

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly worker

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- YP's Labour Republicans
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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Was always time to talk about a republic

LETTERS



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

Rights for all

I am probably a very slow learner, but it has become blatantly obvious to me that, when the myriad Trotskyist sects, with their 'mass membership' of single figures, advocate 'trans rights', what in fact they are calling for is the 'right' of biological men to violate women's safe spaces. I know that is putting it bluntly, but it is important, I think, to get to the essence of the issue here (and I do use the word 'violate' deliberately).

Women, even in advanced capitalist societies, such as Britain, have hardly achieved anything like real economic and social equality. Indeed, probably as part of the decaying of such 'advanced' societies, we are seeing wholesale and increasing mass violence and abuse of women and girls - physical, mental and emotional.

Women, over decades - and indeed centuries - of struggle, have fought for the concept of 'safe spaces' for women, especially in settings where they may be most vulnerable, including criminal justice, prisons, healthcare, victim support services, including for crimes by men and other forms of abuse, public toilets and sanitary facilities. These 'protected and safe spaces' for women are very far from widespread, almost always extremely badly funded and far from what is actually needed for vulnerable women and girls.

In fact, socialists and communists should be arguing for far more 'protected and safe spaces' for women across many other areas and settings in society, wherever in fact, women advocate them. They should all be far better funded, made genuinely safe and much better staffed and resourced than at present.

When the various sects and factions put their lists of 'transitional demands' together, 'trans rights' are always strangely near the top, but in very many cases they simply omit the woman question altogether. Extremely revealing and damning.

Women are over half the population and over half the working class, however we define this, so do the Trots think women have already achieved full emancipation and equality within capitalist society? That *must* be the logical conclusion if demands for women as women are dropped altogether, marginalised or made explicitly secondary to 'trans rights'.

I and most people I know are strongly opposed to any and all forms of discrimination against so-called 'trans people' - which clearly covers a wide spectrum with a range of complex needs and wishes. At one end are those suffering from the genuine psychiatric disorder of gender dysphoria: ie, believing they were 'born into the wrong gendered body' and suffering great amounts of psychological distress. Others may be born intersex: eg, they may have both female and male genital organs, or some missing or underdeveloped.

These are genuine and distressing conditions. I have the utmost sympathy for such people, and do advocate that the range of necessary health, social care, education and other services for this group of people should be far better than they are now.

I don't, frankly, believe that children suffering from gender dysphoria should be allowed to receive medical or other clinical interventions which would change their physical bodies irreversibly. Young children and those in adolescence are going

through all sorts of natural changes anyway, struggling and searching for their identities, and many in this group come from very traumatic backgrounds. It would seem criminal to allow children to have irreversible medical changes to their bodies before all these issues have been worked through and, if possible, disentangled, and before they are old enough to make literally life-changing decisions.

There are some who identify as a different gender to their physical body, but do not need formal medical help or support. There are others who do not necessarily identify as a different gender, but prefer to dress and present themselves as if they were of the other gender. People should be free and respected and without discrimination to live their lives as they choose, as long as they are not impinging on the rights of other people.

Rights are not and cannot be absolute or completely unfettered. Everything is relative. We can and should agree to the majority of 'trans demands' to be free from discrimination and prejudice. But the demand that so-called 'trans women' - ie, biological men - should be allowed to access women-only safe spaces is completely unacceptable and should be firmly rejected. It is wrong in principle and also violates what should be basic rights for biological women, who happen to be the majority, but are oppressed under patriarchy and exploited under capitalism.

Advocating 'gender-neutral' facilities to replace 'women only' spaces sounds very liberal and democratic, but at best is a cop-out, and would *de facto* abolish the principle of safe spaces for women as women. Yes, gender-neutral should be part of the mixed economy of provision to meet everyone's needs and preferences, but *in addition* to greatly enhanced women-only facilities, not in place of them.

We should be fighting for genuine equality, justice and rights for *all* people, groups, sections and individuals who are oppressed within modern capitalist society. Of course, many - probably the majority - of such oppressed groups are members of the working class, who are also subject to class exploitation as integral to the operation of the capitalist economy.

Some of the Trot groups claim the only answer to oppression is 'socialist revolution' and 'communism'. Utterly brainless. Yes, in the final analysis, the creation of a completely classless, harmonious and beautiful society may be necessary for the *complete* elimination of all oppression, discrimination and prejudice (probably requiring several generations of such a society). But are the sects *really* saying to people suffering from oppression, discrimination and prejudice, they must wait a hundred years or so before their issues can be addressed? In practice, yes.

In vivid contrast, the true, communist approach is to fight for full equality, justice, democracy, rights, etc for all oppressed groups and sections in the here and now - yes, under existing capitalist society. We don't have any illusions these can all be met under capitalism, although important and real advances can and should be made.

More importantly, the struggle for equality, democracy and justice exposes the fundamental inability of capitalism to adequately meet the needs of the great majority of the people. Even more important, the struggle for equality, democracy and rights for all oppressed people in the here and now will help shape and *prefigure* the nature and content of the socialism we want to establish.

We can't assume that socialism will *automatically* enable full equality, rights and removal of all discrimination and prejudice against currently oppressed sections and groups. These have to be fought for *now*, so the socialist society of the future - shaped and informed by current struggles - is genuinely emancipatory for *all* working people.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

YP dog's breakfast

By their very nature, constitutions are status quo-maintaining documents. It is one reason, for example, why Americans still have "the right to bear arms" in 2025. That right is based on a document agreed in 1776. Moreover, in the case of Your Party, the proposed constitution will require a two-thirds majority vote to amend.

The new party's draft constitution is, to be blunt, quite a loathsome document, as the *Weekly Worker's* correspondent, Carla Roberts, (and others) have pointed out. It essentially maintains a rigidly top-down structure well into 2026 and beyond.

So what's the solution? Tweaking a few clauses? Or trying to change major ones which are badly flawed? At least five of the six MPs now controlling YP will be deeply resistant to making any major changes to a draft constitution we assume they approved.

The latest issue of *The Left Lane*, headed "A socialist party needs to be run on socialist values and based on a socialist political culture", argues that YP supporters should be pushing that a one-year "sunset clause" be inserted into this constitution, so that "it will - to continue the metaphor - sink quietly below the horizon in November 2026". We don't want to be restrained by this dog's breakfast of a document for the next decade ... or more.

We need to pick the terrain on which we fight. I argue that we can make more progress towards a much touted 'member-led' party, when we have operating branches and an elected executive committee.

Alan Storey
Editor, *The Left Lane*

Defend YP's Sultana

Zarah Sultana's recent round of interviews has sent liberals into meltdown. Her 'crime'? Calling Nato an "imperialist war machine", saying that Zelensky "isn't a friend of the working class" and - sin of all sins! - attacking the Green Party for supporting Nato and refusing to cut ties with Israel. These basic truths have led a whole cabal of liberals, pro-imperialist 'progressives' and pro-Ukraine warmongers to line up and denounce Zarah.

From Labour MPs like Luke Charters (who he?) to Nato stooge and turncoat Paul Mason; from Pussy Riot to *Spectator* hacks - all took turns to lash out at Sultana, shrieking about "Putin's talking points" - the standard accusation thrown at anyone who does not support nuclear war with Russia. Any socialist worth their salt should know that, if these imperialist cockroaches are furious, she's touched a raw nerve.

Alas! A whole line-up of liberals who think they are socialists not only joined in, but even initiated the backlash. Owen Jones (who, as a rule, picks the wrong side in a fight) attacked Sultana for hair-splitting over "minor" differences. Same theme from Novara Media host Michael Walker. Nish Kumar dutifully defended Nato. The 'foreign office socialists' of the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign launched a whole tirade

against her on X in defence of Nato's war aims. Unsurprisingly, all these figures orbit around the Greens.

Sultana's comments, and the reaction to them, have the benefit of revealing that a huge part of the British left is in fact made up of nothing more than liberals who think internationalism means supporting Nato's war drive against Russia, and that socialism is possible without opposing the biggest imperialist alliance ever created.

Also, the reaction to Sultana's comments shows that Nato isn't a 'minor' issue, as the liberals argue, but a red line for the ruling class. Why do you think every journalist always asks leftwing leaders their views on Nato? It isn't to make conversation. It's because the ruling class needs to know who they can work with (ie, coopt), and who is simply beyond the pale.

That's the difference between Polanski, who merely criticises Nato, but wants to remain in it, and Sultana, who calls it what it is - an imperialist war machine that Britain must quit. Polanski's position is compatible with the aims of the ruling class - just sprinkled with pacifist glitter that will be easy to brush off, when push comes to shove. Sultana's is a clear threat to the British rulers that must be crushed. And, for this, they are already getting the assistance of their liberal coterie.

Sultana is under tremendous pressure to stop talking about Nato and criticising the Greens. But the main danger will not necessarily come from those who are attacking her in public. Rather, chances are that it will come from the layer of crusty councillors and conservative independent MPs who have real control of Your Party. No doubt, behind the scenes they will try to twist her arm to shut her up.

What Sultana needs to do is to openly declare a faction. She needs to stop pretending that the leaders of Your Party are not absolutely opposed to her politics, and openly rally people to her positions. Without this, her good words are only her personal opinion and will provide a left cover for Corbyn, Adnan Hussain and the rest of the discredited clique that pulls the strings in Your Party. Socialists must argue for this, and must fight

in the regional assemblies, so that Sultana's sharp points over Nato, Zionism and class-struggle politics become party policy.

But, so far, where has the socialist left been? There has been a deafening silence in almost all quarters against the anti-Sultana liberal backlash. Apparently, the Revolutionary Communist Party has just given up on Your Party and has become infatuated with the Greens. The Socialist Party is banging on about next year's local elections and a "no-cuts People's Budget", completely removed from the actual struggle in Your Party. The Socialist Workers Party is jockeying for organisational control of local branches, careful not to offend Corbyn. Then there's Archie Woodrow, a member of Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century and leading figure of the Democratic Socialists inside Your Party. While claiming agreement with Sultana's points ... he still joined the anti-Sultana bandwagon, denouncing her interventions as "dishonest" and complaining that she is "dictating policy".

To the far left: "Hello! Anybody there?!" Yes, we need to criticise Sultana. But we must first *defend her* against the liberal lynch mob! Those socialists who refuse to do this out of fear of alienating Corbyn, the Greens and liberals, are useless to the class struggle. Change course, or get out of the way.

Vincent David
Spartacist League Britain

YP democracy

The Your Party draft constitution, while claiming to be democratic, includes the same fundamental flaw as the Labour Party (and the Green Party, for that matter): an elected 'party leader'.

While there is some indication that the ultimate decision about how exactly the office of party leader is going to work is to be decided after electing the first leader, it is now obvious that the very idea of one individual being the 'leader' of the party is not only against socialist principles: it has the *practical* effect of causing chaotic infighting, as the patronage networks of the individual leader and other potential individual

Fighting fund

Thanks, one and all

Well done, everybody! Once again the support and dedication of *Weekly Worker* readers has ensured that we reached our monthly fighting fund target of £2,750 - albeit on the last day of October!

As I reported last week, with two days to go we were still £104 short, but - no worries - those two days were enough to see us home. Thanks go to comrades RL (£60), BK (£50), BH (£25), MD (£10), AR and comrade Hassan (£5 each) - the £155 they raised took us to £2,801. Target reached with £51 to spare!

Excellent stuff! But can we keep up the good work in November too? Well, after just five days, as I write, we already have £447 in the kitty. Thank you, comrades AC (£100!), LC (£50), BO (£35), MM (£31), CG (£30), RG (£25), LM (£24), DL and MT (£20), CP (£16), AN and BG (£15), RM (£13), RP (£12), MM (£11), not to mention comrades CH and DI (£10 each).

All the above made their donations by bank transfer or

standing order, while comrades TM and JN each contributed £5 via PayPal. Thanks to one and all!

Yes, £447 is a pretty good start to the month after just five days, but you know me - I take nothing for granted! True, I know so many of our readers acknowledge the outstanding role played by the *Weekly Worker* in not only reporting, but campaigning to make something worthwhile out of Jeremy Corbyn's Your Party. The last thing we need is another 'broad front' party, a Labour Party mark two or a party version of Momentum. No we need a principled, democratic, mass party based on a solid, principled Marxist programme.

Fancy adding your initials to the list of donors above? Go to the web address below for details ●

Robbie Rix

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leaders constantly squabble to ensure who retains or gains power.

That is not to say we should adopt the ‘co-leaders’ model, as that ensures that, instead of all the patronage networks fighting over one centre of power, there are two centres of power often competing with each other. This was a problem for the Romans, with their rule of two elected consuls, as it is for us with the rule of Corbyn and Sultana. Socialists, the rank and file of the party, must argue for the executive committee - elected either annually or every two years by the membership - to lead the party between conferences.

Of course, there are always going to be divisions between factions of the party, but with the rule of a committee at least the influence of ‘celebrities’ such as Corbyn or Sultana would be reduced, with them only having one vote each among many others, instead of being able to declare policy or decide the party’s direction themselves. Factions would therefore have to win support for their policies and ideas among the party members, rather than there being clandestine manoeuvres among cliques and patronage networks.

Parliamentary parties, by procedure, must have a ‘parliamentary leader’, but this individual should be chosen by the executive committee and must have no additional powers. The matter of deciding how the party votes on legislation must be decided by either the executive committee or other democratic mechanisms within the party.

We should also think seriously about the future of the party. If it is successful then eventually the party is going to be the official opposition, at which point there must be a ‘shadow cabinet’, and eventually, if the party is elected to office, a prime minister and cabinet. We cannot work via the same conventions as most political parties, allowing a ‘leader’ to seek a ‘mandate’ from

the country, so that they can appoint the cabinet and decide policy effectively by themselves (that is what a prime minister does: if their cabinet disagrees with them, they can simply remove their opponents from it).

The executive committee must appoint the cabinet, and decide policy. A Your Party prime minister must not, like those of other parties, become a celebrity president who controls both the executive and legislative agendas. Instead they must be subordinate to the executive committee, which could remove them from office at any time.

We should not be campaigning for some celebrity politician to rule the people of Britain. Rather we should campaign for a mandate for our party to govern, and that the party functions as a democratic instrument of its members.

Dovah
Oxfordshire

YP Manchester

Between 125 and 150 members of Your Party met in Manchester for the pre-conference assembly - a disappointing turnout, considering it was for the entirety of Greater Manchester. The hastily organised event was stoically run by local volunteers, who had been drafted in at the last minute.

The assembly itself would not have taken place without the efforts of the Stockport proto-branch, which, with very little money or time, managed to secure a venue. Those at the new party centre would do well to reflect on the fact that an unrecognised branch, without the ability to contact local members or to choose how they are represented at conference, were the only reason members across Greater Manchester were able to meet at all.

The assembly itself started off chaotically, when a member of Socialist Alternative sought a vote on changing the format of the day from non-voting breakout groups to a plenary session with votes.

Despite there almost certainly being a majority in the room for this, the facilitators were directed by an unknown figure to refuse any vote or changes at that point. However, from there on in the assembly did defy the diktats of the new party centre and took votes and had discussions that deviated from what was prescribed. This in part was down to the sensible and calm approach of the facilitators, who sought to give wide scope to the breakout groups, but also to the organised left - particularly the Greater Manchester Left Caucus, the Democratic Socialists and RS21, who all had mobilised a significant number of the attendees and also brought the largest number of younger party members to the assembly. The SWP, Socialist Alternative, Anticapitalist Resistance, SPEW, Counterfire and the Revolutionary Communist Group were all well represented too.

We were broken up into 13 breakout groups that were tasked with going through the constitution, the standing orders and the political statement rather swiftly. That went out of the window immediately and most groups focused on questions and sections of the documents that were most contentious. Every group voted on amendments or statements that were to be fed back to the assembly and many raised the same concerns, gripes and amendments.

Thanks to a combination of votes and applause during the feedback session, some common themes were obvious. Nobody was remotely impressed or assured by the inept stewardship of the new party by the Independent Alliance and Jeremy Corbyn’s office, with many groups calling for the leadership election to happen immediately after the conference or far before the May elections and for no reserved or automatic seats for MPs and councillors. This was also backed up by almost every group feeding back that the branches should be established immediately. Other wide areas of agreement were that branches should be well funded and be able to direct their own work. The need to unite the left and to scrap the attempt to ban members of socialist organisations and factions from the constitution had near unanimous support.

There was also widespread support for ensuring all MPs, elected representatives and officers were paid the average wage of a skilled worker, were open to recall by branches and members, and were subject to reselection and term limits. Likewise collective leadership was preferred over a single leader, with only one of the 13 breakout groups favouring a single leader. In terms of organising conference, nobody was satisfied with what had been taking place, with most groups tilting towards branches electing and sending delegates in the future - though there was also support for sortition or a mix of both.

