Tierra del Fuego in the far south. They also produced their own high civilisations: eg, the Aztec and Inca empires.

Christopher Columbus, and the conquistadors who followed him over the next 30 years, claimed vast swathes of territory and within next to no time allowed the Spanish monarchy to amass unprecedented riches. The native people were enslaved *en masse* and gold and silver flooded into the bulging coffers of Madrid. America, confirms the distinguished French historian, Fernand Braudel, represented the "treasure of treasures".<sup>25</sup>

There was, however, a fundamental problem: labour. Everything comes back to labour, Marx stressed in

*Capital*. Because of Eurasia's much greater population densities the Spanish had developed a certain immunity to a wide range of diseases: measles, typhus, tuberculosis, smallpox, flu, etc. But not the native Americans. European conquistadors came with their writing, reading, flintlocks, horses, steel swords, armour ... and germs.

Hernando Cortés beat the fiercely militaristic Aztec empire not only because his forces possessed immense technological advantages. In 1520 half the Aztec population, including the emperor, Cuitlahuac, died from a raging infection, which miraculously spared the Spanish. "By 1618," writes Jared Diamond, "Mexico's initial population of about 20 million had plummeted to about 1.6 million."<sup>26</sup> The same thing happened when Francisco Pizarro and his raggle-taggle army of 168 men took on the millions of the Inca empire in Peru. Smallpox arrived just ahead of them and decimated the native population, killing both the emperor, Huayna Capac, and his designated successor. Throughout the Americas it is estimated that around 95% of the native population died from European diseases.

Germs facilitated European conquest, but destroyed virtually the entire potential workforce. And without labour the Americas were as good as useless (what remained of the native slaves would annoyingly take flight into what was for them the familiar surrounding hills and forests). Labour therefore had to be recruited from the outside if the Americas were to be transformed from an ever-diminishing object of plunder into a self-expanding source of profit. After indentured European labour was tried and failed, the richest classes amongst the colonialists - and their Old World investors and state backers - turned to *systematically* buying black slaves. They were typically purchased from the most *advanced* areas in west Africa (peasants made the best slaves - hunter-gatherers tended to go native and become Maroons). And, though you would not have thought it, given BBC nonsense about the "very influential" role played by William Wilberforce, an evangelical Christian, in the abolition of the slave trade, it should never be forgotten that slaves resisted, escaped, fought back, and, with Toussaint Louverture's revolution, they established their own St Dominique/Haiti free state. Only after that seismic event - a Caribbean October 1917 - did the UK parliament vote for abolition of the slave trade (not slavery). Till then, of course, highly respectable British merchants had often played the lead role.<sup>27</sup>

Some 12 million Africans were transported across the Atlantic (one and a half million perished during the 'middle passage' and an unknown, but surely even greater, number died prior to embarkation). These poor wretches partially substituted for the ghosts of the native Americans. African slaves were central to the hugely profitable plantation system - sugar, tobacco, coffee, etc - which made numerous aristocratic fortunes. Overwork, pitiless exploitation and malnutrition took a terrible toll. Up to a fifth of the slaves died within the first year. No problem: the labour force "could be replenished by further slave purchases".<sup>28</sup>

Only after two or three centuries of superhuman efforts - half driven by base greed, half by desperate yearnings for freedom - were the Americas reinvented and transformed into Europe's outer skin. Europe and the Americas fused into a single system. But one whose centre of gravity inexorably shifted from east to west. By the dawn of the 20th century the precocious US 'child' had already surpassed its aged 'parent'. The defeat of the Germany-Italy-Japan axis in 1945 certainly saw the transfer of world domination away from the exhausted British empire and the beginning of

the so-called 'American century'. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 left the US as the sole global power.

## Ecosystem

Neither the moon nor Mars are in any way modern equivalents of the Americas. Leave aside the lack of atmosphere and the absence of flora, fauna and running water. There is no native labour. Nor is there a realistic chance of substantial population transfers. Zubrin writes of taking people on a one-way trip to Mars at a rate similar to visits to the International Space Station. To date 388 individuals (including seven tourists) have visited the facility, which has been permanently manned since November 2000.<sup>29</sup> That would mean just 14 new Mars colonists arriving per annum.

