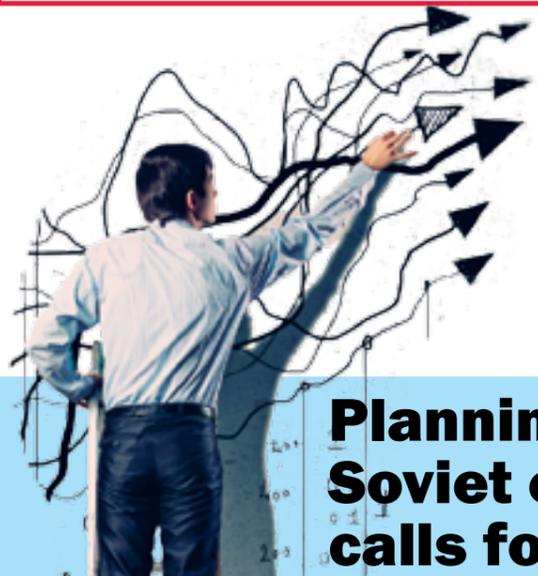


A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



**Planning was not disproved by
Soviet experience: Mike Macnair
calls for socialist optimism**

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- Trump abroad
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- 'Ghost in the shell'

No 1154 Thursday May 11 2017

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**EVEN BY
ANOTHER
NAME
CAPITALISM
STILL STINKS**



LETTERS



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

Not SNP

In Scotland, if you are a supporter of Scottish independence, you would be better voting Labour than Scottish National Party in the June 8 general election.

The way ahead for independence is another referendum called by the Scottish parliament. I don't think the nationalists would win such a referendum, but it is a democratic right for the Scottish parliament to call one if it so desires. Theresa May is blocking the right of the Scottish parliament to call such a referendum. Jeremy Corbyn has said that he supports the right of the Scottish parliament to call an 'indy ref 2'. Hopefully, that will be in the Labour manifesto. Therefore, the road to indy ref 2 leads through a Corbyn-led Labour government, which will agree to such a referendum.

With an SNP government at Holyrood, there is really no point in the 50 SNP MPs at Westminster. If May wins, indy ref 2 will be blocked for the foreseeable future. So Scottish nationalists should vote Labour to help Corbyn form the next government. The bigger the Labour vote, the more likely that Corbyn will remain Labour leader and the present unionist Labour leadership in Scotland will be removed by the Labour membership as part of a move to the left. This is, of course, a separate argument from the obvious socialist case to support a Corbyn-led Labour party in this general election.

Those in the Scottish Labour Party leadership who think Labour should compete with the Tories for the 'unionist vote' are deluded. We are not unionists, but socialists. We are for the political unity of the working class, not the unity of the British state. We think such unity is necessary if the working class is to advance anywhere on this island. Indeed, history shows us that this is the case. We win when we struggle together for pro-working class reforms, such as the national health service and the welfare state.

Corbyn and Labour should state clearly that if the Scottish parliament votes for indy ref 2, they should have it. We oppose any block by May to the Scottish parliament calling another referendum and will fight any such block throughout Britain. Vote Labour for the right of national self-determination.

It is a British-wide election, so don't waste your vote on the SNP, who can't form a government. Labour has no need

to oppose indy ref 2. Indeed, quite the opposite - bring it on. The sooner it is shown that Scottish independence does not have the support of the Scottish people, the better. In effect, Brexit has killed the economic case for Scottish independence. Labour has to reach out to that section of the working class that is supporting independence. We have to overcome their despair that social advance on a British level is impossible. We have to champion the right of the Scottish people to decide on independence, while pointing out that Scottish independence is not a viable option for working class people and that it would lead to national conflict over the divorce terms and to austerity-max.

As well as fighting for jobs, houses, the NHS, etc, we must also support the democratic demand that it is up to the Scottish people to decide if they want independence, and Westminster should have no veto on that decision.

Sandy McBurney
Glasgow

Three elections

The BBC's Laura Tory Kuenssberg asked Corbo the classic trap question: 'Have you stopped beating your wife?' It was wrapped up as 'Will you leave the EU under all and every circumstance?' Any sensible person would have to think before answering that hypothetical. Corbo repeats, 'We are leaving the EU.' 'Yes, but,' says Tory, 'what if it is really, really bad? Will you back a totally shit Brexit? Yes or no?' So here is headline news for the BBC and the Tory press.

It is not the sort of question anybody would ask May, who says we are leaving the EU, the single market and the customs union, no matter how disastrous. If necessary we will have a trade war with Germany. Don't forget we have the nukes, just in case! This is the measure of the ruthlessness of the Tories. They would sacrifice anybody and anything for the good of their party.

At least that is how they want to harvest the votes of all the Anglo-British chauvinists. Nothing like 'war' and warmongering to ignite the Ukip wing of the Tory Party. As we know 'party', is merely a metaphor for their class and hence the bankers, bosses and billionaires. So it is not as simple as the BBC and the Tory press claims.

The Tories will leave the EU. Reading the fine print on page 267 of their top secret document, it says: 'As long as there is a secret deal for the City of London, the "hard-working" workers (the only kind the Tories and the bosses love) can go hang.' So who do you trust to be in charge of the real deal, the secret one to be done behind closed doors? This takes us to the

essence of the general election.

There are really three separate elections going on in parallel universes, which only become one because we vote on the same day. The first two elections are in England and Wales. The Tories are running a plebiscite on "strong and stable leadership" provided by a weak and unprincipled opportunist. Why does the country need an elected dictator? Because of the dangers of Brexit, silly! This is the Tory Brexit election plebiscite and so Laura Tory was on message with her question.