On the political statement and on uniting the left, there was near universal support for a much clearer socialist basis for the new party, with many groups wanting the new party to be openly for trans liberation, against Zionism, and for an end to the slaughter and occupation of the Palestinian people - as well as getting Britain out of Nato, scrapping the anti-trade union laws and so on. It was proposed that the new party must not enter government at any level until the minimum demands, programme or manifesto could be met. This was well received, but clearly needs further agitation and explanation.

All of these votes and

accompanying notes have been sent back to the new party centre. Knowing that Manchester, along with many other assemblies over the last week, have voted on amendments, we should expect and demand that these are heard and given to delegates as options at the conference. What Manchester showed in a small way is that the real engine of this new party is actually the organised left - those who are the backbone of our unions, tenants campaigns and Palestine protests. It is clear that the opportunity for the left to become more than the sum of its parts is still there and communists must roll up their sleeves and fight for it.

CJ
Manchester

YP South London

Your Party’s South London regional assembly convened on November 2 to discuss its four founding documents and was attended by roughly 350-400 people. Like most other assemblies, we were organised into small focus groups of about 10 members to discuss small sections of the documents. There was a lot of sentiment for this process to be run differently.

A comrade from the Greenwich and Bexley proto-branch wrote a good resolution arguing against the ongoing ‘stewardship’ of the Independent Alliance of MPs until March 2026 and calling for a change in the agenda, in order to have some time to discuss the documents together as a whole group and express a collective view on key issues via a consultative vote. He got some support for this, including 10 signatures from our Lewisham proto-branch. But, when another member attempted a similar request at the beginning of the meeting, he was dismissed by the self-selected leadership running it, despite a significant minority raising their hands to at least be able to hear and vote on it. This was unfortunately in keeping with the lack of democracy and transparency of the whole process leading up to the national conference in a few weeks.

The facilitators of the small breakout groups are tasked with typing up their discussion notes, which will then apparently be indeterminately composited and reviewed. The whole thing felt like a performative farce and the discussions of the documents were almost incidental - in contrast to the heartening early reports of the South Yorkshire assembly the same day, which managed to overturn the prescribed discussion rules and allow consultative votes. The ‘Sheffield Declaration’ was used as a framework for this: a set of amendments to the founding documents, which include basic workers’ democratic demands, like being able to recall our representatives.

We spoke with others at the event who want to make YP a real vehicle for working class power. There is determination to not create another Labour Party mark two and a burning need for a mass working class party - we have heard this countless times in our local branch as well. We want to take Zarah Sultana at her word: “We are not here to beg for crumbs off the table. We are taking the fucking lot.”

But to do that we will have to engage in political struggle for revolutionary change. We must be distinct from capitalist parties like the Greens, who are already implementing cuts and claiming that continuing this is inevitable. In contrast, YP must stand on a ‘no

cuts’ basis and defiance of the anti-trade union laws as part of a fight to nationalise the major corporations without compensation under workers’ democratic control of all of society.

We will have our differences about the best way forward, but these need to be democratically debated at every level of YP, rather than subordinated to the next electoral campaign. Only then do we stand a chance of winning - at the ballot box, but, more importantly, in the streets and workplaces.

We can be reached at marxistbulletin@gmail.com.

Roxanne Baker and Hans-Peter Breitman
Lewisham YP proto-branch

Learning Play

What started life at Communist University in August this year as the ‘Learning Play cultural programme’ takes its next step this weekend as a fringe to the Historical Materialism London conference at the SOAS University of London running from November 6 to 9.

There will be performance fragments taking place between various sessions each day and a gathering on the Saturday to explore a present-day emulation of what Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin planned as a “Diderot Gesellschaft” - an international collective of radical artists, writers and scientists. We are meeting on the steps of the main building at 1.45pm, from where we will go to a room with Zoom facilities. Anyone caring to join online can contact me on my social media outlets @tamdeanburn.

We also have a radio broadcast probing these themes on the Friday evening from 10 to 11.30pm on the Bad Punk show on ResonanceFM.com.

Tam Dean Burn
email

More ‘terrorists’?

The number of Allianz offices hit by protestors mounted to 15 on November 3, after activists sprayed paint and smashed windows over the arms insurer in Barcelona, Italy, The Netherlands, Mexico and Ireland. Actions started on Sunday night in the UK, France, Germany, Austria, Spain and Taiwan, after Allianz renewed its contract with Israel’s main weapons provider, Elbit Systems, on November 1.

Allianz is one of Europe’s largest insurance companies, fuelling destruction worldwide through its underwriting practices. It insures Textron, complicit in the genocide in Gaza, and US nuclear weapons; and Chevron, which bankrolls the genocide as Israel’s largest gas producer.

Allianz has drawn criticism for investing in Israeli shares and bonds, which the UN’s special rapporteur for the occupied Palestinian territories, Francesca Albanese, claimed are “implicated in the occupation and genocide”.

Allianz shields the world’s worst wrong-doers from accountability, while drawing premiums from unimaginable human suffering and environmental destruction. That is deranged, inhumane profiteering at its very worst. We have no choice but to escalate till they withdraw.

Sunday’s actions marked the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration in 1917, when the British government and Zionists signed over Palestinian lands to occupation and then waged over 30 years of British military assaults against Palestinians.

Shut the System
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Online Communist Forum



Sunday November 9 5pm

Potatoes in a sack?

The Irish peasantry and class struggle

Speaker: Marc Mulholland

Use this link to register:
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Organised by CPGB: communistparty.co.uk and
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A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain

MONARCHY

Was always time to talk about a republic

Scandal alone is not enough to do away with the House of Windsor. We need determined political activity to put an end to the monarchy and establish the democratic republic, argues **Paul Demarty**

A weekly publication schedule is always a hostage to fortune, and mere hours after my last article on the travails of the British royal family went to press,¹ Buckingham Palace finally creaked into action concerning the erstwhile Prince Andrew.

Readers will be aware that, as of this time of writing, this man is formally stripped of his old titles. His lease on the Royal Lodge - a vast mansion in the grounds of Windsor Castle - is summarily terminated. This is all accomplished on the authority of the king and the heir to the throne. He remains, bizarrely, eighth in the line of succession, since excising him would require primary legislation. But, unless a meteor strikes Windsor at the wrong moment, that is unlikely to make much difference in practice.

He is not completely out on his ear, however. He is to be found accommodation on yet another royal estate, Sandringham. He is to receive a lump sum payoff, according to *The Guardian*, in the six-figure range, to cover moving expenses. (What are they doing for that kind of money? Flying his crusty boxers over on a magic carpet?) To follow is an annuity, "which is designed to prevent him overspending in his new life as a commoner" - a bizarre formulation 'The Graun' does not deign to explain². Presumably it is some kind of insurance against him simply being hoovered up as an asset by some foreign government. We shall see if this sum is enough to keep this preposterously venal man in the manner to which he is accustomed.

Clean-up

We are, in short, in the clean-up stage of the Prince Andrew affair - although part of the clean-up is the excision of the P-word altogether. Newspapers from *The Guardian* to the *Daily Mail* have already replaced the 'Prince Andrew' tags on their websites with 'Andrew Mountbatten Windsor' - a change also reflected in Andrew's Wikipedia page (this was the pre-existing house style in this paper, we do not hesitate to gloat).

Those inclined to deceive themselves congratulate Charles and William for acting 'decisively', even though this scandal has been bubbling for almost 15 years, and swoon at the assertion that "Their Majesties wish to make clear that their thoughts and utmost sympathies have been, and will remain with, the victims and survivors of any and all forms of abuse". Such is the British monarchy in the modern age: prop up the prodigal son with millions of pounds over decades of scandal and, when it finally becomes too much to bear, issue a statement in vacuous HR-department jargon.

Of course, it may be in fact the case that these two men were, in fact, far more concerned about the allegations that kept washing up at the door of the Royal Lodge than was apparent in their actions heretofore. It is generally accepted that, in the worst days of Andrew's scandal - his initial association with Jeffrey Epstein at the time of the latter's imprisonment for child sex trafficking, and his calamitous 2019 interview with Emily Maitlis on BBC's 'Newsnight' - he was protected largely by his doting mother, the late Elizabeth. She has been dead for three years, during which time the king and crown prince - we are given to understand by the royal lobby - have become increasingly uneasy at their association with Andrew.

The problem for them is that it is clearly *the institution* that has protected Andrew, even as his position



Liberal republican protest, May 2023

became completely untenable. They are now in charge of it, and their dilatory practice in dealing with this scandal is at issue. The same problem arises as in any potential cover-up: what did they know, and when? They certainly cannot have had any more faith in Andrew's 2019 excuses than the rest of us.

Where does this leave the Firm? It is certainly a good moment for us republicans to hawk our wares. At issue is not merely the peccadilloes of one man - really, by the historic standards of the kings, queens and princes of England, quite *mild* ones. It is the impunity Andrew enjoyed for years, the way scrutiny of his financial affairs has been frustrated by the united front of the British state, never mind the small matter of his association with Epstein.

This is a weak point in the very idea of monarchy, which amounts to nothing more than the idea that society gets along better if the centre of sovereignty is something insulated from the cut and thrust of day-to-day political life. To have a king *just is* to have a king who can protect his family from the consequences of its actions by mere acts of fiat. That is why one has a king instead of just a prime minister.

Yet ours is a *constitutional* monarchy, where the power of the king is largely exercised through an oligarchic parliament, which is not robustly insulated from popular opinion (though for our part we do not call this arrangement 'democracy'). So far as things are trucking along smoothly at the palace, the government of the day - and above all the permanent institutions of the coercive and bureaucratic state - enjoys all the benefits of royal impunity. Royal scandals, among their many effects, can disclose this all too cosy arrangement.

Robust institution

Having said that, we should not overstate the danger presently faced by the monarchy. There is a tendency, among liberals of republican persuasion, to imagine that this or that scandal will somehow cause the monarchy to wink out of existence. After the death of Diana Spencer in 1997, the standard form of this idea

was that Elizabeth should be the last of them, and the country would simply not tolerate Charles on the throne. Now the idea has taken hold that Charles should be the last of them. Thus Will Lloyd concludes a not-uninteresting piece in the *New Statesman*, these days effectively the house journal of Blue Labour:

William should stop the rot and acknowledge the truth when his father dies. The mystique is gone. Charles III should be the last King of England. He is the last Windsor who really believes in any of the hocus-pocus of his house. William doubts that God exists. How can he go through with a coronation in Westminster Abbey without acknowledging that God has put him there, on the throne? Abolition would be contested and vicious. Or, the monarchy could end very beautifully.³

This is a rather thin thread of hope to cling to. The monarchy, after all, survived Wallis Simpson and Henri Paul, and for that matter William IV's many mistresses. In the end, it survived Oliver Cromwell. It is a robust institution, for all it seems entirely directionless at present. Lloyd notes acerbically the lack of interest in reading on the part of William, the fact that, when he accedes to the throne, he will be the first in more than a century not to have read Bagehot on the British constitution. By the same token, however, he need not feel any great existential dread, not understanding his predicament. How can he go through a Westminster Abbey coronation as an agnostic? We reply with Napoleon Bonaparte: Paris is worth a mass.

Examples could be adduced from further afield. There are many kings and queens in northern Europe, mostly living quiet lives and wheeling themselves out for ceremonial occasions. Juan Carlos of Spain abdicated in 2014, after a scandal over an elephant hunt in Botswana; but there is still a king of Spain. There is, indeed, still a king of Belgium, despite the numerous controversies of the life of Leopold II - from genocidal exploitation of the Congo (long his

personal fiefdom) to underage sex scandals of a distinctly Mountbatten-Windsor flavour.

The job of work done by the institution in modern pseudo-democratic capitalist societies is, in part, to promote the idea of a space above politics - a vantage point from which the interests of the politicians seem trivial and self-interested. It is thus a natural support for the permanent parts of the state - the bureaucracy and army. Our armed forces, after all, swear their loyalty not to parliament or even the country, but to the crown. Lloyd correctly intuits this, calling the ideology "Windsorism", and equally correctly replies that "politics is not a squalid exercise in 'division'. We need more politics, not less."

Yet he is wrong in expecting that the current wave of anti-systemic politics represents a unique danger to this ideology. The anti-system people, after all, react precisely against the evident 'squalidity' of actually existing politics today; this *might* lead them to more radical monarchism, as it did during the expenses scandal of 2009, when there were frequent calls for the queen to dissolve parliament. Anti-systemic politics - or populism, if you prefer - is a style, or perhaps even a source of inchoate energy, rather than a programme. Left at that level, it becomes attached to a particular programme by cathexis rather than rational argument, which, of course, leaves it at the mercy of the paid persuaders of the bourgeois media.

No anachronism

We can put this another way by saying that it is fruitless for opponents of the monarchy to reject it on the basis that it is an anachronism - a strange fether to be cast off on the way to the future. It is a more or less well-functioning institution that plays an indispensable role in the statecraft of many countries; indeed, arguably, the republics of France and the United States are able to continue only because their presidents increasingly approximate to monarchs anyway (consider the recent protests in the US - 'no kings', indeed). It is absolutely and irreducibly of our time, as proper to us as it was to the peasants of the 1300s, and to suppose we have outgrown it is a delusion.

What would it mean to outgrow

it for real? It would mean creating a mass culture of truly *substantive* and democratic republicanism. The masses so convinced would understand that constitutional monarchy, far from being an anachronism, effectively expresses the universal presence of domination throughout bourgeois society. At one time, kings - according to the prevailing theory - found their place in a great chain of being linking illiterate peasants to the orders of angels and God himself. So it is today, really, except the peasants have become workers and petty bourgeois, the squires are supplanted by managers, and God by capital.

Jeremy Corbyn

To really grasp monarchy as an affront to democratic life is inescapably to denounce the tyranny of the boss over the factory floor, of the private equity magnate over innumerable factories he sees as mere cost centres, of the world's governments over their petty fiefdoms. The substantive alternative to such tyranny is not a modern liberal-capitalist society shorn of supposed 'feudal relics', but the dismissal of all such tyrants great and small, and with it the establishment of democratic control of all social life - in a word, socialism.

The obverse is also true. Those, such as Jeremy Corbyn, who shrink from addressing the question of the monarchy - or do so only at opportune moments like the current fiasco - are unequal to the task they set themselves (Your Party's Political Statement does not even mention the monarchy). Our goal is not merely an alternative set of election pledges, but a wholly different structure of politics. We are against good kings as much as bad princes, and preparing the mass of society for authentic collective self-government means saying so loudly and continuously ●

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Notes

1. 'Not just one rotten apple' *Weekly Worker* October 30: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1559/not-just-one-rotten-apple.
2. www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/oct/31/andrew-in-line-for-six-figure-payment-and-annual-stipend-from-king-sources-say.
3. www.newstatesman.com/politics/2025/10/abolish-the-monarchy.

YP REPUBLICANISM

Call for a Political Statement boycott

Citing Tony Benn and his 1992 Commonwealth Bill, Steve Freeman of the Republican Labour Education Forum calls for dividing the working class movement in Britain along national lines, and a common organisation with the petty bourgeois Irish nationalists of Sinn Féin

If you think YP is moving slowly and stealthily down the royal road to socialism, it is time to sound the trumpets of rebellion (I note that Jack Conrad is in a similar rebellious mood). Boycotting the Political Statement means opposing it and not seeking to amend it. We have no confidence this political statement is taking us in the right direction or that there is the right process in place to rectify it. A republican boycott is a call for all YP republicans of various political shapes and sizes to unite openly and together.

A republican boycott does not prevent criticism of the document. Indeed it requires more: it is a demand for a more representative and accountable process for drafting a programme. Instead of making politics and programme the priority, we could end up arguing politics through the mystification of rules and regulations.

It should be made clear there is no proposal to boycott the other three documents and rules. If this was the case we should simply resign. A limited boycott is not an exit note, but a declaration of intent to fight for a republican programme. No party can be welded into a fighting force without debate over programme. As republicans we should not board a train where the tracks and destination are already set down. It is worse if the wrong programme is hidden behind a few general abstract principles that nobody can object to.

Rabbit hole

A boycott of the YP Political Statement is a call for all social republicans to unite and not go down the rabbit hole of amendments. It is a vote of no confidence in the current process. The statement ignores and treats democratic issues as marginal or irrelevant to the working class. Working class republicanism stands directly against this on the basis of historical evidence - that the democratic republic is essential to the struggle for democracy, freedom and socialism.

Of course, there are different views among republicans over the programme. There are differences over the national question, for example. These are set aside, but not ignored, for the purposes of a united front. A boycott is not about each group of republicans writing a detailed alternative of their own: it is about finding common ground and demanding a process for developing a real programme and rejecting the poor substitute on offer.