But who would *seriously* volunteer to spend the rest of their lives in a precarious "tuna can" habitat, with the prospect of endless toil ahead of them? Zubrin's colony is expected to obtain its water from the underground permafrost, practise CO<sub>2</sub> agriculture in flimsy greenhouses and produce all their basic industrial needs. However, the Biosphere 2 experiment in Arizona, built between 1987 and 1991, which covers 3.14 acres of varied biomass, all under huge glass roofs, was unable to produce either enough food or enough oxygen.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, a recent report by MIT researchers warns that Mars colonists would soon be dying: from suffocation, starvation, dehydration or incineration. In short, the colonisation of Mars will make for some seriously morbid reality TV. The analysis also concludes that 15 heavy rocket launchers - costing around \$4.5 billion - would be needed to support just the first four Mars colonists.<sup>31</sup>

Hence the fancy projections of fabulous economic returns are quite frankly risible. There is no chance of plunder, let alone profit. The chatter about mining "gold, silver, uranium, platinum, palladium, and other precious metals" is just that - chatter.<sup>32</sup> Talk of Martian towns acting as humanity's technological driver, etc, owes everything to quackery and nothing to rational investment of labour time. The relative unit costs of doing virtually anything on Mars would be a thousand - a million - times greater than on Earth. Ferrying things back here, to Earth, is technologically feasible, of course, but would be prohibitively expensive. Getting a Mars colony to produce anything on a scale for export to planet Earth makes no commercial sense whatsoever - except for techno-utopian dreamers.

Nor do Nasa's manned space missions stand in the noble tradition of Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein - a grotesque suggestion made by Dr James Williams of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.<sup>33</sup> All that the astronauts did on the moon was plant the Stars and Stripes, leave footprints and carry back a few bags of rocks. Apollo was neither about economic returns nor scientific advance. It was an *engineering* triumph over the Soviet Union - a second-rate superpower. Any new mission Mars would essentially be no different. It would reassert the US position as the global ... and space hegemon.

Let me cite three trusted members of the US space establishment. First, Doug Osheroff - a Nobel prize-winning physicist, who sat on the committee which investigated the 2003 Columbia accident. He is perfectly frank: "Right now there is no economic value in going to Mars."<sup>34</sup> Ed Weiler - assistant advisor of Nasa's office of space science - is equally candid: "These missions will not be driven by science."<sup>35</sup> Neil de Grasse Tyson - astrophysicist and member of George W Bush's Mars commission - admits that, if "pure science" was the purpose, "it's obvious that you would send robots".<sup>36</sup> Compared with astronauts, robots are 50 or 100 times less expensive.

Mars is the most Earth-like of all

of the other planets and moons in the solar system. But that is not saying much. Barren, pitted with craters, prone to gigantic dust storms, Mars is virtually airless - the mainly (95%) carbon dioxide atmosphere is 100 times less dense than ours on Earth. Therefore there is no ozone layer to shield the planet's surface from the sun's deadly ultraviolet radiation. To make matters worse, Mars is hellishly cold. On average the *temperate* zone is 60 degrees Celsius below zero. True, there is plenty of iron and a little magnesium, titanium and aluminium.<sup>37</sup> But, as far as we know, nothing exists there that cannot be made or obtained infinitely more cheaply here on Earth.

No-one with a modicum of scientific knowledge ever doubted the water ice in the Martian poles. We do not need astronauts to tell us that. There is also abundant frozen water beneath the planet's rocky surface. But why travel in a tiny metal capsule - six months there and six months back - across 60 million miles of deep space for that?

Yes, eminent scientists speculate about the possibility of terraforming. The Martian atmosphere could conceivably be artificially oxygenated, the density dramatically upped and thereby significantly warmed. Water might then flow once again along its wide valleys and into new seas and oceans. However, creating a self-sustaining ecosystem - one capable of supporting plant and animal life - would take quite a few years: roughly 100,000.

There are more modest schemes. If 100 nuclear-powered terraforming factories were established on Mars - discussed in a joint paper by Margarita Marinova and Chris McKay - specifically in order to pump out perfluorocarbons (super greenhouse gases), the time span is much less awesome.<sup>38</sup> At a Nasa-sponsored conference on terraforming Mars held in October 2000, they estimated that it would take 100 years to raise the Martian temperature by six to eight degrees. To get to the point where some water melts would need another 700 years. A greatly thickened carbon dioxide atmosphere would then retain heat. But Mars would remain cold, alien and thoroughly inhospitable to life as we know it on Earth - except perhaps for microbes.

Worshippers of science doggedly insist that going into space is the one sure way of overcoming all the mounting problems and contradictions found here on Earth: eg, hunger, poverty, global warming, resource shortages. For them technology holds the solution for everything. By the same measure the huge exertions required for space colonisation would encourage humanity to leave behind parochial concerns.

Isaac Asimov, the 20th century science fiction writer, touchingly hoped that "cooperation in something large enough to fire the hearts and mind" - like a Mars mission - would make people "forget the petty quarrels that have engaged them for thousands of years in wars over insignificant scraps of earthly territory".<sup>39</sup>

The morphed Revolutionary Communist Party - a 1980s ultra-leftist flash in the pan and nowadays a rightwing libertarian coven - echoes this scientism. Writing on the *Spiked* website, Stuart Atkinson impatiently urged the US on to Mars in the name of an ahistorical human nature: "We are a curious species". Scraping the bottom of the barrel, he pleads on behalf of the dead crew of space shuttle Columbia which disintegrated in February 2003, when attempting to return to the earth. They "would not have wanted" space exploration stopped. A "big idea" like Mars would inspire and show what could be done here on Earth.<sup>40</sup>

In the same breathless spirit James Wouldhugsan says: "Let's go back to the moon - and beyond."<sup>41</sup> Ray Bradbury (1920-2012), author of *The Martian chronicles*, proved no less

embarrassing: “The moment we land on Mars all the people of the world will weep with joy.”<sup>42</sup> Nor did China Miéville, till recently a member of the Socialist Workers Party, want to be left out. “We socialist sci-fi fans can’t bring ourselves to oppose space programmes... I think it says something exciting about humans that we want to explore space. I think there’s something wonderful about rocket ships.”<sup>43</sup>

Nothing could be more misplaced or naive. Ever since Adam Smith, the ideologists and apologists of capitalism have insisted that the system’s contradictions and the attendant curses of war, unemployment, ecological destruction, gross inequality and poverty could be overcome through accelerating capitalist progress. The subsequent history of capitalism should have taught a lesson or two. Obviously some will never learn.

Marxism does not question the existence of human nature. But attributes such as curiosity and an eagerness to explore must be examined historically and contextualised socially; not treated in a manner which universalises Nasa-man and the modern American ideology of constant technological innovation, individual enrichment and restless expansionism.

Scattered around the Indian Ocean coast, in India and Pakistan, the Philippines and Malaysia - marking the southern route out of Africa and the “beachcombing” trail to Australia - there are genetically distinct “remnants” of the original homo sapiens.<sup>44</sup> Having arrived between 80,000 and 75,000 years ago, they often liked what they found very much. With the subsequent expansion in population numbers and pressure on natural resources, some immediate descendants would trek off to the next suitable location along the coast. But enough were perfectly happy to stay firmly put.

It should not be forgotten that till recent times many groups of hunter-gatherers contentedly enjoyed what some would describe as a primitive existence. Others might be tempted to call it idyllic. Such was their mastery of the local environment - yes, through curiosity and exploration - that necessary labour could be reduced to a couple of hours. The rest of their day was spent eating, story-telling, playing with the children, dancing, etc. Why move under such benign circumstances?

Nor should technological progress be viewed as linear. After 1450 China scuppered its ocean-going fleet of big treasure ships and dismantled its shipyards (mechanical clocks and water-driven spinning machines were also abandoned). Between 1600 and 1853 Japan virtually eliminated what had up till then been a lucrative line in the production of guns. In the 1880s legislation put a stop to the introduction of public electric street lighting in London. Jared Diamond provides other examples of technological “reversals” which occurred during prehistory. Aboriginal Tasmanians abandoned bone tools and fishing, aboriginal Australians may have abandoned the bow and arrow, Torres Islanders abandoned canoes, Polynesians abandoned pottery and Polar Eskimos lost the bow and arrow, while Dorset Eskimos put aside the bow and arrow, bow drills and dogs.<sup>45</sup>

There are materialist explanations for all such seemingly aberrant behaviour, but clearly teleological notions of an inevitable progression from flint axes to landing humans on Mars are quite erroneous.