This question posed in YP is the struggle between *social monarchists* and *social republicans* and between the *unionists* and *anti-unionists*. Of course, this means four possible combinations, which individual comrades might support. As argued before, the only consistent democratic position is *republican anti-unionism*. In England, this requires 'revolutionary' thinking outside the political and cultural box of the ruling class. It is not too difficult to work out that the YP Political Statement is built on the rotting foundations of social monarchist-unionism.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is facing a growing 'crisis of democracy'. The broken, decayed and corrupted leftovers of the social monarchy has led to a loss of confidence in political-constitutional order in Westminster. It finds resonance in the instability of the union of England, with Northern



Tony Benn in 2006: long career as MP and government minister

Ireland, Scotland and Wales and the scandal shaking the royal family. The working class movement in England and the rest of the kingdom are arriving at a political cross roads.

The central strategic political question is the future of the United Kingdom in the wider imperialist world order. There is now an unprecedented crisis in the kingdom itself. This might explain why 150,000 people marched through London under the banner, "Unite the Kingdom". In its present state of degeneration, the kingdom is edging along the road to right populism (Reform UK) and fascism.

The working class in England will be forced by social conditions to decide whether to continue supporting the Orange constitution (1688-1707) on which the Labour Party was built. Does the constitutional monarchy, on the basis of the sovereignty of the crown-in-parliament and the union of nations, serve the political and economic interests of the working class throughout the kingdom? The YP Political Statement provides no recognition of this question and no answer.

How can we make the allegation that this silence is in fact social monarchist and unionist? Evidence comes from two letters the Republican Labour Education Forum sent to Jeremy Corbyn. The first in July 2025 referenced the need to break with Labourism and the pioneering work of Tony Benn's Commonwealth Bill. A second follow-up letter was sent to Jeremy with a copy to Zara Sultana on August 14. The letter's proposals can be summarised as follows:

- The circulation of Benn's 1992 Commonwealth Bill to Your Party supporters.
- The principle of the sovereignty of the people and 'democracy from below'.
- Application of these principles to YP members and their inclusion in the

party rules.

■ All YP representatives must be regularly elected, accountable and subject to recall.

■ An English parliament alongside the existing Scottish and Welsh parliaments.

■ End all jurisdiction of the British crown in Ireland.

■ End all jurisdiction of the British crown over England, Scotland and Wales.

■ England, Scotland, Wales must become 'free nations' with sovereignty of the people.

■ These nations are free to negotiate new constitutional relations if they choose.

■ There must be autonomous English, Scottish and Welsh parties.

■ There should be a coordinating committee of the three republican parties.

■ Sinn Féin should be invited to send representatives to this committee.

These demands do not constitute a programme, but point in a definite republican direction, both in the relations between England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and in the constitution of the new party and relations between members. Our letters were seeking a constructive engagement with a 'member-led' process. We have not had a reply to the second letter. We do not know why and will not speculate. We do know for sure with the publication of the YP Political Statement that none of our proposals are recognised or incorporated into it.

No programme

The YP Political Statement begins: "This statement sets out broad principles and purpose. It is not a programme or a manifesto - policies will be decided through the party's democracy." The opening words of the very first document show us where we are. Without a programme,

there is no real party. The programme is the rock on which the party is built. It is a democratic contract between members and between the rank and file and elected leaders. The opening words are a declaration that we intend to found the party on sand or marshy land.

This statement is a substitute for a political programme. It articulates familiar abstract ideas of peace, equality, social justice and international solidarity. It is ahistorical, equally applicable at any point in time since 1945. It makes no connection with the history of class struggle in the UK. This level of generality leaves YP in danger of sleepwalking back into a future that no longer exists.

The question is what comes first: the party programme or the party organisation? This is the 'chicken and egg' problem. Do we build an organisation and add a programme later or is it the other way round? Does the founding conference discuss the draft programme first or the draft rules? If we are forced to choose one, science tells us the 'chicken' programme comes first. Here we have 'eggs being laid' in documents two, three and four. We are left to puzzle what will be hatched - chicken, duck or dinosaur?

After the founding conference there will be an organisation without a programme. Let us consider the 'Organisational Strategy Year I Paper'. This sets out YP "strategic objectives" as "(1) Building membership, (2) building structures and (3) building organisation". There is no mention of drafting a programme. As far as work in the first year is concerned, the focus of these proposals is "in keeping with the Political Statement, constitution and standing orders": therefore, organisation trumps programme.

The over-arching theme of the Political Statement is 'democratic socialism'. The statement says: "Your Party is a democratic ('member-led') socialist party." Its goal is the "transfer of wealth and power" to the overwhelming majority in "a democratic socialist society". At the end it says that Your Party aims for a "democratic and socialist transformation".

In the UK, if we look under the bonnet of 'democratic socialism' we can find social monarchism and social republicanism. The politics of the Labour left has long been social monarchist and described as democratic socialist. The Labour manifestos of 2017 and 2019 exemplify social monarchism. By contrast 'republican socialism' says what it means and means what it says.

The aim of YP democratic socialism is to "win elections" with a "programme for real change" and to "shift the balance of power at every level of society". How is this balance of power to be shifted? The answer is by "organising and campaigning in communities and workplaces, trade unions and social movements across the nations and regions". How does this differ from the aims of the social monarchist Labour Party? In the British constitutional monarchy 'winning power' must mean, and can only mean, transferring power from the crown-in-parliament to the people. The YP formulation limits itself to "winning elections" and "shifting the balance of power" towards his majesty's subjects in their communities, etc. The ideological source of this error is to be found in the 'economism' of the Labour Party.

The YP statement says the "task is to build a mass party for the many that represents and is rooted in the broadest possible social coalition with the working class at its heart". This implies a class coalition of popular forces. It speaks of the 'few' in contradiction to the "overwhelming majority". This is the language of left populism without a republican programme. If there is a case for a left-populist republican party, this should be considered on its merits rather than snuck in by the back door.

The default politics of the Labour left is 'loyalism'. All YP MPs swear an oath of loyalty to the king. The right honourable Jeremy Corbyn is a member of the king's Privy Council. Working class political activists are instinctively republican. This statement avoids calling for a democratic republic. It steers clear of terms such as 'king', 'kingdom', the 'United Kingdom' and the slogan, 'No kings', popular in the United States. There is no reference to the republican case to extend democracy and achieve popular sovereignty.

The British union and the nations of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales are not identified in the political statement. Unionism is one of the central pillars of the UK and the unspoken position of the Labour left. The Labour manifestos of 2017 and 2019 naturally assumed the permanence of the union. This pro-unionist stance is recognised indirectly in the words, "campaigning ... across the nations and regions".

The YP Political Statement must be seen together with the three other documents. The absence of democratic specific politics in this short statement stands in stark contrast to the lengthy documents on organisation and rules. What is the purpose of the complex set of rules, some of which are difficult to decipher? We are directed from the priority of programme into marshlands of organisational controversy. The dominance of organisational politics sheds light on a bureaucratic method of top-down party-building, based on the assumption that constitution and rules trump programme.

Orange Labourism

A republican boycott of YP Political Statement aims to draw attention to the fact that YP has no programme (and no republican programme) and no democratic means of creating one. We should not forget that a boycott is another democratic way in which members' voices can be heard.

The working class movement in England faces a stark choice. We are moving to more authoritarian government and being dragged down the road to fascism and the end of liberal democracy. The choice we face is between the orange and sea-green. The orange road stands by the constitution of 1688-1707, as subsequently amended, transformed into a social monarchy and maintained to the present day. This is the politics of Labourism.

The democratic alternative is represented by the sea-green of the Levellers, who in 1649 fought for a republican Commonwealth of England. It is more than 30 years since Benn put forward his landmark bill in the House of Commons. It is time to take advantage of his experience and insights and build a mass republican party. The republican boycott is a marker that says, 'We are not going along the orange road' ●

YOUR PARTY

Doing things differently

South Yorkshire Your Party regional assembly was a model of transparency, open debate, participation, democracy and control from below. **Tina Becker**, a member of the Sheffield proto-branch steering group, reports

Our regional assembly, Sunday November 2 in Sheffield, appears to be the only one nationally - so far - where local members were actually in charge. This was down to a few 'happy accidents': for a start, the Sheffield proto-branch is relatively far advanced, having first been set up in the summer by Lee Rock and the Sheffield Left, with a meeting of over 200 people. That avoided confessional sects like the Socialist Workers Party taking over or setting up their own tame auxiliary outfit. We elected a politically diverse steering committee and held a number of successful public meetings. There are constituency and ward groups too.

When one of us was asked to book a venue for the assembly in Sheffield, we quickly decided to also set up a proper assembly organising team that could start to make preparations. Thirty people joined the team representing all five proto-branches in South Yorkshire (Sheffield, Doncaster, Rotherham, Barnsley and Chesterfield) and we met a few times on Zoom to discuss how we could 'tweak' the national format to make things as democratic as possible. We decided early on that we would make a very conscious effort to let the members and the branches decide how they wanted to run the assembly, and if, for example, they should be able to vote.

Zoom meetings

Sheffield proto-branch also ran a well-attended public Zoom meeting the week before the assembly, where we went through some of the key questions in the four founding documents. Comrades were able to ask questions and we collectively discussed problematic or unclear formulations - in other words, it helped comrades to prepare for the assembly itself.

We did not actually know that we would be left to run the assembly ourselves (that only transpired 72 hours before!), but we tried from the beginning to involve as many people in the process as possible. We began by sending the participants in our various WhatsApp and Facebook groups an online survey, asking them a few questions about how they would like the assembly to be organised. It transpired that most were not happy about some of the proposals coming from HQ, including their plans for how the constitution and the standing orders should be discussed. (Somebody at HQ had divided the two documents into 11 sections and proposed that each working group of 10 people would be randomly allocated two of the 11 sections.) Comrades also indicated that they would want this to be a decision-making event, where - after thorough discussions - comrades should be able to vote.

At the start of our assembly, we therefore asked the 200 participants (about half of them quite young, and many from the pre-Corbyn era) if they wanted the assembly to allow voting, in the small groups as well as the final feedback session - and, unsurprisingly, nobody put their hand up *against* that proposal. And why would they? I believe we were also the only region that managed to run the event in a hybrid format, allowing comrades unable to travel to participate in the discussions via Zoom. This was only possible because we had a team of very committed comrades involved, who wanted to make sure the event was a success. We also produced our own briefings for attendees and



Team Corbyn: determined to keep members powerless

facilitators, because information from HQ was in rather short supply.

When it came to discussing the four documents, our organising team decided that we would present the participants with two options: they could either stick with the HQ plan ('option 1') or they could freely decide in their group what to discuss ('option 2'). Reflecting pretty much the results from our earlier survey, a third of the 200 or so people present went with option 1, while the others opted for the free discussion. At the back of our mind, we feared this might become a bit chaotic - but it did not. Very ably guided by our two main facilitators, comrades in all groups quickly agreed which issues they wanted to discuss and, judging by the lively feedback session, it was particularly the rights, structures and funding of the branches that comrades were concerned about. Plus the call that official branches should be set up immediately (and where proto-branches exist, they should be recognised ASAP). All facilitators agreed that the discussion was much more important than the 'note taking' (via an online Google facility) - chiefly because nobody knows what - if anything - will happen to those notes. The groups instead focused on clarifying various concepts in the documents and on formulating what needs changing.

Throughout, we also canvassed comrades' opinions on a number of key issues in a so-called 'visualisation exercise' (a brilliant suggestion made by comrade Miranda), which was initially conceived as a method to circumvent HQ's ban on voting at assemblies.¹ I am really glad we kept this in, even after it turned out we were able to run the event unchaperoned, because it proved to be a very popular addition to the usual format of organising left events. Participants were able to 'vote' with coloured dots to show if they preferred the current formulations in the draft constitution/standing orders - or the alternative proposals prepared by the assembly team (which were based on the seven key amendments agreed by Sheffield steering committee and which have become known rather grandly as the 'Sheffield Demands').²

The nine coloured posters on the wall featuring these questions worked really well and always had a good crowd around them: comrades were able to read through some of

the most controversial issues in the documents, consider the alternatives and then visually express their point of view. Some were sure about their view and 'voted' as soon as they came into the hall. Others felt less certain about an issue and waited until further discussions in their working group. Of course, there was also a 'neither' option available, though few made use of that box.

Members first

The result was not always a foregone conclusion. For example, on the question of 'local assemblies', a majority voted in favour of the current proposal ("All branches shall undertake the necessary work to run regular public-facing, local community assemblies") instead of our proposal: "Local branches should decide how they organise, if they want to set up assemblies - and how those should be run."³ I suspect that, had we had the space to discuss this issue further, the vast majority would have gone with the steering committee's proposals - after all, the clear vibe of the whole assembly was very much 'Put the members and branches first!' This is a problem with breaking up into working groups - contentious issues are not really resolved, at least not in front of, and with the active participation of, the whole audience (more below).

We also used the 'visualisation exercise' as a way to structure our feedback session, which made it much sharper than those kinds of sessions usually are. Chair Sophie read through each of the nine posters, the current formulation and our amendments, and then explained how much support they had each received. This allowed both the majority and the minority to be seen and heard. She then asked if any of the working groups had come up with a formulation or an issue *different* from what was already covered on the posters. It turned out that we seem to have managed to cover *most* of the issues that members were concerned with, meaning that we were able to go through some uncontroversial issues rather quickly.

For example, a clear majority voted via dots that we should campaign for a "party of the whole left", where all groups are positively welcomed and the establishment of temporary and permanent platforms and tendencies is allowed. There was also no need to discuss at great length

why the constitution's proposal for "confidentiality on internal party matters" is a bad idea and that the phrase should be deleted. Instead, members at our assembly clearly and overwhelmingly opted for our proposed amendment, demanding that the leadership should publish detailed minutes of all its meetings and that all of our elected leaders should be instantly recallable and only receive the average skilled workers' wage, donating the rest to the party. We do not want MPs defecting to Your Party for careerist reasons: they should be representing the working class, and it is very difficult to do that when you are on almost £100,000 a year (plus many, many expenses and freebies)!

The visualisation exercise also had the added benefit that comrades knew exactly what the emergency motion moved by the Sheffield steering committee was about, because it featured all those amendments - and they were able to make an informed decision when voting on it. A couple of friendly(ish) amendments were accepted, but we did vote down a proposal demanding that platforms and tendencies should be forced to publish their minutes - this obviously should only be a requirement for *elected* leadership bodies, who should be held accountable by the members, not for platforms and tendencies.

We did not discuss the political statement at great length - mainly because it is so vague. Quite a few comrades criticised the fact that it is way too short and makes references to cross-class alliances rather than the need to focus on the working class (which is everybody who has to sell their labour power, as well as all of those depending on the 'wages fund' - pensioners, students, carers, the disabled and long-term sick etc). Comrades also criticised the fact that it presents "redistribution of wealth and power" as the apparent solution, when in fact it is no such thing: the "billionaires" (presented in the document as *the* problem) would, firstly, use their considerable influence and wealth to prevent any government enforcing such laws - and could also just relocate elsewhere.

In today's global economy, national solutions are no solutions at all. It is not the billionaires, but the system of international capitalism, that we have to overcome. Comrades also said that the statement should be much more focused on explaining what socialism/

communism actually is (ie, the rule of the working class), and how we can get there. "Rip it up and start again", was mentioned a few times.

In this final feedback session, many comrades also, rather unsurprisingly, expressed unhappiness with the lack of transparency and that there are no methods to actually concretely change the four founding documents. "Who decides which comments and edits are accepted and which ones aren't?", as one comrade put it. I think many appreciated the chance to actually vote on some of the policies, rather than doing an 'edit' on their computer, in the hope that somebody, somewhere will at least read it (which is very doubtful).

The Sheffield emergency motion expressed many of those frustrations and focused on the need to democratise the foundation process, as well as the party more generally, and that was agreed by an overwhelming majority at the assembly, with nobody voting against.

No doubt, we would have done things quite differently if we had known from the beginning that we could organise the assembly ourselves. For a start, I certainly would have argued against putting people into little working groups for most of the day. Although many said they found them useful, I think they are limited in what they can achieve. Yes, they can be good for educational purposes: comrades are more likely to ask questions and seek clarification. But in terms of collective decision-making, they are a hindrance and actually disempower members. By the time you get to the feedback session, everybody is knackered and just wants to go home.

No privileges

A number of issues were raised, briefly, which should really have been discussed in more detail. For example, an amendment was agreed that "Trades unions and other bodies should not have separate arrangements or special privileges". We did not have time to properly discuss what exactly that means - there might well be a need for 'separate arrangements', without that leading to any automatic representation or privileges.

Another comrade mentioned in passing that they thought there should be *more* organised sections that should have automatic representation on the YP leadership body. Not a great idea, in my view (and the opposite of what was agreed in the emergency motion). But there just was not enough time to properly discuss any of those differences, because we had to be out of the room.