Of course, Marxists have always had a positive attitude towards science and technology. But we do not privilege them or take an uncritical view. Motivation, application and consequences must be thoroughly interrogated. Neither science nor technology is neutral. So it is wrong to conflate scientific and technological progress with *social* progress (a mistake which joins Eduard Bernstein, ‘official communism’ and the former RCP).

The main locomotive of history is class struggle and the constant striving



**First launch of Orion spacecraft, December 5 2014. Next time, in November 2018, it will be from the Space Launch System**

for human freedom: eg, the Athenian citizen-peasant revolution of 508-507 BC, the 73-71 BC Spartacus uprising, the 1381 peasant revolt, the Hussites of 14th century Bohemia, the 1789 French revolution, Chartism, the First International, the 1871 Paris Commune, the 19th century democratic breakthrough in Europe, the 1917 Russian Revolution.

Development of the productive forces and the rational application of science create the objective basis for generalised human freedom and the rounded development of each individual. But capitalism does not do that. Capitalism skews progress - it performs technological miracles, while simultaneously leaving millions into abject squalor. Capitalism perverts science - not only by bending it to the lopsided, narrow and demeaning diktats of profit, but by turning it against humanity to the extent of threatening our very survival. The insights, ingenuity and resources of science have been channelled into ways of killing and destroying on an almost unimaginable scale: carpet-bombing, gas chambers, nuclear warheads, chemical and biological weapons. Walter Benjamin damningly remarked somewhere that our rulers perfect not so much the means of production: rather the means of death.

## Military

And the fact of the matter is that Nasa and the whole US space business is a branch, or extension, of the military-industrial complex. What is true for the US is true for Russia, China, the EU, Japan and India too. Satellites, launch rockets, tracking stations, etc, owe far more to military requirements for spying, pinpoint targeting, the delivery of WMDs, real-time command and battle communications than so-called pure science. Loring Wirbel, a peace activist and expert in space technology, shows that even back in the 1950s the US “civilian satellite programme served as a cover for a wide-ranging spy satellite programme”.<sup>46</sup>

Nowadays, the US military relies on

space technology, including commercial systems, which by their very nature have a dual use. Take the global positioning system (GPS) of satellites, which allows motorists, seafarers, airline crews and even hill walkers to locate themselves to within a few feet. But, however welcome, this is merely a by-product. It should never be forgotten that GPS has *overriding* military functions. When a vehicle suspected of carrying Hamas members is blasted to pieces by an Israeli missile strike in Gaza, that was GPS at work. When ‘precision’ bombs slammed into Baghdad in 2003, that was GPS at work. Indeed the US military boasts that during the invasion of Iraq 60% of all aerial bombardment was accounted for by GPS bombs. The US deployed not so much airpower, but spacepower. As former US airforce secretary James Roche triumphantly announced, concluding an April 2003 speech, “The war in space has already begun.”<sup>47</sup>

Behind mission Mars and the highfalutin language of discovery, human adventure and manifest destiny lurks a sinister agenda for ensuring total US domination of space. The US military-industrial complex has tested unmanned space-planes, most notably the Boeing X-57, which, having made a sudden dive into the atmosphere, could conceivably be used to deliver nuclear bombs.<sup>48</sup> No less worrying, the administration of George W Bush pursued a National Missile Defence programme. The inheritor of Ronald Reagan’s Strategic Defence Initiative, it aimed to put in place an anti-missile system in space “capable of shooting down nuclear missiles”. This would “profoundly alter” the balance of power between nuclear powers, says Nayef Al-Rodham, and “could have disastrous consequences in terms of global security”.<sup>49</sup> With his confrontational policy towards China, Trump will surely find a revival of such a programme very tempting.

There is another aspect to mission Mars which cannot be ignored.<sup>50</sup> The US Mars project, like the rest of the military-industrial complex,

constitutes a so-called third department of production (the other two being the production of the means of production and the production of the means of consumption). Department three allows capitalism to guarantee “maximum” self-expansion from the firm basis of the “minimum” consumption of the *relatively* impoverished masses.<sup>51</sup> Their limited ability to purchase the means of consumption no longer constitutes a barrier.

Turning the production of the means of destruction into a system of profit and self-expansion through state purchase effectively obliterates the distinction between consumption and destruction. This is feasible precisely because for capital the purpose of production - the end aim - is not human consumption of use-values according to need: rather it is self-expansion for its own sake. Problems of real use, and therefore *real* consumption, are overcome (though not eliminated) through the unlimited ability of the state to generate *artificial demand* and purchase waste - ie, the means of destruction - through credit and taxation. This innovative response to capitalist overproduction - initially tried before World War I and then after the 1929-33 world economic crisis - was made into a model of normality after 1945. Under Trump the *peacetime* US arms budget is set to increase to \$603 billion (well over twice as much as China and Russia combined).<sup>52</sup>

The Trump administration justifies this perverse and obscene squandering of human and material resources through peddling a fiercely nativist patriotism (and generating jobs). Of course, this approach has a long history - kaiser Germany, Bolshevism, European fascism, post-World War II USSR, Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, the Taliban and Islamic State have all been used. Voting in favour of the endless production of waste has thereby become a national duty and imposes a welcome internal discipline over the working class. Spending on Nasa and the space programme is essentially no different. Except that, besides patriotism, it is able to harness another misplaced idealism - the Quixotic belief that space represents humanity’s manifest destiny and promises solutions to every problem.

## Social problems

Meanwhile, here, back on planet Earth, the United Nations estimates that over a billion people have no access to clean drinking water, some 840 million have to survive on significantly less than the daily recommended intake of calories and around 30 million are infected with HIV/Aids. There is nothing inevitable or natural about any of this.

Neoliberal International Monetary Fund and World Bank programmes of market ‘reform’ and subordination to capitalist globalisation over the last 30 years have greatly exacerbated the unevenness characteristic of the system. Today the richest one percent “hold nearly half the global wealth”.<sup>53</sup> Leave aside the so-called third world - in Britain some 900,000 people have registered with food banks.<sup>54</sup>

Yet with organisation and political will humanity has within its reach the ability to easily meet all basic needs. The wealth exists in abundance. Simply diverting the US arms budget to *real* human needs would do away with global poverty - almost at a stroke. But such a turnaround can never happen through the greasy platitudes and essentially diversionary calls of the NGOs, religious notables and various leftwing reformers for rich governments to do their moral duty. The modern state palpably exists to defend, serve and promote the self-expansion of capital - the two are inextricably and increasingly interwoven and interdependent.

Social problems demand social solutions. Humanity - which can viably only be led by the *revolutionary* working class - faces an epochal challenge of putting humanity’s wealth under the

control of the associated producers. Capitalism long ago outlived any usefulness it once possessed. Now this most alienated of social relationships threatens our very existence - through economic crisis, social dislocation and ecological destruction.

Once humanity has superseded capitalism and become properly human, who knows what we might choose to do? Mars, along with other planets and moons in the solar system, could be explored by self-replicating robots or terraformed in an attempt to make them habitable. Perhaps one day in the far distant future our descendants might reach nearby stars. Now, however, the main subject of humanity must be humanity - as we find it, here on this planet. Our mission is to finally win the battle for democracy and transform all existing social relationships ●

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# 1917

## For a people's Provisional Revolutionary Government '1917: the view from the streets' - leaflets of the Russian Revolution, No7

One hundred years ago, on March 14 (March 1) 1917, the Social Democratic Interdistrict Committee (Mezhrayonka), supported by the Petersburg Committee of Socialist Revolutionaries, issued the following appeal to soldiers.

At that time, the duma committee and the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies were striving to bring order into the revolutionary events on the streets and to prevent the tsarist autocracy from restoring its control over

the city. Dominated by moderate socialists, the soviet pursued a policy of cooperation with liberals in the duma.