Overall, however, this was a very useful event and it was good fun working with comrades across the region in planning it. Many members have told us since that they found it a lively and invigorating event, with one comrade from Doncaster even describing it as "the best event I've been at this century". That might have been a little over the top (though gratefully received), but it certainly was a very useful, as well as enjoyable, expression of member-led, democratic organisation ●

Notes

1. docs.google.com/document/d/1z_kupRoa91zrked1OYZ-iA4XGloYCRIOXCeXqYQxqo/edit?tab=t.0
2. docs.google.com/document/d/1gQWBPSGSDDJJsM5Oobv2tYxvqgLfafv_hQgX-EUCqg/edit?tab=t.0



Misleadership control-freakery

Legal threats, secrecy, tightly controlled regional assemblies and sheer incompetence has repelled many. However, the left seems to be getting its act together, says **Carla Roberts**

Preparations for the launch conference of Your Party have been so shambolic that many fear it might still get cancelled at the last minute.

Yes, Liverpool's ACC has been booked for the weekend of November 29-30 and the "contracts have been signed this week" - but, of course, booking and paying are two different things. There is now enormous pressure on Zarah Sultana to release the £1.3 million held by MOU Ltd, of which she recently became the sole director - replacing Andrew Feinstein, Beth Winter and Jamie Driscoll in a move designed to absolve those three of any legal responsibility and any hefty fines for the 'data misuse' that Jeremy Corbyn publicly accused them of, when Sultana launched her membership portal on September 18.

These fines and the prospect of a potential criminal prosecution no doubt explain why Corbyn and the other male members of the Independent Alliance of MPs refused the offer to become directors themselves, which would have given them control over the money and the data of the 20,000 or so members who joined via that portal. Incidentally, they are not part of the 50,000 members that Your Party now officially claims - a figure that is just about 'okay', considering there were 800,000 who previously expressed an interest in joining. It is unsurprising really that the vast majority have taken one look at the shambles that is Your Party and said, 'No, thank you'. Many have undoubtedly joined the Greens (whose membership now stands at over 140,000).

Should Sultana continue to 'refuse' to hand over the money (which includes £800,000 in donations that were made before she launched the portal), it could be used as a reason to cancel the conference at the last minute - and it looks like journalists are already getting briefed to that effect.¹ Considering that conference takes

place in just over three weeks time and that the sortition process has not even started, with no details about conference arrangements having been published, that is still a distinct possibility.

Add to that the fact that there is absolutely *no mechanism* to ensure any proposed amendments are guaranteed to reach conference - no matter how widely supported they might be - and it would be a relief to all of us if this shambolic event were to be cancelled. The thousands and thousands of notes and amendments taken down by facilitators in the regional assemblies will no doubt be processed in the same way as the numerous 'edits' that members have input in the 'crowd editing tool' on the Your Party website - ie, not at all.

When questioned about this amendment process, Artin Giles (who officially works for the Peace and Justice Project and now acts as Karie Murphy's enforcer in Your Party) mumbled, at a recent facilitators' training, that "a group of volunteers in London" would be going through them. Even if that were true (which is very doubtful), how on earth are these 'volunteers' chosen? How will they decide which amendment will make it into the next draft of the founding papers - and which ones will not? It does not take a genius to work out that this method gives all power to the unelected leadership.

Meanwhile, Sean Halsall, in charge of setting up YP regional assemblies around the country, has repeatedly explained that there is "a desire" and "a plan" to introduce a "ranking system" for amendments on the online portal, to allow the most popular ones to go through. That would at least be *something* and give members an (inadequate) opportunity to at least *try* and influence what the launch conference will be voting on (if there will be voting). Alas, we cannot be sure this ranking method will *actually* be introduced or whether it will remain an empty

'desire', born out of an attempt to placate members for as long as possible.

On a more positive note, a number of socialist organisations and representatives from proto-branches have started to come together on the basis of their general support for the Sheffield Demands,² which focus on a set of key amendments to the constitution, standing orders and organisational strategy papers published by HQ. A much-needed and welcome initiative by the Democratic Socialist Platform, which saw a first meeting last week of 21 representatives from groups like the Democratic Platform of Ken Loach, Counterfire, the CPGB, Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century, Republican Labour, the Manchester Left Caucus, Trans Liberation Group, Eco-Socialist Horizon and a number of proto-branches.

The Socialist Party in England and Wales, the Socialist Workers Party and the Revolutionary Communist Party were among the groups invited, but did not show. We hope they will change their minds - considering that the first of the Sheffield Demands is the desire to form "a party of the whole left", which opposes bans and proscriptions, and enshrines the right to form temporary and permanent platforms and tendencies. We would have thought that the SPEW, SWP and RCP comrades would agree to it.

The meeting agreed to form a small working group, which has now gone through some proposed 'tweaks' to the Sheffield Demands, which will be presented to a second meeting of all reps on November 8.³ Such cooperation is *politically* important, in that it reinforces and strengthens calls for the kind of party we actually need - democratic, transparent and without the type of powerful and untouchable leadership positions that the founding documents propose.

Close cooperation will also be absolutely necessary, should a

ranking system be introduced. Such a system comes with the obvious problem that different groups might have similar criticisms of the same issues in the founding documents - but because each group and proto-branch submits its own alternative version, none of them get 'ranked' high enough to go through.

Our first meeting also agreed to hold a fringe event in Liverpool on Saturday November 29, which can play a number of useful roles - hear and share feedback from the launch conference, discuss the Sheffield Demands, as well as where our ideas might differ. It will hopefully also be a useful platform to discuss future cooperation of the socialist, democratic left in Your Party. The meeting, however, agreed that we are unlikely to be able to formulate a joint alternative to the dire political statement put out by the YP HQ. Ken Loach proposed a number of points, which most participants thought did not go far enough. He was mainly focusing on protecting the welfare state and such - all important and supportable demands, which are now more than covered by Zack Polanski's Green Party. What we really need, however, is a party with a radical alternative vision, which clearly spells out our view of what socialism is - and how we can get there •

Notes

1. www.politicshome.com/news/article/zarah-sultana-accused-delaying-transfer-funds-your-party.
2. bit.ly/SheffieldDemands.
3. Get in touch if your group is not already involved at mail@dsyp.org.

Sign up to CPGB news




bit.ly/CPGBbulletin

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

Together with
SF, SDs and
Greens

Unity for what?

Catherine Connolly's 63.4% election landslide is undoubtedly a symbolic blow against the mainstream establishment and a victory for the coalition of socialist, centre-left parties and progressives who ran her campaign. However, **Anne McShane** questions the goal of a coalition government being pursued by People Before Profit

For the leadership of People Before Profit - the main left group in Irish politics and closely linked to the Socialist Workers Party in Britain - there is no doubt that Catherine Connolly's election as president marks a political sea change. PBP leaders encouraged her to stand and then threw their membership into the campaign to ensure she won both the nomination and the election. PBP claims it provided the majority of forces on the ground.

The comrades worked together with Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, the Greens and the Social Democrats, organising a 32-county campaign, despite the fact that people in the Six Counties are, of course, ineligible to vote south of the border. This emphasised Connolly's commitment to a united Ireland. True, her social media campaign was unceasing, repetitive and unimaginative ... but it worked. The question now, of course, what next for the socialist left?

Like current president Michael D Higgins (referred to in Ireland simply as Michael D), Connolly describes herself as a socialist and a pacifist, deeply committed to Irish neutrality. It is a 'social justice' kind of socialism, of course, rather than a revolutionary one. Connolly and Michael D had a close collaboration in the Galway Labour Party until 2006, when she resigned in disgust at the refusal of the party leadership to allow her to run on a joint slate with Higgins in the 2007 general election.

Independents

After an unsuccessful Dáil campaign in 2011, Connolly benefited from the trouncing of her former party in the 2016 election and became an independent TD. On her election to the Dáil she positioned herself close to the left, supporting Richard Boyd Barrett of PBP in the bid for the position of taoiseach, and joining the Dáil group, Independents 4 Change, with Clare Daly and Mick Wallace. She used her position to criticise the government over its failures on housing, institutional abuse and its links with Nato. Controversially, she travelled to Syria with Daly and Wallace in 2018, where they visited a Palestinian refugee camp - a matter of great controversy in the election campaign, when she was accused of giving support to the Assad regime.

Connolly campaigned for a 'yes' vote in the referendum on gay marriage in 2015 and for abortion rights in 2018. She opposes the scapegoating of migrants, speaking out during her election campaign against claims that Ireland is full, and describing such assertions as palpably false and deeply disturbing. She has also been a long-time supporter of Palestine. In an interview with Radio Ulster on September 23, she stated that, while she condemned the initial Hamas



Catherine Connolly speaking in the Dáil in 2024

attack, it was important to note that "history did not start on October 7".

Connolly's vote almost certainly benefited from the collapse of Fianna Fáil's campaign. Its candidate, Jim Gavin, handpicked by party leader Micheal Martin, was forced to withdraw at the 11th hour because of revelations that he had been dishonest in his dealings with former tenants, to whom he still owed money. His departure was so late in the day that his name remained on the ballot paper, triggering confusion and resentment among FF voters, 103,568 of whom refused to obey the leadership's directive to vote for Heather Humphries of Fine Gael, and still gave Gavin their number 1 vote.

Even greater numbers refused to vote for any of the candidates, with 213,738, or 13%, participating in an organised boycott. Most of the boycotters wrote the name of Maria Steen, a far-right candidate who had failed to overcome various obstacles to get on the ballot. These boycotters made their point clear - there was nobody to speak on their behalf.

The highest number of spoilt ballots were in poor working class areas - those in Dublin constituencies often recording around 20%. In three there were more spoilt ballots than first-preference votes for Fine Gael candidate Heather Humphreys. Such high numbers are unprecedented and show the depth of resentment and marginalisation among sections of the working class.

The far-right Independent Ireland is now playing the democracy card, calling the nomination process "an affront", and have drafted a bill to make things more accessible. Meanwhile attacks on hotels and direct provision centres housing asylum-seekers continue. Even second-generation migrant populations, those who were born here, are being targeted and, ridiculous as it sounds, told to 'go home'.

PBP and election

As the election results rolled in, Paul Murphy TD, leader of the PBP Rise faction, spoke to the media, calling for a united conference of leftwing parties to be held next year, adding that private discussions should take place

with other leftwing parties to explore possible cooperation ahead of the next general election.¹

He followed up with a piece in *Rupture*, Rise's publication, where he set out his position in more detail. For him the election was a "watershed moment" - "the first time that the left has won a majority of votes in a national election."² This victory had been despite a concerted smear campaign from Fine Gael and its friends in the media, and the repeated attempts of its candidate, Heather Humphries, to undermine and tarnish Connolly's reputation. Paul Murphy has announced elsewhere that he is instigating defamation proceedings against Humphries because of claims she made in an election debate that he was involved in criminal activities during the water charges campaign in 2015. In fact he and other protestors were found not guilty of any wrongdoing by a jury in 2017.

Back to the left government discussion. Murphy's argument is that the success of the alliance in the presidential campaign provides a lesson on the effectiveness of unity. It shows that "if the left unites and seeks to mobilise people, it can win". Such unity could "raise people's sights for the possibility of a left government for the first time in the history of the state". To further the process, PBP is proposing "a major conference of the left in the new year to discuss how left cooperation can be deepened, with a view to presenting a clear choice in the next general election: Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, and those who would prop them up, versus a left government."

The commitment to fighting for this alternative government - something which has been promoted by Connolly herself - comes despite the fact that it will undoubtedly be to the right of PBP: "We are ... open to participating in this dynamic towards a left government, including committing to vote to allow this government to be formed, despite the very significant limitations of the likely programme." He stated that PBP will "retain our right to independence, to put forward our own ecosocialist position, and continue strengthening our connections with communities to mobilise the power of people from below". Also, because

PBP understands that the capitalist system cannot deliver for the working class, it "will only enter a government that commits to a people-power strategy of mobilising from below to overcome the opposition of the powerful capitalist class and deliver ecosocialist change".

At a Rise meeting on November 1, I asked whether the socialist left would be invited to participate in the planned conference. Paul Murphy replied that creating a mass audience for Marxist ideas "was not about getting the existing left together". Instead it was about uniting with substantial forces to the right of PBP, and being the voice of socialism within such a formation. Jess Spears agreed and said that having a conference with the Socialist Party and Militant Left would effectively be one with "nobody". There was talk from Murphy and Spears about the "miserabilist left" who were happy to stay on the sidelines, isolated in small meetings and writing their critical arguments in papers that nobody reads. Instead Rise, as part of PBP, was bringing their Marxism to the masses.

Migration

Murphy also spoke about the need to address the concerns of those sections of the working class which feel disenfranchised and have turned to the right. I raised in that context the fact SF is peddling a populist and dangerous line to the right of the government on migration. In an effort to win voters, its spokesperson on migration, Matt Carthy, continually presses for harsher action against those served with deportation orders. He wants them arrested and removed more quickly. He rails against the fact that thousands of unidentified illegal migrants remain in Irish society. His is the language of the far right - SF's version of the "migrant bogie man" who threatens your wives and daughters, and frightens your children. SF is determined to win their voters back from Independent Ireland. They are keenly aware that polls show SF voters in the republic as far more negative about migration than their counterparts in the north. SF therefore responds with different policies, speaking out of both sides of its mouth.

Murphy responded by agreeing that SF has an abysmal record on this question. Nevertheless this did not put it outside of the left government project, as PBP could intervene to win its members over.

The major problem, of course, is that of government. We have seen the disasters of Syriza and other attempts of the left to manage capitalism. And in this case, it is not even the socialist left that PBP wants unity with. The best that can be said about PBP's potential partners in a governmental coalition is that they are 'left of

centre' - with the exception of SF, which is populist, always chasing the vote. Labour and the Green Party have been in government before as junior partners to FF and FG, and have proved to be just as assiduous in their implementation of austerity measures as their partners. The Social Democrats have not yet been tested in government, but a cursory glance at their policies will leave you in no doubt - they describe themselves as standing for "equality", "social justice" and "progressive politics". Based on their voting record, there is certainly no reason to expect the SDs to behave any differently in essence to FF and FG. Capitalism, not least through the famed markets, imposes its own discipline on those in government.

The November 3 PBP meeting to launch the campaign for a conference failed to meet expectations. Jeremy Corbyn was invited, but did not show, sending a brief message instead, while Luke Ming Flanagan, a left independent MEP, also failed to attend. PBP were left to speak to themselves and a couple of Connolly supporters.

It was, though, Richard Boyd Barrett's first meeting after a long battle with throat cancer. He was rightly warmly welcomed. He expressed his full agreement with Murphy on the enormous potential of a left government alliance. PBP "is not the same as the others" and will act as "a leftwing pressure" within the alliance. It would not adopt the policies of the other parties: "We will not drop our principles. We have no truck with scapegoating migrants."

The most interesting speaker was a journalist, Aoife-Grace Moore, a Connolly supporter. She stated that, based on her long experience as a political reporter, she would have a lot of concerns about the other parties PBP wanted to go into coalition with. All of them were "really only interested in votes", for which they would be willing to throw the likes of PBP "under the bus". There would also be a lot of egos to contend with and clashing priorities. She believed that there could not be any unity with parties who were willing to scapegoat migrants - clearly a reference to SF.

Meanwhile the Socialist Party, the Red Network, Militant Left, Socialist Democracy and Connolly Youth have been putting forward their analyses and criticisms of the Connolly campaign, PBP and its left government strategy. It is these forces that the PBP leadership is determined to ignore or belittle in its headlong rush to get into government with the big boys and girls •

Notes

1. www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/article/41728728.html.
2. rupture.ie/articles/catherine-connolly-wins-an-historic-victory-for-the-left.

SUPPLEMENT



Lev Kamenev: took over as editor-in-chief of *Pravda*

Duelling editorials

After the February 1917 revolution overthrowing the tsar, the question facing every political party in the soviet system, as well as the mass soviet constituency as a whole, was straightforward: how can we best achieve our revolutionary goals? **Lars T Lih** hones in on the polemical battle between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks before the return of Irakli Tsereteli and Vladimir Lenin to Russia

On March 12 1917 - barely two weeks after the February revolution - the Menshevik party newspaper, *Rabochaia Gazeta* (*The Worker Paper*), published an editorial entitled 'The Provisional Government and the working class'. A couple of days later, the Bolshevik newspaper, *Pravda* ('Truth'), published an editorial with a similar title: 'The Provisional Government and revolutionary Social Democracy'. These two editorials usefully set forth directly opposed answers to a key question confronting the soviet constituency: can we achieve our revolutionary goals by means of a political agreement with census (educated elite) society? The Menshevik editorial answered 'yes', and the Bolshevik editorial 'no'.