Nonetheless, the soviet's 'order No1', which it issued on March 14 in response to soldiers' pressure and published on March 15, called for soldiers to elect representative committees all along the chain of command, stipulated that officers treat soldiers respectfully and asserted the soviet's primary influence over soldiers, who should obey only duma commands that did

not contradict soviet resolutions.

The duma committee announced the formation of the Provisional Government on March 15, and Nicholas II abdicated on behalf of himself and his son. By March 16, the autocracy had collapsed. Thus, the ground had been prepared for the 'dual power' in Petrograd that prevailed between the March (February) and November (October) 1917 revolutions.

The appeal below presented a militant alternative to the duma committee's course. According

to Michael Melancon (2009), it was circulated on March 14 1917, probably before order No1 was issued, and may have influenced the wording of that order. Alexander Shlyapnikov, who published the leaflet in 1923, states that the executive committee of the Petersburg soviet confiscated it on the morning of March 15 1917 ●

This series is edited by **John Riddell** and the leaflets have been translated and annotated by **Barbara Allen**.



The abdication of Nicholas II on March 2 1917. In the royal train: minister of the court Baron Fredericks, General N Ruzsky, VV Shulgín, AI Guchkov and Nicholas II

Petersburg Interdistrict Committee of the RSDWP  
Petersburg Committee of Socialist Revolutionaries

## Soldiers, take power into your own hands!

### Comrade soldiers!

It has come to pass! You enslaved peasants and workers arose, and with a crash the autocratic government collapsed in disgrace.

Soldiers! The people were patient for a long time. The peasants long suffered under the power of the gentry landowners, the land captains, the district police officers, and the whole gang of servants of the tsarist autocracy. Millions of peasants became swollen from hunger, while the state treasury, the monasteries and the landowners seized all the land, and while the nobles got fat from sucking the people's blood. Without land, the peasant cannot even put his chickens out to feed!

### Brother soldiers!

As peasants, as workers, what do you need? All the land and full freedom - that is what you need! You did not shed your blood in vain. For two days Petrograd has been under the power of soldiers and workers. It has been two days since the dissolved state duma elected a Provisional Committee, which it calls a Provisional Government. Still, you have not heard a word from [MV] Rodzianko [duma chair] or [PN] Miliukov [Cadet Party leader and Provisional Committee spokesman] about whether the land will be taken from the gentry landowners and given

to the people. The prospects are poor!

Soldiers! Be on your guard to prevent the nobles from deceiving the people!

Go ask the duma, will the people have land, freedom and peace?

Soldiers! Why does the duma say nothing about this? Autocratic arbitrariness needs to be completely uprooted. The people's cause will perish unless we conclude the business by convening the Constituent Assembly, to which all peasants and all workers would send their deputies - not like in the current duma, composed of the wealthy and highest ranks of society, which dooms the people's cause!

Take power into your hands, so that this Romanov gang of nobles and officers does not deceive you. Elect your own platoon, company and regiment commanders. Elect company committees for managing food supplies. All officers should be under the supervision of these company committees.

Accept only those officers whom you know to be friends of the people.

Obey only delegates sent from the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies!

Soldiers! Now, when you have arisen and achieved victory, those coming to join you include not only friends, but also officers, who are

former enemies and who only pretend to be your friends.

Soldiers! We are more afraid of the fox's tail [intrigues] than the wolf's tooth [outright aggression]. Only the workers and peasants are your true friends and brothers. Strengthen your unity with them! Send your delegate-representatives to the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, already supported by 250,000 workers in Petrograd alone. Your representatives and worker deputies should become the people's Provisional Revolutionary Government. It will give you both land and freedom!

Soldiers, listen to us! Demand an answer from the duma right now. Will it take land from the gentry landowners, state treasury and monasteries? Will it transfer land to the peasants? Will it give the people complete freedom? Will it convene the Constituent Assembly? Don't waste time!

Soldiers! Talk about this in your companies and battalions! Hold meetings! Elect from among you commanders and representatives to the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

- All land to the peasants!
- All freedom to the people!
- Long live the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies!
- Long live the Provisional Revolutionary Government!