The two editorials are short; the full text of each is provided at the end of this article.¹ From them we can learn about an essential clash of outlooks - a clash that had its roots in the past and continued throughout the revolutionary year. When these editorials were published in mid-March 1917, the chief spokesmen for and against the agreement tactic - Irakli Tsereteli and Vladimir Lenin - had not yet arrived in Petrograd. Thus our duelling editorials help us see the inner logic of the conflict apart from the influence of these strong

personalities.

After the February revolution overthrowing the tsar, the question facing every political party in the soviet system, as well as the mass soviet constituency as a whole, was straightforward: how can we best achieve our revolutionary goals? In the concrete circumstances of March 1917, this question translated into defining the proper relation between the two new institutions created during the February days: the Petrograd soviet and the Provisional Government. The new government desperately needed the legitimacy that only the soviet could provide, and they received it - in return for the government's commitment to carry out sweeping revolutionary policies. This treaty - or 'agreement' (*soglashenie*), as it was usually called - provided what seemed like a path toward radical reform with the smallest possible political and social cost. But was this agreement tactic really workable? From the beginning, Russian socialists were divided between those who were pro-agreement, who thought the tactic could indeed work, and anti-agreement, who were sure that it could not.

For the time being, I will use 'Menshevik' and 'Bolshevik' more or less synonymously with 'pro-agreement' and 'anti-agreement' respectively, since the official party

newspapers endorsed these policies. Nevertheless, we should not fully equate the partisan institution with the political outlook. There were strong anti-agreement contingents within the Menshevik party as well as within the Socialist Revolutionaries - the other party with an official pro-agreement stand. There was even an evanescent pro-agreement group among the Bolsheviks that made a brief appearance in late March.

The reader should be aware that there exists a strong academic and activist consensus that what I call 'duelling editorials' are actually saying the same thing. The Bolshevik editorial, although unsigned, was drafted by Lev Kamenev, a Bolshevik leader who had just returned from internal exile in Siberia. According to the consensus, Kamenev advocated something called 'conditional support' for the Provisional Government, thus making him a 'semi-Menshevik'. I will only remark here that, by putting Kamenev's editorial side-by-side with a Menshevik editorial of around the same date, we will have a good opportunity to test the confident assertions we find in the historians.

A thorough analysis of any political document requires two tasks: subjecting it to a close textual and even linguistic reading, but also placing it in the larger environment of what might

be called its various interlocutors: that is, the other political pronouncements to which it is responding. As I show later, western academic specialists on 1917 have largely failed to take on these two tasks in their portrait of the Bolshevik outlook prior to Lenin's return in early April. The result has been major distortions - not only of Kamenev's and Stalin's activities during March, but also the meaning and impact of Lenin's April theses.

Given this situation, our examination of two short articles from mid-March 1917 takes on an unexpected weight. Underneath what may seem like a fleeting episode are two clashing positions that defined revolutionary politics throughout the year. These two editorials thus provide the reader without access to Russian-language documents one of the few opportunities to grasp the contours of a central issue - perhaps the central issue - dividing socialists: for or against the agreement tactic.

Postolku, poskolku

Postolku, poskolku - 'insofar as' - is a famous phrase from the first days of the February revolution. As the Menshevik editorial accurately states, 'insofar as' was the official policy of the Petrograd soviet: "The Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies issued a decree to support the Provisional Government to the extent and insofar

as [*postolku, poskolku*] it carries out its programme." Here is the crucial language from the Soviet resolution of March 2 that granted recognition to the new government. In this early resolution, issued when the February revolution was still unfolding, we do not find the canonical phrase *postolku, poskolku*, but rather the equivalent expression, 'to the extent that':

Comrade citizens!

The new *vlast*,² created from the more middle-of-the-road strata of [elite] society, has today made an announcement of all those reforms that it has committed itself to carrying out - some of them even while in the process of fighting against the old regime, some after this fight is over. Among these reforms are several that are to be welcomed by the broad circles of the democracy: political amnesty, a commitment to undertake the task of preparing the Constituent Assembly, implementation of civil liberties, and the removal of nationality restrictions. And we believe that, to the extent that the *vlast* being born will act toward realising these commitments and undertakes a decisive struggle against the old *vlast*, the democracy should give this *vlast* its support.³

At first sight, the phrase 'insofar as'

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might seem banal to the point of tautology: I will support you if you adopt policies that I support. But, in the context of the time, the formula was in fact highly subversive. I remember reading an anecdote about a cabinet minister of the new post-February government patiently listening to one of the innumerable worker/soldier delegates, as they greeted the government, until the delegate spokesman got to the phrase ‘insofar as’, whereupon the minister got up and stalked out. Why was he so upset? Because the formula, ‘We support you insofar as you carry out revolutionary policies’, has a direct negative implication: ‘We will remove our support if you do *not* carry out revolutionary policies - and *we* decide if this is the case.’

When you or I announce our lack of support for a government, we mean that we will not vote for it, that we will complain about it, that we will mobilise public opinion against it. But the Petrograd soviet was less like an interest group and more like a legislature and, as such, denying support and confidence to the government was a good deal more serious. It meant to remove crucial legitimacy from the government, without which (at least in the eyes of the soviet) it could not function. ‘Insofar as’ was, in fact, a declaration of the *de facto* sovereignty of the soviet, even though it claimed to grant *de jure* sovereignty to the government. And, in reality, the soviet did have the final say about the personnel and programme of the government - and everybody knew it.

The Menshevik editorial advocated loyal support for the ‘agreement’ (*soglashenie*) between the soviet and the Provisional Government. But, in order to make a persuasive case, it felt compelled to acknowledge that there were solid grounds to distrust the revolutionary inclinations of the representatives of ‘census society’ - the educated elite who helmed the government. The editorial furthermore made clear that, if the soviet refused its support and the government fell, the only alternative was a revolutionary *vlast* that was based on the soviets and therefore excluded any representatives of ‘bourgeois’ society.

The Bolshevik editorial also faced constraints in its efforts to be persuasive. The ‘insofar as’ formula was official soviet policy, and to reject it was evidently to reject the soviet. And indeed it would be rather odd to oppose otherwise desirable policies, given the fact that the government was doing them at the behest of the soviet.

Furthermore, as the Menshevik author stated, “Up to the present time, the Provisional Government is fulfilling its programme.” We shall later look at events that transpired on March 9 (a couple of days before the Menshevik editorial) that seemed to provide a dramatic confirmation. And so the Bolshevik editorial published on March 14 could not yet point to any concrete example of the Provisional Government defying the soviet. All it could do was to confidently predict that such defiance was inevitable in the near future.

To sum up, the duelling editorials agreed on some basic features of the post-February political situation:

- The soviet has *de facto* sovereignty.
- There exists an agreement between the soviet and the Provisional Government, by which the Provisional Government has committed itself to carrying out revolutionary policies, while the soviet has committed itself to provide crucial legitimacy, insofar as the agreement was honoured.
- Support for the Provisional Government of the ‘insofar as’ type is the official policy of the Petrograd soviet and enjoys strong majority support.
- To date, no serious or unresolvable disagreement has arisen between

soviet and government.

■ The Provisional Government represents ‘bourgeois’ census society, so that there is good reason to be distrustful of its genuine commitment to revolutionary policies.

■ If the ‘agreement’ between soviet and Provisional Government falls through, *then* the only logical alternative is a revolutionary *vlast* based on the soviet and excluding censitarian influence.

These areas of overlap only bring out the underlying clash on the crucial question confronting the soviet constituency: what is the best tactic for achieving our revolutionary goals? Will the agreement tactic now in place actually achieve those goals?

According to the Menshevik editorial, the agreement tactic *will* work. Furthermore, the only alternative - an anti-agreement revolutionary *vlast* - will *not* work. An attempt to install such a *vlast* would be disastrous, now or at any time in the future.

According to the Bolshevik editorial, the agreement tactic *will not* and *cannot* work. Furthermore, the anti-agreement alternative *will* work, in fact, it is the *only* way of achieving basic revolutionary goals. Admittedly, an attempt to install *at the present time* an anti-agreement *vlast* would be disastrous. The Bolsheviks must wait until the soviet constituency shares their view that the Provisional Government is a counterrevolutionary sham. Fortunately (the editorial assured its readers), this realisation will happen sooner rather than later.

Will the agreement tactic work?

Granted, says the Menshevik editorial, while the workers were the ones who actually carried out the February revolution, the new *vlast* quickly fell into the hands of “the representatives of the progressive gentry and bourgeoisie, of the liberal-democratic intelligentsia”. Yes, the new government published a revolutionary programme, but “Good intentions pave the way to hell, and we have more than once witnessed how even the most excellent promises remain on paper. [Therefore,] whether or not the programme of the Provisional Government is put into practice in the real world depends on the workers themselves and on the revolutionary democracy as a whole.”

Not to worry! If the soviet applies “unremitting pressure”, the government will indeed carry out the promised democratic reforms. And, insofar as this is the case, we workers are committed to greet and support these reforms; we must agitate to obtain support for them from the dark masses, especially the peasants: “Our task, the task of the working class as a whole, is to *help the government in this work*. Then, and only then, will it be solid and fruitful.” Luckily, the impetus of the revolution guarantees the cooperation of census society: “Under the pressure of the whirlwind of events, under the influence of the unstoppable historical flood that in two weeks has carried away the rotten mainstays of centuries-old slavery - this government, *against the will of the majority of its members, has become a revolutionary government*” (original emphasis).

Granted (says the Bolshevik editorial, on the other hand), the Provisional Government has promised to carry out many reforms. Granted, right now we cannot point to any concrete examples of a clash between the soviet and an openly counterrevolutionary government. And, of course, it goes without saying that, as loyal members of the soviet, we accept the injunction to support government policies of which we otherwise would approve anyway.

But, workers and soldiers, don’t be

fooled! This very unstable situation will last only until the bourgeoisie gets its act together. And then the government will *inevitably* move against the soviet in the near future. You *cannot* count on the Provisional Government to help you achieve your goals - in fact, you can count on the opposite:

The Provisional Government, in accordance with the social nature of the strata from which it came, would like to hold back the development of the revolution at its first steps. If they haven’t done so as yet, it is only because they don’t have the strength for it ...

We must realise that the paths of the democracy and of the Provisional Government will diverge - that, when the bourgeoisie comes to its senses, it will *inevitably* attempt to halt the revolutionary movement and not permit it to develop to the point of satisfying the essential needs of the proletariat and the peasantry [my emphasis].

As we see, Kamenev cannot point to any concrete proof of the Provisional Government’s counterrevolutionary intentions, but he confidently asserts that this proof will be forthcoming in the near future. And indeed, a couple of weeks later, at the March All-Russia Soviet Conference, Kamenev thought he had found a smoking gun. A speech by a supporter of the agreement tactic, Iurii Steklov, spilled the beans by listing all the conflicts, all the kicking and screaming emanating from the Provisional Government before it signed on to the agreement in the first place. The Bolshevik leaders at the March Bolshevik party conference immediately renounced any talk of support of *any* kind:⁴

Kamenev: In Steklov’s resolution [that is, the original draft proposed by the pro-agreement leadership], the point dealing with support is absolutely unacceptable. It is impermissible to have any expression of support, even to hint at it. We cannot support the government because it is an imperialist government - because, despite its own declaration, it remains in an alliance with the Anglo-French bourgeoisie.

Stalin: The speaker [Stalin] proposes that a resolution that does not support the Provisional Government be accepted as a basis. The government is organising the army [against us], it is arousing the hostility of the soldiers against the workers, and it relies on the strength of Anglo-French capital: it is already organising the counterrevolution.

There is, of course, no contradiction between these statements at the end of the month and what Kamenev and Stalin were saying earlier in mid-March, no more than there is a contradiction between the statement, ‘I predict A will happen’, and a later statement that says, ‘I assert that A has happened’. But, whatever the motivation of the Bolshevik leaders, it is crucial to note that Kamenev and Stalin *denounced all support for the Provisional Government prior to the April theses on the basis of their own political logic*. On this central point, the party did *not* need to be rearmed.

Will soviet power work?

The Bolshevik editorial argues that only an anti-agreement *vlast* based on the *narod* [people] will achieve revolutionary goals:

The proletariat and the peasantry and the army composed of these

classes will consider the revolution now begun as completed only when it has satisfied their demands entirely and in full - when all remnants of the former regime, economic as well as political, have been torn up to their very roots. This full satisfaction of their demands is possible only when the full and complete *vlast* [*vsia polnota vlasti*] is in their own hands. Insofar as the revolution is going to develop and to deepen, it will come to this: to the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.

The phrase, “the full and complete *vlast*” [*vsia polnota vlasti*], means exactly what it says. The abdication manifesto of Mikhail Romanov (the tsar’s brother) used the same phrase to describe the new Provisional Government, just as Kamenev’s editorial used the phrase to describe its projected replacement. The Bolshevik editorial went on to argue that an attempt to replace the Provisional Government *right now* (*seichas zhe*) would be premature. Such an attempt would make political sense only after the Provisional Government had thoroughly discredited itself in the eyes of the soviet constituency, at which time the ‘insofar as’ formula would turn its blade *against* the government. In the following crucial passage, Kamenev outlines a scenario for the future development of the revolution:

We must be on the alert and ready to act. Calmly and cold-bloodedly weighing our forces, we must use all our energy to gather, organise and consolidate the revolutionary proletariat. But there is no reason to force events. They are developing with immense speed by themselves.

And, precisely for this reason, it would be a political mistake to pose the question right now of replacing the Provisional Government.

The active forces of the great revolution are working for us; they are exposing the inadequacy and the limitations of any attempt to solve the tasks of the revolution by means of compromise.

And only then, when the Provisional Government of the liberals has discredited itself before the face of the democracy of Russia, will the question of the transfer of *vlast* into its own hands stand before the democracy as a practical question.

We see that in this passage Kamenev is addressing impatient revolutionaries on his own side. He wants to sober them up without discouraging their revolutionary ardour. He therefore tells them that, even though the government is indeed composed of the class enemy, now is not the time. But don’t give up on further revolution, he hastens to add: events are moving rapidly in our favour.

Let us ask: when Lenin returned in April, whose side did he take in this dispute? Obviously, Kamenev’s! I select the following from a multitude of relevant Lenin pronouncements (Lenin’s emphases throughout). Compare the Bolshevik editorial of March 14 to Lenin’s argument from April 9:

It should be clear from this why our comrades, too, make so many mistakes when putting the question ‘simply’: Must the Provisional Government be overthrown immediately?

My answer is: (1) it must be overthrown, for it is oligarchic and bourgeois, rather than reflecting the *narod* as a whole; it *cannot* provide peace, bread, or full freedom; (2) it must not be overthrown right now [*seichas*], for it maintains itself by a direct and indirect, a formal and actual *agreement* with the

soviets of worker deputies, and, first of all, with the main soviet, the one in Petrograd; (3) generally, it cannot be ‘overthrown’ in the ordinary way, for it rests on the ‘support’ given to the bourgeoisie by the *second* government - the soviet of worker deputies, and this government is the only possible revolutionary government, which directly expresses the mind and will of the majority of the workers and peasants.⁵

Did the actual course of events in 1917 resemble the scenario set out in the Bolshevik editorial of March 14? I think it did. As the weeks rolled on, the commitment of census society to achieve the revolutionary goals of the soviet grew less and less plausible. The soviet constituency grew more and more disillusioned with the results of the agreement tactic, so that the term ‘agreementisers’ (*soglashateli*) became an angry insult. By September/October, the Provisional Government was indeed thoroughly discredited, so that ‘the question of the transfer of the *vlast*’ now stood before the soviet constituency as a practical question. As we know, Lenin and Kamenev had their differences about some of these practicalities, but their October disputes have nothing to do with the essential accuracy of Kamenev’s March scenario.

The Menshevik editorial argues that any attempt, now or later, to install an anti-agreement *vlast* would surely be a disaster. It lists a host of reasons why a *vlast* based solely on the workers, one that rejected the agreement, would spell ruin for the revolution:

1. Russia is not yet at the level of political and economic development needed for carrying out the final [*krainye*: literally, ‘extreme’] demands of the workers. ‘Russia stands before a long period of bourgeois-democratic development.’
2. Any attempt by the workers to install their own *vlast* would alienate the huge mass of ordinary people, “the rural and urban petty bourgeoisie”. In fact, even to criticise the Provisional Government or to deny it confidence will in itself “fracture the forces of the Russian Revolution”.
3. The mass of the population is still fairly benighted in its political outlook. Remember, they have been liberated for only a week or so.
4. Although the *political* slogans of the workers may find mass support, their *economic* demands are too advanced for the majority of the population.
5. The Provisional Government has promised to achieve the ‘minimum programme’ of the socialist proletariat, which by definition is “the highest limit of what can be achieved within the framework of bourgeois society”.

A number of comments on this argument is in order. First, the very fact that the pro-agreement editorial gives such passionate attention to the demand of their anti-agreement rivals shows that, even at this early date, an anti-agreement *vlast* based exclusively on ‘revolutionary democracy’ was an acknowledged option that had to be taken seriously.

The Menshevik argument is to a large extent aimed at a straw man, since the Bolsheviks did not then or later advocate a regime based exclusively on the workers: that is, one that would carry out worker demands exclusively, as *opposed* to the interests of the ‘urban and rural petty bourgeois’. The longtime Bolshevik ‘hegemony’ scenario was that the socialist proletariat would *lead* the peasantry and other sections of the *narod* to achieve *common goals*. This scenario may be unrealistically romantic and utopian in its own right, but the Menshevik critique did not take it on.

The Menshevik editorial clothed its polemic against an anti-agreement *vlast* in the abstract terms of Marxist

theory, but (in my view) the Menshevik point of view was more fundamentally based on a strong *empirical* reading of Russian society in 1917. To declare war on educated society just seemed like a very bad idea (something like the USA in the Trump era). Indeed, anyone reading this editorial will feel that its Menshevik author was much more passionate and emotional about the horrors of an anti-agreement *vlast* than enthusiastic and confident about the agreement itself.

Which leads to a dilemma facing the Mensheviks in 1917. Their strategy to make the agreement tactic work was to threaten a withdrawal of soviet support. But this threat was hollow - a bluff, given the evident terror they felt at the prospect of a genuinely anti-agreement *vlast*. And, since the censitarian politicians were perfectly aware of this, they had one less motive for carrying out their end of the bargain.

Arrest of ex-tsar

On March 9 - that is, just a few days before our duelling editorials were published on March 12 and 14 - there occurred a dramatic episode that illustrates the logic of 'insofar as' on the ground: the arrest of ex-tsar Nicholas Romanov by the soviet executive committee.⁶ The details of this episode are worth examining, not only because of its manifest influence on the duelling editorials: it was the first of the spiralling 'crises' that challenged and eventually destroyed the agreement tactic.

Tsar Nicholas abdicated on Thursday March 2. No immediate decision was made about his status, and the embittered ex-tsar seemed to be wandering around the army front at his leisure. On Friday March 3, the Petrograd soviet called for his arrest and hinted that the soviet itself would carry out the arrest, if need be.⁷ On Monday March 6, the issue came up again: the executive committee of the soviet was starting to get impatient about the arrest. But (the session was told) an individual minister had promised to facilitate the arrest. The next day, the Provisional Government finally took action to put Nicholas under house arrest at his luxurious residence in Tsarskoe Selo, about 20 or so kilometres south of Petrograd.

The government delegation with its ex-royal prisoner arrived in Tsarskoe Selo on the morning of Thursday March 9, a week after the abdication.

On that same day, the soviet executive committee received through unofficial channels some very unsettling news: the Provisional Government planned to ship the entire ex-imperial family off to England! In the eyes of the outraged members of the executive committee, this move was clearly counterrevolutionary in intent: keeping the tsar safe and sound in readiness for a monarchical restoration. The soviet leaders also had to face heavy pressure from the soviet constituency, who were already angry at what they considered kid-glove treatment of Nicholas. In response, the soviet's executive committee passed a hard-hitting resolution, which invoked the sharp edge of the 'insofar as' policy:

It was decided to inform the Provisional Government at once of the unswerving determination of the executive committee not to permit the departure of Nicholas Romanov for England, and to arrest him ... It was decided to carry out the arrest of Nicholas Romanov at all costs, even if this threatens to break relations with the Provisional Government.⁸

The committee further demanded that the tsar be imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress, and an armed delegation was sent to Tsarskoe Selo to check up on the exact whereabouts of Nicholas.



February 1917: burning monarchical symbols

This delegation was headed by Sergei Mstislavskii, an 'internationalist' and anti-agreement left SR, who later wrote a marvellously vivid description of his mission, available in English.⁹ Mstislavskii used his credentials as a representative of the Petrograd Soviet to bully his way past various palace guards and to see with his own eyes that the ex-tsar was physically present in the palace (a grimly hilarious scene). He ascertained that security arrangements were extremely tight and that the local troops were loyal to the soviet.

On his way into the palace, Mstislavskii passed a room crowded with ordinary soldiers and addressed them with these words: "Greetings, comrades. Best wishes from the Petrograd garrison and the soldier section of the soviet." After he told the soldiers about the plan to whisk away the ex-tsar, the mood became tense and angry. But Mstislavskii calmed them down: "Peacefully, without bloodshed, comrades. But firmly: what the revolutionary *narod* wants, that's what will happen."

After Mstislavskii reported back to the executive committee that the situation was well in hand, house arrest was deemed sufficient, and the earlier soviet demand that the ex-tsar be thrown into a dungeon was quietly shelved. A few months later, the ex-imperial family was finally sent off - not to England, but to Tobolsk, Siberia. Now let us take a look at these events in the way they were seen at the time: as a test case for the agreement tactic.

On the one hand, the episode showed that the Provisional Government would reluctantly carry out its side of the agreement only after "kicking and screaming", as Kamenev put it in the Bolshevik editorial. On the other hand, the episode showed that the tools at the disposal of the soviet - *kontrol* (keeping close tabs on what the government was up to) and pressure - were sufficient to make the government cooperate. As the chair of the executive committee, the Menshevik, Nikolai Chkheidze, informed the soviet: "Under the pressure of the executive committee, the Provisional Government has rejected the idea of permitting Nicholas

Romanov to leave for England without the special consent of the executive committee ... In the future, the question of Nicholas Romanov will be resolved in agreement with the executive committee."¹⁰

Observers on the other side of the social demarcation line came to the same conclusion about the lessons of the mini-crisis. George Buchanan, the UK ambassador to Russia, wrote to his home office that the Provisional Government had failed to overcome the opposition of the soviet, since they were not "masters in their own house".¹¹

The events of March 9 had a major impact on what we might call the 'plausibility constraints' facing the two editorials published in its immediate aftermath. In order to be plausible, the Menshevik editorial had to concede that the government could indeed harbour dangerous counterrevolutionary designs. The Bolshevik editorial likewise had to concede that, at least in some cases, when the soviet told the government to jump, it jumped.

What does the saga of the ex-tsar's arrest tell us about the workability of the agreement tactic? Did it show that, given proper vigilance by the soviet, the two *vlasti* could work together effectively? Or did even this fairly minor matter reveal strains that would prove fatal in crises to come? Let us imagine what our duelling editorials might have said, if asked about these implications.

■ Pro-agreement Menshevik: The agreement tactic is half-full. Yes, the Provisional Government tried to pull a fast one.

■ Anti-agreement Bolshevik: The agreement tactic is half-empty. Look at all the trouble the executive committee had to take, just to thwart a clearly counterrevolutionary move by the government. True, the soviet was able to impose the will of the revolutionary *narod* in this instance, but do you really think that the government and the social forces behind it will long tolerate the humiliation of not being the master in what they feel to be their own house? But don't worry: we will get our revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry! After all, what the revolutionary *narod* wants -

that's what will happen.

Implications

'You have identified some textual, some linguistic, differences between the Menshevik and Bolshevik editorials: thank you for that. But, in the context of March 1917, were there really any *practical* differences? After all, both editorials endorse "insofar as", both call for pressure and *kontrol*, both reject the idea of replacing the government, both exhort activists to organise, organise, organise - and nothing more.'

In responding to the understandable objection I have paraphrased above, I take my lead from Vitaly Startsev, the Soviet-era historian whose monographs in March/April 1917 are still irreplaceable. Startsev surveys the whole political landscape of Russia in the immediate aftermath of the February revolution and concludes: "All parties promised their support for the government, with a single exception" (the Bolsheviks). When discussing the various documents circulating in soviet and party circles during this time, Startsev warns historians against equating the political content of these documents merely on the basis of 'grammatical' similarities, by which he meant the presence of isolated vocabulary items such as *postolku*, *poskolku*.¹²

Following up this line of argument, we shall take up the various vocabulary items mentioned in the objection described above and put them into the framework of the overall point of view found in the two editorials. Recall the concrete situation: both Menshevik and Bolshevik editorials are responding to the *agreement* between the soviet and the Provisional Government, whereby the Provisional Government undertakes to carry out revolutionary policies and the soviet undertakes to provide essential legitimacy. The soviet constituency was thus faced with a fundamental choice: was the agreement tactic the best way to achieve their revolutionary goals?

The Menshevik editor writes in the hope and expectation that the agreement tactic *could* achieve these goals. Here is the key passage: "The working class must remember that

only by keenly observing the activity of the government, only by applying unrelenting pressure, will the working class achieve the promised democratic reforms. But, insofar as these reforms are really put into practice, we need to greet them and support them."

The Bolshevik editor (Kamenev) writes in the hope and expectation that the agreement tactic *could not* achieve those goals. In the following passage, I have rearranged the order of clauses in order to bring out the logic:

For us, revolutionary Social Democrats [= Bolsheviks], there is no need even to state that, insofar as the Provisional Government actually struggles against the remnants of the old regime, to that extent it is assured of support from the revolutionary proletariat.

[But] the Provisional Government, in accordance with the social nature of the strata from which it came, would like to hold back the development of the revolution at its first steps. If they have not done so as yet, it is only because they do not have the strength for it.

This full satisfaction of [worker/peasant] demands is possible only when the full and complete *vlast* [*vsia polnota vlasti*] is in their own hands.

These two passages give us that framework for each of the duelling editorials that in turn allows us to judge the meaning of specific vocabulary items. And, as we shall see, these items have dramatically opposed political implications - based on whether they are used by a socialist who supported the agreement tactic or by a socialist who rejected it.

1. 'Insofar as': The Menshevik editorial uses this formula to urge the workers to accept an *ongoing commitment* to the agreement tactic. The editorial says to the workers: the soviet decreed support for the government, insofar as it carries out its obligations, and now you must live up to the commitment made in your name. In contrast, the Bolshevik editorial says: obviously, we support government policies insofar as they genuinely advance revolutionary goals, but - we do *not* 'tie our hands', we do *not* promise any sort of commitment, because the Provisional Government will *inevitably* fail to meet its own commitments, and so we look forward to a *vlast* based on the revolutionary *narod*.

2. Pressure: Both editorials remark that the Provisional Government adopted a revolutionary programme only due to energetic pressure from below:

■ *Menshevik editorial*: "Under the pressure of the revolutionary democracy of Petrograd, the Provisional Government published a programme of its [future] activity, containing almost all the political demands of the Russian and global democracy."

■ *Bolshevik editorial*: "Kicking and screaming, [the social strata supporting the Provisional Government] are compelled under the pressure of the revolutionary *narod* to still go forward."

As usual, the consensus on the *facts* only serves to bring out the deep contrast in the *evaluation* of these facts. The Menshevik editorial aims at giving the reader a sense of the *power* of applied pressure. In this way, 'pressure' becomes an argument to help persuade the soviet constituency to support the agreement. We realise (says the editorial) that you have good grounds to distrust Russia's new rulers - but don't worry, we're on the case, we're keeping a keen eye on its doings, and, if the government strays from the revolutionary path, we will apply 'unrelenting pressure' to set them straight. Pressure is thus

SUPPLEMENT

an indispensable tool *for making the agreement tactic work*. No wonder that the editorial mentions ‘pressure’ four times in this short article. The editorial wants to drive home the moral of the story: pressure worked before and it will work again.

The Bolshevik editorial has a completely different attitude. When it asserts that the Provisional Government was *compelled* from below to move forward, the aim is to demonstrate the ingrained *reluctance* of the Provisional Government to act in a revolutionary manner. Any hope of using pressure to enforce the agreement for any length of time is therefore *futile*. The moral of the story is: yes, pressure worked once or twice - but only because the bourgeoisie is temporarily discombobulated. So don’t expect pressure to work so well in the future. Accordingly, Kamenev’s editorial mentions ‘pressure’ only this one time. His whole argument is meant to show that no amount of pressure will succeed in really bringing the government to heel.

Just days later, both Kamenev and Stalin advocated launching a campaign to ‘pressure’ the Provisional Government to open immediate peace negotiations. But this campaign was not launched with the slightest idea of *actually persuading* longtime imperialists such as Miliukov and Guchkov - an expectation that truly would have been non-Bolshevik (indeed, non-sensible). On the contrary, the whole campaign was predicated on the inevitable *failure* of putting pressure on the imperialist government, and in this way to show the utter unworkability of the agreement tactic. As Stalin explained a few years later, looking back on this episode, the aim of the campaign was “to enable the soviets to discern the actual imperialist nature of the Provisional Government on the basis of the concrete question of peace, and in this way to wrest the soviets from the Provisional Government”.¹³

The Mensheviks also did not believe that any amount of pressure could make the Provisional Government alienate its international allies by unilaterally offering to open peace negotiations. For this very reason, they voted down the corresponding Bolshevik proposal when it was put forward at the All-Russian Soviet Conference at the end of March. They realised that pressure on this issue would put a great strain on the agreement. Many observers today find it plausible that Kamenev and Stalin *actually believed* that pressure from below could get Miliukov and Guchkov to offer to open immediate negotiations. If that were true, these two longtime Bolsheviks would be more Menshevik than the Mensheviks. Far from being merely ‘semi-Mensheviks’, they would be Mensheviks on steroids.¹⁴

3. *Kontrol*: We repeat once more our basic point about context: the political meaning of a word such as *kontrol* changes when it is used by a socialist who supports the agreement tactic, as distinct from a socialist who opposes the agreement tactic. While we do not find the actual word *kontrol* in the Menshevik editorial, a verbal formula found therein - “keenly observing the activity of the government” - is a good working definition of this key term (taken over from the German *Kontrolle*). For the pro-agreement socialist, *kontrol* is an essential tool for demonstrating that the agreement tactic can work. If the soviet constituency keeps *close tabs* on the government, it can help ensure the smooth workings of the agreement.

In stark contrast, for the anti-agreement socialist, *kontrol* is a tool for *exposing* the inevitable counterrevolutionary doings of the government, and thus of demonstrating that the agreement *cannot* work. In Kamenev’s words:

We call upon the revolutionary democracy, headed by the proletariat, to the most unwearying *kontrol* on all the actions of the *vlast*, whether in the centre or in the localities.

We must realise that the paths of the democracy and of the Provisional Government will diverge - that, when the bourgeoisie comes to its senses, it will inevitably attempt to halt the revolutionary movement and not permit it to develop to the point of satisfying the essential needs of the proletariat and the peasantry.

4. Transfer of the vlast: In a manner of speaking, both editorials counsel against the idea of replacing the Provisional Government with a soviet-based *vlast*. The Bolshevik editorial asserts that “it would be a political mistake to pose the question right now of replacing the Provisional Government”. The Menshevik editorial says flatly “the proletariat cannot and should not aspire to the *vlast*”. But, obviously, in their attitude to the possibility of replacing the Provisional Government with a soviet-based *vlast*, the two editorials differ as night from day. For the Menshevik, the idea of a worker-based *vlast* is a non-starter in every possible way. It flagrantly contradicts Russia’s historical stage of development, it will surely alienate a majority of the Russian population - in a word, it would spell the ruin of the revolution.

For the Bolshevik, the transfer of the *vlast* into the hands of the revolutionary *narod* is indeed *premature* in March 1917 - but it remains the only way the *narod* can achieve its goals. Further, events are developing “with immense speed”, so that what is now premature will *soon* be a practical question. Kamenev does not want an uprising in March 1917 precisely because he does want an uprising later. As he said to fellow Bolsheviks a few days after drafting this editorial, “What’s important is not to take the *vlast*: what’s important is to keep it.”¹⁵

5. Organise! Both editorials call on the soviet constituency to organise - just as generals of opposing armies each call on their troops to mobilise. For the Menshevik, to organise means *to support* the Provisional Government: “Organise yourselves, pull the rug from under the feet of the counterrevolution by enlightening those in whom the old *vlast* still hopes to find support. This means, at one and the same time, to support the Provisional Government in its revolutionary work and to obstruct any and all *counterrevolutionary designs from its side*.”

The Bolshevik editorial also calls for energetic organisation: “... the slogan of the moment still remains: organisation of the forces of the proletariat”. But, for Kamenev, the point of organising is to be ready on the great day when the agreement tactic is fully discredited, when the course of events has persuaded the soviet constituency of the fact that “the tasks of the revolution [cannot be solved] by means of compromise”, and therefore when the transfer of the *vlast* to the *narod* has finally become a practical question.