Translated from **AG Shlyapnikov Semnadsatyi god Vol 1, 1923, pp337-38. On Shlyapnikov's role in the 1917 events, see Barbara C Allen Alexander Shlyapnikov 1885-1937: life of an old Bolshevik Chicago 2016.**

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## What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# weekly Worker

Nothing  
succeeds  
like failure

## Trebles all round

George Osborne's appointment as *Evening Standard* editor is a textbook illustration of establishment corruption, argues Paul Demarty

**G**ood news, then, for George Osborne - and bad news for London commuters.

The erstwhile chancellor of the exchequer has made the news by going into the business of news gathering himself, balancing the rigours of editorial life with his parliamentary duties to the people of Tatton - a place he could no doubt find on a map in a pinch. There are many other striking features of this appointment, not the least of which is the level of his journalistic experience (a failed tilt at a couple of traineeships and a paltry few freelance paragraphs in the year between university and his entry into the Tory workscape).

### Black gold

Anyone would think that there were - how to put this? - extra-professional reasons for this turn of events; and incredibly, the *Standard* job is only the second lucrative and eyebrow-raising appointment Osborne has garnered so far this year. And, while the editorial craft seems bizarrely outside his comfort zone, the earlier such job is all too close to home.

In January, Gideon (Osborne's original given name) took up a £160,000-per-quarter role as advisor-cum-brand-ambassador on behalf of BlackRock, the enormous institutional investor (read: pension fund manager). For any former chancellor, a job at such a vast, tentacular financial concern would stink of a conflict of interest; Osborne in particular, however, made several striking innovations to British pension policy that offered his new employers no small cheer on their own account (after the key 2014 budget, BlackRock announced that it was "uniquely positioned because of our multi-asset strategies" to take advantage of changes in rules that would allow pensioners to spend their pots more freely).<sup>1</sup>

It would be reasonable to ask whether it can really be true that senior government ministers can just stroll blithely into exactly the same parts of the private sector their decisions so recently shaped. Indeed, in theory the answer is no. In practice, as ever, things are endlessly favourable to the capitalist and the bright-eyed public servant with a taste for the high life. The Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (Acoba), which is supposed to stop abuses of this nature, asserted that "there were no specific policy decisions in [Osborne's] time in office that would have specifically affected BlackRock".

This is a rather different assessment than BlackRock's quoted above (perhaps the latter ought to retain Acoba *en masse* as advisors?); by such means, amazingly, is George Osborne - this gormless pillock who destroys everything he touches, apart from his own bank balance - on course to make a million pounds in his first year since Theresa May disposed of his disastrous political career (the balance made up by £600,000 worth of Stateside speaking engagements). Nothing, as they say, succeeds like failure.

### Services rendered

Gideon's implausibly rosy fortunes are, however, not merely a picture-postcard of moral corruption in public life, but also



George Editor Osborne ... Can you believe it?

a textbook illustration of how it works.

We shall take George's new jobs in chronological order. What makes a fund like BlackRock hire a person like him? We might start by asking: what is he being paid to do? According to the register of members' interests, he is an "advisor on the global economy", working 12 days a quarter. That's £13,500 a day - nice work if you can get it. We live in a perfectly efficient market economy, of course; so £3 million *pro rata* is presumably the market rate for the services of so useful an advisor on the global economy as old Gideon O. That is an awful lot of money; but then, BlackRock has an awful lot of money. On further reflection, there are many aspects of the global economy that impinge on BlackRock's ability to grow that awful lot of money into a still greater sum, so it is astonishing that it had not already splashed out for so profound a prognosticator as our George. Better late than never ...

Of course, the whole thing is manifestly implausible. We are talking about a financial behemoth here, and it is perfectly well abreast of international developments, employing no end of 'advisors' - or analysts, as actually useful advisors are known - to exploit global conditions in order to turn one dollar into two. Such people can be had for less than £13,500 a day - so what explains the Osborne premium?