Despite the overlapping vocabulary items, then, the practical implications of the two editorials are completely opposed. As a matter of method, the general rule is this: the individual vocabulary item does not determine the overall message: rather, the overall message determines the meaning of the vocabulary item. And, furthermore, these contrasting implications for practice were not confined to the editorial pages of party newspapers: the contrast between pro-agreement and anti-agreement socialists was made vividly clear in concrete policies

already during March 1917, prior to Lenin’s return and the April theses. An essential example is Bolshevik agitation against the war.

In March, the Bolsheviks launched two major agitation campaigns. One was organised around the slogan of demanding that the government make an official offer to start peace negotiations; the other was organised around the slogan of publishing the secret treaties signed by the tsar with Russia’s allies. The ultimate aim of these campaigns was, of course, not to induce the government to actually carry out these policies, since (among other reasons) the Bolshevik slogans were carefully calculated to offend the government and to alienate the allies. No, the aim was to open the eyes of the soviet constituency to the government’s counterrevolutionary nature. Mensheviks were therefore naturally opposed to the slogans of both Bolshevik campaigns. At the March All-Russian Soviet Conference, the most prominent pro-agreement spokesman, Irakli Tsereteli, explained at length why acting on these slogans would be disastrous for the revolution.

Unsurprisingly, Bolshevik amendments and resolutions based on their campaign slogans were voted down by large majorities at the Soviet conference. These vote tallies should not obscure the fact that the diametrically opposed viewpoints of Menshevik vs Bolshevik, pro-agreement vs anti-agreement, were put on display for a national audience. Everyone could see that the revolutionary democracy did *not* present a united front and that to equate Mensheviks and Bolsheviks was nonsense.

Tone of voice

Startsev gives us another piece of useful advice: we should be alert to the contrasting *tone of voice* used by various interlocutors when they make their case. We will here detail some of the ways by which readers at the time would instantly recognise where each of the two editorials were coming from and where they were going. We can start with their description of the social forces behind the Provisional Government:

■ *Menshevik editorial*: “The progressive gentry and bourgeoisie, the liberal-democratic intelligentsia”.

■ *Bolshevik editorial*: “The liberal movement of the class of *sobstvenniki* [people of property] ... the bourgeoisie”.

The Menshevik editorial refrains from using the kind of prejudicial words that we find in the Bolshevik article - words such as “people of property”. Similarly, the Bolshevik editorial eschews words like “progressive” or “intelligentsia”, used by the Menshevik author to make the censitarian government sound more acceptable. Both editorials refer to ‘liberals’, but the Menshevik speaks benignly of the “liberal-democratic intelligentsia”, while the Bolshevik grimly ties ‘liberal’ to “people of property”. And, of course, the Bolshevik author makes no mention of the presence in the government of Aleksandr Kerensky - “the *vozhd* of the genuine democracy”, as he is described by the Menshevik editorial.

In describing the social forces behind the Provisional Government, both sides make concessions to objections they expect to hear from their audience. The Mensheviks concede that the government might harbour counterrevolutionary designs; the Bolsheviks concede that the government might still carry out a revolutionary policy or two. But these concessions are of the ‘yes, but’ variety, whereby the concession is cancelled out by the following ‘but’ clause, as in the following paraphrase: ■ *Menshevik*: yes, of course, counterrevolutionary designs might emanate from the government, *but*

rest assured, we will be able to thwart them by constant surveillance and mass pressure.

■ *Bolshevik*: yes, of course, we will support revolutionary policies emanating from the government, *but* don’t be fooled: the classes that support the government will turn against the soviets - and that right soon.

We next turn to contrasting rhetorical portraits of the social forces that supported the soviet. At the beginning of the Menshevik editorial, we read that the February revolution was carried out by “the proletariat and the rebellious army”, but the overwhelming thrust of the rest of the editorial is to *contrast* the proletariat to the rest of the mass soviet constituency. According to the editorial, “the democratic peasants and the army coming out of its ranks” will not accept the economic leadership of the proletariat: only its political leadership. Why? Because “the working class is the most revolutionary class of contemporary society, and its interests are opposed to the interests of the entire bourgeoisie as a whole”. And, by “the entire bourgeoisie”, the Menshevik editorial means to include the great mass of ordinary people, the *obyyateli*, because they are one and the same as “the rural and urban petty bourgeoisie”. The editorial emphasises, then, a *conflict* of interests between the workers and the “still dark masses! (*eshche temnye massy*)”.

In stark contrast, the Bolshevik editorial treats “the proletariat and the peasantry and the army composed of these classes” as a united mass, as “the revolutionary *narod*”. The Russian word *narod*, the people, has strongly positive connotations, as opposed to the somewhat contemptuous term, *obyyateli*, used by the Menshevik editorialist. The word *narod* is not found in the Menshevik editorial.

At one point, the Menshevik editorial asserts that “this government, against the will of the majority of its members, has become a revolutionary government”. Translation: I grant you that the censitarian ministers are far from revolutionaries, but ‘the whirlwind of events’ has turned them into a ‘revolutionary government’. In contrast, the Bolshevik editorial, even while granting that the government might possibly carry out a revolutionary policy or two, would never talk about a ‘revolutionary government’.

We can list other contrasts that attest to the strong difference in the tone of voice of our two editors. When we see phrases like “help the government in its work”, so that it will be “fruitful” [*plodotvorny*!], we know we are reading a Menshevik editorial. When we read phrases like “the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” or “full and complete *vlast*”, we know we are reading a Bolshevik editorial.

As remarked earlier, a shared aim of the two editorials is to respond to the talking points of the other side in order to get them out of the way, allowing the editorial as a whole to define the situation along pro- or anti-agreement lines. Oddly enough, both editorials choose to end their text with one last reference to a central talking point of the opposing side. Here are the final words of the two editorials: ■ *Menshevik editorial*: “obstruct any and all counterrevolutionary designs from the Provisional Government’s side”.

■ *Bolshevik editorial*: “an energetic support of each step that leads to the uprooting of all the remnants of the tsarist-landlord regime”.

It seems very paradoxical! The Menshevik editorial warns of the counterrevolutionary designs of the Provisional Government, while the Bolshevik editorial promises support for genuinely revolutionary policies. The world turned upside down! But,

when we read the two perorations as a whole, the world rights itself.

In the final paragraph, we see the real message of the Menshevik editorial to its readers: support the Provisional Government in its revolutionary work, ward off any non-revolutionary policy by organised pressure, and enlighten the dark masses to support the government as well. In contrast, the closing passages of the Bolshevik editorial call for “consolidation [*splochenie*] of the forces of the proletariat, peasantry and army” around the soviets and for keeping eyes on the prize - on the day when “the question of the transfer of *vlast* into its own hands stands before the democracy as a practical question”.

What should we think of historians who present the paradoxical final phrases in isolation and who build their picture of the Menshevik/Bolshevik contrast entirely on these half-sentences? But this is essentially what has happened, as we shall see in the next section.

Conditional support

■ *Alexander Rabinowitch* (1968): “Beginning with the March 14 issue, the central Bolshevik organ swung sharply to the right. Henceforth articles by Kamenev and Stalin advocated limited support for the Provisional Government... Lenin reiterated his appeal for continued revolution, coupling it with a vehement attack on the policy of conditional support for the Provisional Government and the war effort ... Lenin’s theses rejected the ‘limited support’ formula of the soviet and Kamenev.”¹⁶

■ *David Longley* (1972): “*Pravda* No8 [the Bolshevik editorial on March 14 discussed here] also carried an article by Kamenev calling for conditional support for the Provisional Government. This was the policy of no Petrograd organisation at the time. Even the Petersburg committee’s policy merely stated that it would refrain from opposing the government ‘in so far as’.”¹⁷

■ *Oleg Khlevniuk* (2015): “After arriving in Petrograd, [Kamenev and Stalin] essentially took control of the Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda* and used it to promote a moderate agenda, based on the belief that the ascent of the liberal bourgeoisie to power was in accordance with the dictates of history and that socialism was a long-term prospect. The newspaper proclaimed conditional support for the Provisional Government.”¹⁸

■ *Geoffrey Swain* (2017): “Led by Kamenev, this group [of Bolsheviks] was even more supportive of the Provisional Government than the St Petersburg committee. From March 14 onwards, *Pravda* editorials used the phrase ‘conditional support’, when referring to the Provisional Government.”¹⁹

■ *Ronald Suny* (2020): “Kamenev did not hesitate to take the lead and went further even than the Petersburg committee, calling in *Pravda* for conditional support of the Provisional Government.”²⁰ (In a footnote, Suny refers to Kamenev’s March 14 editorial with no further comment.)

If there is one thing on which post-war western academic specialists on 1917 agree, it is that Kamenev’s editorial of March 14 advocated a policy of ‘conditional support’ (or some equivalent phrase) for the Provisional Government.²¹ Should I be worried about challenging such an impressive consensus? Not particularly. A closer look reveals that this consensus is a glittery facade with nothing behind it, so that it resembles a movie set that portrays no more than the front of an office building.

In the gallery of quotations above, I have not singled out summary or illustrative sentences. No, what you see is what you get: the quotations above constitute *the entire discussion* by these historians of Kamenev’s

alleged ‘conditional support’. So far, in the entire western secondary literature, I have found only two writers who actually quote Kamenev’s editorial of March 14: myself and Eric Blanc. And we both challenge the consensus.²²

The historians are so confident in their description of Kamenev and the March Bolsheviks that they sometimes see things that are not there. Consider this striking assertion by Geoffrey Swain as quoted above: “From March 14 onwards, *Pravda* editorials used the phrase ‘conditional support’ when referring to the Provisional Government.”

This statement is unconnected with reality. In fact the words, ‘conditional support’, are nowhere to be found, not in Kamenev’s editorial of March 14, nor anywhere in *Pravda*.

At most, then, ‘conditional support’ is a label for an *interpretation* of Kamenev’s editorial. Who was first to use this phrase to portray Kamenev’s outlook? One candidate for this honour is Iosif Stalin. The notorious *Short course* of party history, issued in 1938, contains the following passage about March 1917, drafted personally by Stalin: “Kamenev and several activists in the Moscow organisation - for example, Rykov, Bubnov and Nogin - held a semi-Menshevik position of conditional support for the Provisional Government and the policy of the defencists.”

When Stalin wrote that description, Kamenev was a recently executed ‘enemy of the people’ who could not reply. Western historians have energetically pushed back against Stalin’s slander of such former comrades as Lev Trotsky and Nikolai Bukharin, and yet, for their own reasons, they have let Kamenev twist slowly, slowly in the wind.

When looking over the historical literature about March 1917, the most surprising thing is the lack of surprise. Imagine: here is a longtime Bolshevik, one of Lenin’s top two lieutenants, with a decade’s worth of Bolshevik polemics under his belt, a man who before the war had specifically attacked such future ministers of the Provisional Government as Aleksandr Guchkov and Pavel Miliukov, who had passionately insisted that the liberals were the most dangerous enemy of the revolution - and then, when he shows up in Petrograd after February, he urges the workers to trust their longtime class enemies and to pin their hopes on those nice imperialists in the Provisional Government!

The historians blithely tell us Kamenev advocated ‘conditional support’, and yet they express no surprise and offer no explanation (except, perhaps, with a gesture toward an alleged post-February ‘euphoria’). Fundamentally, the historians are simply not that interested in Kamenev nor in the alleged ‘sharp right turn’ he is supposed to have instigated. Kamenev in March is only mentioned in passing in order to get to other more intriguing matters, such as the April theses. I therefore feel no need to defend myself against arguments supporting the ‘conditional support’ interpretation, because such arguments are not to be found.²³

The short text of Kamenev’s editorial is appended here. Readers can see for themselves that it argues that the agreement tactic could not possibly work and that the only way to achieve revolutionary goals was through the full and undivided *vlast* of the revolutionary *narod*. A strange sort of ‘conditional support’! I have no idea what the historians quoted above would say if asked to comment on the relevant passages, because they show no awareness that such passages even exist.

One reason the historians have painted such a surprising and *prima facie* implausible portrait of Kamenev is because they evidently felt they did not have to bother with a lowly textual or ‘merely’ linguistic analysis of the relevant texts. They have also failed in another task: putting Kamenev and his *Pravda* articles into the context of its immediate interlocutors. Instead, they have resorted to a device that I call gerrymandering, to use a term now in the news. For our purposes, gerrymandering consists of manufacturing a misleading similarity or a misleading contrast by means of strained and artificial boundaries.

A typical example of gerrymandering is the way ‘insofar as’ is employed by historians to turn Kamenev into what Stalin called a ‘semi-Menshevik’. Essentially they argue that, since Kamenev used the same phrase as did the Mensheviks, he agreed with them on essentials. They are able to do this simply by giving us descriptions that leave out the italicised section of the following paraphrases (I will let the reader guess which is Menshevik and which is Bolshevik):

1. Insofar as the Provisional Government carries out revolutionary policies, we must support those policies - *but we confidently predict that any such policies are a passing phenomenon, since the government’s inherently counterrevolutionary nature will inevitably come to the fore in the near future.*
2. Insofar as the Provisional Government carries out revolutionary policies, we must support those policies - *and we are confident that, if the soviet applies pressure and kontrol, the government will continue to carry out revolutionary policies, thus earning our enthusiastic support.*

If you think the italicised words are irrelevant for understanding Bolsheviks and Mensheviks during the revolution, then you can rely on the historians. A similar false unity is created by leaving out the italicised sections of the following paraphrases:

3. We should not attempt to replace the Provisional Government with a soviet-based *vlast* at the present time, *nor at any other time, since the whole project of an exclusively soviet-based vlast is misbegotten.*
4. We should not attempt to replace the Provisional Government with a Soviet-based *vlast* at the present time - *but we are rapidly approaching the time when the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry will be an urgent necessity and a practical task to be solved.*

Gerrymandering can also be used to create a false contrast: for example, the following popular contrast between Kamenev and Stalin in March versus Lenin in April (my paraphrase):

- *Kamenev and Stalin in March:* We should not replace the Provisional Government with soviet power *now*, but we should do so when we get majority support from the soviet constituency.
- *Lenin in April:* We should not replace the Provisional Government with soviet power *now*, but we should do so when we get majority support from the soviet constituency.
- *The historians:* Look at the gulf between these Bolshevik leaders: Kamenev and Stalin don’t want to replace the Provisional Government, but Lenin does.

A sad and unsettling realisation comes over one after reviewing the historical literature on Bolshevism in March/April 1917: many interpretations that are advanced by authoritative historians - including those who are with reason widely trusted and admired - rest on suppressed or in any event ignored textual evidence - evidence that is in fact crucial. Cast your eye on the gallery of quotations at the head of this section, look over the duelling

editorials, and ask yourself whether you have been well served by the academic specialists.

Conclusion

We have examined a pair of duelling editorials, one that appeared on March 12 1917 in the official Menshevik party newspaper, and the other published two days later in the official Bolshevik party newspaper. Each gives an answer to the key question confronting the soviet constituency: what is the best tactic for achieving our revolutionary goals? In the context of the post-February situation, this question becomes: can we achieve our goals by means of the ‘agreement’ [*soglashenie*] between the soviet and the Provisional Government? To this fundamental question, the Menshevik editorial answered ‘yes’, the Bolshevik editorial answered ‘no’.

For many people, this result will seem extremely unsurprising. *Of course* the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks disagreed on basic revolutionary tactics! But, according to the academic specialists, this is a naive reaction by uninformed laypersons, one that is allegedly refuted by a strong historical consensus. To conclude, then, here are some of the implications of our findings that, in this case, support the ‘naive’ against the ‘sophisticated’.

1. The positions taken by the duelling editorials are entirely predictable, given the clash between mainstream Menshevism and mainstream Bolshevism in the decade before the war and revolution. The pre-war clash between the two factions was not just an inconsequential dispute between sectarian *intelligently*, even though this seems to be the attitude of many historians of 1917. Rather, this dispute among Russian Social Democrats represented a working-out of practical revolutionary tactics in the wake of the revolution of 1905. The results were directly relevant to 1917. As Shliapnikov well said, the ‘old dispute’ [*staryi spor*] was *not* made irrelevant by the February revolution.²⁴
2. Both sides in the debate within Russian Social Democracy in 1917 assumed that the only alternative to the agreement tactic was a *vlast* based entirely on the soviet constituency that *ipso facto* excluded censitarian influence. But other alternatives to the agreement tactic are conceivable and indeed they had advocates at the time. Perhaps (some argued) the whole idea of carrying out a broad revolutionary transformation of society during wartime was foolish. Or perhaps the dilemma of ‘double *vlast*’ could be solved by handing over ‘the full and complete *vlast*’ to the censitarian Provisional Government, so that it enjoyed *de facto* as well as *de jure* sovereignty. Neither editorial gave the slightest attention to alternatives such as these.
3. Kamenev - the author of the Bolshevik editorial - was *not* a ‘semi-Menshevik’ who advocated ‘conditional support’ for the censitarian government. And, as I have shown in my recent documentary handbook, the same is true of Stalin. These findings are not minor factual discoveries that can easily be accommodated within the prevailing ‘rearming the party’ narrative: they challenge some fundamental assumptions about Bolshevism in 1917 and thus about the course of the revolution in general.
4. The basic logic of the central dispute over the agreement tactic that informed the course of political debate throughout the revolutionary year was already clear to activists in mid-March, *before* the arrival of the influential party leaders, Tsereteli and Lenin. This circumstance suggests that the dispute was not imposed by ideological whim, but by a difficult choice inherent in the political situation, a choice that could in no way be avoided.