There are two explanations. The first is employed by Owen Jones, savaging the more recent editorial job:

Public office gives you lots of marketable

advantages: prominence, connections, knowledge of the inside workings of government. These can then be exploited by major corporations, wealthy individuals and media oligarchs to gain even more power over our corrupted democracy.<sup>2</sup>

There is little to object to here, of course - such things do command a price. Yet the lattermost is presumably an asset Osborne shares with middle-ranking civil servants and the like - sure, the notorious revolving door admits the likes of them too, but for nothing like the same sums of money. Prominence is a double-edged sword for the likes of Osborne, the flash-git posh boy who combines the cynicism of post-Blair machine politics with the appearance of a vampire, and is routinely pilloried in the pages of the press as a slippery failure. That leaves connections; and it is just possible that Osborne's are good enough for the price.

There is another, less charitable, hypothesis; namely, that this is not employment, but 'payment for services rendered' - Osborne is not being paid for the anticipated benefits of his advice, but the realised benefits of his policies. This is not the explanation favoured by BlackRock's PRs or Osborne's self-image, but we must insist it *is* the explanation favoured by Occam's razor. Similar suspicions cling to other such creatures - we think of Tony Blair, whose already troubled image has been besmirched further since his exit from the Commons by his prostitution

before oligarchs and tyrants, and the similar career of Peter Mandelson. The establishment remembers its friends.

### Join the resistance

As for the *Standard*, it is surely a match made in heaven. Evgeny Lebedev, the eccentric proprietor, has pristine Osbornite bona fides; he led another paper of his, the late and unlamented *Independent*, to call in 2015 for a tactical vote to ensure the continuation of the Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition. The *Standard*, for its part, participated enthusiastically in Zac Goldsmith's disastrous, racist gutter campaign for London mayor, whose form was dictated by the Osborne-Cameron hit-man, Lynton Crosby. Nobody came out of that smelling of roses, but the stink itself binds them together, like the bloody solidarity of the military unit.

There is, of course, another tie that binds Lebedev to Osborne, which is their overt cosmopolitanism. Lebedev is London to his bones - all the more so for being a Russian oligarch. In Osborne, he sees a kindred spirit. The latter, in the spare five minutes he finds, here and there, between the editorial conferences, PMQs and BlackRock consultations, is writing a book, *The age of unreason*, about the depredations of nationalist populism - an endeavour that, no doubt, will give the latter doctrine a much-needed boost in popularity.

From his new bully pulpit, Osborne may be expected to offer little in the way of day-to-day management (if Lebedev has half an ounce of sense, which is by no

means guaranteed); instead, he will bring a political line equally friendly to high finance and the cosmopolitan collective consciousness of the capital - the City and the city. Liberated from the need to satisfy the provincial reactionaries of Tatton (for even he cannot have the chutzpah to seek re-election, surely), he will instead take his place within the ranks of 'the resistance', the cabal of persons (Tony Blair, John Major and so on) whose defence of neoliberal globalisation in the hour of its decrepitude is somewhat compromised by their insistence on profiting handsomely from it.

There is a paradox and irony to this outcome, for the growth of rightwing populism is attributable in part to the punitive, alienating character of the neoliberal victory, the hectoring and bureaucratic inflicting of ever greater humiliation on those 'left behind', and the discussion of the working class, where the phrase could even be found on elite lips, as purely an insular, resentful rump to whom it was occasionally necessary to throw a few lumps of meat in the form of empty threats against immigrants and 'scroungers'. That is the legacy of Blair, and of Osborne; and it was the Brexit vote, a hopeless flailing revenge on the part of the same discarded rump, that did for Osborne directly.

Yet this cloud is its own silver lining; for the unravelling of the self-evidently 'sensible', 'rational' world order that obtained well enough until last year, in spite of everything, gives such people a mission. While he was prime minister, Blair transparently lusted only after power itself; the office of prime minister was its own reward, and no sacrifice was too great to keep it. The same attitude characterised Osborne as chancellor, whose tactical manoeuvres were breathtaking in their empty cynicism. Now the two of them pose as the last redoubt of civilised humanity against the pitchfork-wielding hordes - a pose that depends for its plausibility on the consequences of their former nihilism. What a twisted world we live in, when the architects of disaster must appear by the same token as our saviours from it.

We wish them the success they deserve ●

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