5. The automatic assumption of historians is that Lenin’s April theses were aimed at his fellow Bolsheviks. Why did Lenin call for no support for the government? Because (we are told) *Pravda* had earlier been calling for such support, and Lenin wanted to rebuke it and its editors. But the April theses contain no explicit attack on *Pravda*, and our look at the duelling editorials show that in fact this automatic assumption is highly dubious.²⁵ Indeed, a closer look shows that Lenin *sided* with Kamenev and Stalin on some key issues.
6. The two parties - Menshevik and Bolshevik - wagered their political reputation on the scenarios outlined in the duelling editorials. The pro-agreement Menshevik wager was that pressure and *kontrol* - and eventually coalition - could effectively police the agreement, so that revolutionary goals could be achieved *with* the cooperation of censitarian society. The Bolshevik party wagered that the agreement tactic was bound to fail because of clashing class interests, that the tactic would be seen to fail by the soviet constituency, and that therefore the alternative of soviet power would be chosen. One wager led to collapse and political disaster; the other wager led to triumph, at least for a time.

We have treated the two editorials as interlocutors in the complicated political context of March 1917. In one respect, this metaphor might be fairly literal. In the Menshevik editorial of March 12, we find the following very typical complaint (emphases as in original):

The Provisional Government and its programme, undertaken in agreement [*soglashenie*] with the executive committee of the Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies, has met with a triumphal reception throughout all of Russia. To fight against it in the very beginning of its activities, to insist on a denial of confidence [*nedoverie*] at every step, and especially to try to become the *vlast* in its place - to do this will only *raise up against oneself all of bourgeois-democratic Russia* and fracture the forces of the Russian Revolution. This would mean *playing into the hands of the forces of the gloomy past, forces that have not yet been thoroughly beaten.*

The Menshevik editorial is irritated by unnamed people who keep talking about *nedoverie*. *Nedoverie* (denial of confidence) should be taken in a strong, parliamentary sense: when a government loses a vote of confidence, it resigns. No wonder the Menshevik editorial was annoyed by threats of *nedoverie*.

The next day, March 13, at various Bolshevik party meetings, a telegram just received from Lenin was read out in which he called for “*absolutnoe nedoverie*” in the government. Kamenev immediately pounced on the phrase and incorporated it into his editorial. In his final paragraph, he calls for “an absolute denial of confidence [*absolutnoe nedoverie*] to any liberal promises”. Thus a direct link with Lenin’s émigré missives was established, along with solidarity with the earlier Petrograd agitators, who had so annoyed the Menshevik editor. I am tempted to see the clash about *nedoverie* as an angry, but revealing, exchange of taunts:

- On March 12, the Menshevik says: ‘Will you shut up about *nedoverie* already?’
- On March 14, the Bolshevik answers: ‘*Nedoverie! Nedoverie!* - in fact, *absolute nedoverie!*’

Perhaps I overdramatise what happened. But I think we can use this exchange as a final iconic image: the pro-agreement Menshevik editorial denounces *nedoverie*, while the anti-agreement Bolshevik editorial exalts it! ●

Notes

1. My translations. The Russian text of the Menshevik editorial can be found in Z Gallii y Garcia *et al* (eds) *Mensheviki v 1917 godu* (‘The Mensheviks in 1917’) Moscow 1994; that of the Bolshevik editorial at revarchiv. narod.ru/kamenev/oeuvre/pravda150317.html.
2. ‘*Vlast*’ = ‘political power’.
3. My translation. For the Russian text, see *Petrogradskii sovet rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov v 1917 gody* (Leningrad 1991).
4. For a more detailed discussion, see LT Lih ‘Was Stalin a “moderate” in March 1917?’ (*Lih documentary handbook* No1, September 2025).
5. ‘The double *vlast*’ *Pravda* April 9 1917.
6. My thanks to Ian Thatcher for calling my attention to this episode.
7. *Petrogradskii sovet rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov v 1917 gody* Leningrad 1991.
8. For a fuller English text, see RP Browder and AF Kerensky (eds) *The Russian Provisional Government 1917: documents* Stanford CA 1961, p181.
9. S Mstislavskii *Five days which transformed Russia* Bloomington 1988. This relatively short memoir is particularly valuable, since it is one of the very few non-Bolshevik anti-agreement voices available in English. It also contains eye-witness accounts of the Second Congress in October and the short-lived Constituent Assembly in January.
10. RP Browder and AF Kerensky (eds) *The Russian Provisional Government 1917: documents* Stanford CA 1961, p181.
11. *Ibid* p183.
12. VI Startsev *Revoliutsiia i vlast*’ Moscow 1978, pp20, 37. When Startsev wrote his monographs, Kamenev was still an unrehabilitated enemy of the people, so that Startsev’s portrait of him is distorted. Otherwise, I side with Startsev, as opposed to mainstream western historiography, about March 1917.
13. For full documentation of Stalin’s retrospective discussion, see LT Lih ‘Was Stalin a “moderate” in March 1917’.
14. For further discussion, see LT Lih, ‘100 Years of the Lenin cult is enough’, part 3 *Weekly Worker* September 19 2024: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1507/a-hundred-years-is-enough.
15. *Peterburgskii komitet RSDRP(b) v 1917 godu* St Petersburg 2003, p120.
16. A Rabinowitch *Prelude to revolution: the Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 uprising* Bloomington 1968), pp38-39.
17. D Longley, ‘The divisions in the Bolshevik Party in March 1917’ *Soviet Studies* Vol 24, No1 (1972), p72. This ancient article by a graduate student is still cited today, since it is the closest thing to real research on this topic.
18. OV Khlevniuk *Stalin: new biography of a dictator* New Haven 2015, pp42-47. Of course, no Bolshevik believed that the leadership by the liberal bourgeoisie during the revolution was mandated by ‘the dictates of history’.
19. G Swain *A short history of the Russian Revolution* London 2017, p66. Note that both Rabinowitch and Swain use quote marks to suggest that ‘limited support’ and ‘conditional support’ were terms actually employed by Kamenev, which is not the case.
20. RG Suny *Stalin: passage to revolution* Princeton 2020, p597. Suny’s discussion in 2020 still relies heavily on the Longley article from 1972.
21. I have also consulted works by WM Chamberlin, SA Smith, Sheila Fitzpatrick, Robert Daniels, Leonard Schapiro, Merle Fainsod, James White, among others. I would be remiss not to mention that many of these historians have been open to my ideas, if not always persuaded by them, and have generously given me valuable feedback. The present article has greatly benefited by the observations of SA Smith.
22. www.historicalmaterialism.org/a-revolutionary-line-of-march-old-bolshevism-in-early-1917-re-examined; LT Lih, ‘Fully armed: Kamenev and *Pravda* in March 1917’ in *The NEP era: Soviet Russia, 1921-1928* (2014). The present article replaces my earlier discussion. Eric Blanc is correct to insist that sizable differences remain between us on the subject of Kamenev.
23. The same studied lack of curiosity is found on the subject of the war. The historians affirm that, in March, Kamenev went out of his way to reject the slogan, ‘Down with the war!’, thus proving that he was in fact a revolutionary defencist. A lifelong Bolshevik and ‘internationalist’ now supports the imperialist war and cheers it on! Ho hum: move along, nothing to see here. On this issue, a majority of historians do no more than roll out a couple of recycled one-liners from another article by Kamenev that was published on March 15. For a detailed discussion of the real reason Kamenev expressed reservations about ‘Down with the war!’, see LT Lih ‘100 Years of the Lenin cult is enough’ (see note 13 above). Suffice it to say that, on this issue as well, Lenin, after his return, sided with Kamenev.
24. “The completed revolution gave birth to illusions in the minds of the comrades that the old dispute [*staryi spor*] about the driving forces of the revolution had outlived itself by the very fact of the revolution. In fact, the reverse was true. After the turnaround, the old dispute, about the character of the revolution and its driving forces, acquired immediate and practical significance” (A Shliapnikov *Kamun semnadsatogo goda Semnadsatyi god* Moscow 1992, p207).
25. Lenin’s one explicit critique of *Pravda* after his return concerned the issue of ‘demands’: should Bolshevik slogans make ‘demands’ on a bourgeois government unlikely to fulfil them?

SUPPLEMENT



Provisional Government in March 1917: Prince Lvov in centre

Appendix: Duelling editorial texts

1. Menshevik editorial, *Rabochaia Gazeta*, March 12: 'The Provisional Government and the working class'

A mighty revolutionary wave, tossing aside the dynasty and the monarchy, carrying away the old order in a flood, has pushed forward on its crest a Provisional Government out of members of the Duma and the State Council, with the chairman of the Zemsky Union [Lvov] at its head. The revolution - begun and sustained by the proletariat and the rebellious army - has pushed forward, in the capacity of provisional rulers of Russia, the representatives of the progressive gentry and bourgeoisie, of the liberal-democratic intelligentsia, with at least one *vozhd* of the genuine democracy: Kerensky.

We see a repeat of something that has happened more than once in European revolutions: the workers overthrow the old *vlast*, but the new *vlast* falls into the hands of the liberal bourgeoisie and the liberal-democratic intelligentsia. *And this inevitably had to happen with us as well, given the level of political and economic development at which Russia finds itself.* The working class makes up only one part of the whole mass of the population. The democratic peasantry and the army that comes out of its ranks can adhere to the proletariat's political slogans, but they cannot follow it in its final [*krainie*] economic demands.

Russia stands before a long period of bourgeois-democratic development.

The rural and urban petty bourgeoisie - the huge mass of ordinary people [*obyvateli*] - have received, it is true, an excellent political education, due to the influence of the war and to the crimes of the old government. This is the reason that the old regime collapsed so easily and without trauma. But the sympathies of these people will immediately turn away from the revolution, if the working class takes into its hands the state *vlast*: the working class is the most revolutionary class of contemporary society, and its interests are opposed to the interests of the entire bourgeoisie as a whole. In a state in which the vast majority of the population has barely made the transformation from 'most loyal', ordinary people to free citizens, in which the rapid development of the bourgeoisie and capitalism lies ahead - the proletariat cannot and should not aspire to the *vlast*.

Under the pressure of the revolutionary democracy of Petrograd, the Provisional Government has published a programme of its [future] activity, containing almost all the political demands of the Russian and global

democracy. That which constitutes the minimum programme of the socialist proletariat is at the same time the highest limit of what can be achieved within the framework of bourgeois society. Of course, good intentions pave the way to hell, and we have more than once witnessed how even the most excellent promises remain on paper.

But whether or not the programme of the Provisional Government is put into practice in the real world depends on the workers themselves and on the revolutionary democracy as a whole.

The Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies issued a decree to support the Provisional Government to the extent and insofar as [*postolku poskolku*] it carries out its programme. Following up on this, the working class must remember that only by keenly observing the activity of the government, only by applying unrelenting pressure, will the working class achieve the promised democratic reforms. But, insofar as these reforms are really put into practice, we need to greet them and support them, we need to clear a path for them in the outlook [*soznanie*] of the still-dark masses in the city and especially in the village, we need to beat down all remnants and manifestations of the old regime.

Up to the present time, the Provisional Government is fulfilling its programme. We might have expected from it more daring and decisiveness. Still, we have to admit that in the course of one week it published a series of crucial state acts that introduced a new order in Russia: it arrested the tsar and replaced a fair amount of the representatives of the old *vlast* in the localities. Our task, the task of the working class as a whole, is to help the government in this work. Then, and only then, will it be solid and fruitful.

The Provisional Government and its programme, undertaken in agreement [*soglashenie*] with the executive committee of the Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies, has met with a triumphal reception throughout all of Russia. To fight against it in the very beginning of its activities, to express denial of confidence in it [*nedoverie*] at every step, and especially to try to become the *vlast* in its place - to do this will only raise up against oneself all of bourgeois-democratic Russia and fracture the forces of the Russian Revolution. This would mean playing into the hands of the forces of the gloomy past, forces that have not yet been thoroughly beaten.

The Provisional Government is

the government of the revolution and corresponds to the level of development on which rebellious Russia stands. Under the pressure of the whirlwind of events, under the influence of the unstoppable historical flood that in two weeks has carried away the rotten mainstays of centuries-old slavery - this government, *against the will of the majority of its members, has become a revolutionary government.*

And our business is now to help it bring the revolution to the end [*do kontsa*] and, at the same time, to obstruct any attempts on its side to hold back the revolution and to turn it back. But we will better carry out this second task, not by cries of betrayal nor by attempts to conquer the *vlast* by the proletariat, but rather by applying organised pressure on the government and by the untiring preaching of our views among the backward strata of the population. Organise yourselves, pull the rug from under the feet of the counterrevolution by enlightening those in whom the old *vlast* still hopes to find support. This means, at one and the same time, to support the Provisional Government in its revolutionary work and to obstruct any and all counterrevolutionary designs from its side ●

2. Bolshevik editorial, *Pravda*, March 14: 'The Provisional Government and revolutionary Social Democracy'

The Provisional Government, created by the revolution, is much more moderate than the forces that gave it birth. The workers and the peasants dressed in soldiers' greatcoats were the ones who created the revolution.

But in formal terms the *vlast* passed into the hands not of the representatives of the revolutionary proletariat and peasantry, but of people pushed forward by the liberal movement of the class of people of property. The proletariat and the peasantry and the army composed of these classes will consider the revolution now begun as completed only when it has satisfied their demands entirely and in full - when all remnants of the former regime, economic as well as political, have been torn up to their very roots. This full satisfaction of their demands is possible only when the full and complete *vlast* [*vsia polnota vlasti*] is in their own hands. Insofar as the

revolution is going to develop and to deepen, it will come to this - to the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.

In contrast, the Provisional Government, in accordance with the social nature of the strata from which it came, would like to hold back the development of the revolution at its first steps. If they haven't done so as yet, it is only because they don't have the strength for it. Kicking and screaming, they are compelled under the pressure of the revolutionary *narod* to still go forward. And for us, revolutionary Social Democrats, there is no need even to state that insofar as [*poskolku* . . . *postolku*] the Provisional Government actually struggles against the remnants of the old regime, to that extent it is assured of support from the revolutionary proletariat. Always and everywhere, when the Provisional Government, bowing to the will of revolutionary democracy, as

represented by the Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies, clashes with the reaction or the counterrevolution, the revolutionary proletariat must be ready with its support.

But this is support of actions [*delo*] and not of persons - support, not of the given composition of the Provisional Government, but of those objectively revolutionary steps that it is compelled to take and to the extent that it actually undertakes them.

Therefore our support should in no way tie our hands. Just as we will energetically support it in the complete liquidation of the old regime and the monarchy, in the implementation of freedoms, etc, we will just as energetically criticise each failure of the Provisional Government to act on its declared intentions [*neposledovatel'nost*], each deviation from decisive struggle, each attempt to tie the hands of the *narod* or to put out the raging revolutionary fire.

We call upon the revolutionary

democracy, headed by the proletariat, to the most unwavering *kontrol* on all the actions of the *vlast*, whether in the centre or in the localities. We must realise that the paths of the democracy and of the Provisional Government will diverge - that, when the bourgeoisie comes to its senses, it will inevitably attempt to halt the revolutionary movement and not permit it to develop to the point of satisfying the essential needs of the proletariat and the peasantry.

We must be on the alert and ready to act. Calmly and cold-bloodedly weighing our forces, we must use all our energy to gather, organise and consolidate the revolutionary proletariat. But there is no reason to force events. They are developing with immense speed by themselves.

And precisely for this reason, it would be a political mistake to pose the question right now of replacing the Provisional Government.

The active forces of the great

revolution are working for us; they are exposing the inadequacy and the limitations of any attempt to solve the tasks of the revolution by means of compromise.

And only then, when the Provisional Government of the liberals has discredited itself before the face of the democracy of Russia, will the question of the transfer of *vlast* into its own hands stand before the democracy as a practical question.

The slogan of the moment still remains: organisation of the forces of the proletariat, consolidation of the forces of the proletariat, peasantry and army by means of the soviets of deputies, absolute denial of confidence [*absolutnoe nedoverie*] to any liberal promises, the most constant *kontrol* on the implementation of our demands, an energetic support of each step that leads to the uprooting of all the remnants of the tsarist-landlord regime ●