May's record of twisting and turning is there for anybody to see. Never forget her two London vans with adverts on the side telling any immigrants to 'go home'. It was a publicity stunt for May. She didn't actually use the second van. It was only there so she could say there was more than one. The Tories are experts in wasting taxpayers' money for the sake of vanity and a bit of racist publicity.

Of course, her behaviour contrasts with the everyday Tory story of 'Corbo the Weak'. For a man who has had more bombs dropped on him than World War II and emerges smiling from his bunker, it is truly remarkable. 'Strong leader battles on against all the odds.' No wonder they hate him. Nobody is more dangerous than a man, or woman, who doesn't know when they are beaten. Corbo will not be the next prime minister or I will eat my porridge. If the polls are right it will be a heavy defeat. But a score draw would be a great result for Corbyn and equally bad for May. So it is all to play for.

Labour are running a different - and in some ways a more normal - election. They are focused on issues like health, education, taxing the rich and "For the many, not the few". We have yet to see the manifesto. Whatever its finer points, we have to recognise that Corbyn is currently the political leader of the working class movement. However, we should give no support to Labour's fifth column of rightwing (or New Labour) MPs, whose main aim is to sabotage Corbyn at every opportunity. So we should give critical support to Corbyn and oppose all his rightwing enemies - in the Tory Party and the Labour Party.

A third election is taking place in another country. The battle lines are drawn up in Scotland around the constitution and the related issue of a second independence referendum. On one side are reactionary or simply conservative unionists, who include the Orange Order, the Tories, UK Independence Party, Liberal Democrats and Scottish Labour. The present period has seen the growth of the Tories, who under Davidson have become the hard-core militant fighters defending the British union against 'nationalism'.

On the other side are the national democrats and internationalist democrats, or anti-unionists. All are demanding more democracy and self-government for Scotland, including the right to decide on remaining in the EU. These include the SNP, Green Party, Scottish Socialist Party, Rise, Left Unity and the Socialist Workers Party. Looked at from England, there is only one position to take. We must critically support anti-unionists and totally expose and condemn the Anglo-British chauvinists, especially the English social chauvinists.

So, in conclusion, the socialist movement needs to fight this election with its own independent, democratic manifesto and not see it as simply or primarily about 'supporting' this and 'opposing' that. I would propose the following democratic demands for consideration.

- Democratic exit from the EU.
- Repeal the Act of Union.
- Parliament for England.
- Commonwealth of England

- Democratic NHS and public sector.
- Democratic, republican United States of Europe.

Steve Freeman
Left Unity and Rise

Percentages

In the election for the West Midlands combined authority mayor on May 4, the Communist Party of Britain's candidate, Graham Stevenson, obtained 5,696 votes - a 1.1% share of the vote. I think this is quite significant. In six out of seven local authority areas, Graham's vote share was pretty consistent - between 0.9% and 1.5%. Only in Solihull was there a significantly lower share, at 0.5%.

In the 2015 general election, the nine Communist Party candidates obtained rather paltry shares of the vote, averaging between 0.2% and 0.4%. Only general secretary Robert Griffiths obtained a relatively higher share, at 0.57%. Graham's vote share seems consistent with the 1% support achieved by No2EU (backed by the Communist Party) in the 2009 European parliament election.

The consistent and significantly better results in the West Midlands mayoral election are unlikely to be the result of Graham's personal reputation and personality or the work of local branches, as these are quite varied over the patch. My interpretation is that the very name of the Communist Party and of communism is capable of resonating with a relatively significant number of the population, who are unlikely to have had direct personal contact with the party or with members.

I think it quite remarkable that more than one in 100 of voters in the West Midlands are prepared to vote communist. To break through that one-in-a-100 barrier means the name 'Communist Party' is starting to register - albeit mildly on the Richter scale of political awareness and consciousness in the electorate as a whole. Capitalism itself creates the working class and it also creates the material basis for ideas of socialism and communism.

The 5,696 votes are somewhat greater than the national membership of the Communist Party and therefore gives the Midlands district and local branches a significant opportunity to connect with wider sections of the population and start to build both in terms of numbers and wider influence and standing. The next immediate targets must surely be to increase vote shares to 2%-3% and then to breach the 5% barrier, which is the next step change in wider impact and awareness - one in 20 voting communist - and enabling deposits to be saved.

The lessons of recent electorally insurgent parties in the UK, such as the Green Party and Ukip, suggest that electoral strategy needs to be planned, painstakingly implemented and gradually built on over years and decades. Ukip focused on the national share of the vote, ensuring that every household had an awareness of the existence of the party by being a consistent presence over 20 years on the ballot paper and in election campaigns.

Nigel Farage has talked of the importance of ensuring the maximum number of people and households were leafleted in each and every election, gradually building up the awareness of the party and what it stood for. Ultimately, after years of painstaking work and ridicule from the establishment parties, Ukip broke through, winning the 2014 European election with nearly 27% of the popular vote.

None of this is about entertaining illusions in some sort of parliamentary road to socialism. However, democratic structures, institutions and processes are important gains for the working class, and any serious socialist or communist party should make maximum use of

them, both to defend those democratic gains and to engage with the maximum number of people.

I very much like a quote used in Mike Macnair's article, 'The Bolsheviks' success and the "revolutionary" fear of electoralism' (July 24 2014): 'I'm sorry, but the whole "electoralism is bad" argument is daft and is part of the reason the far left struggle. You end up failing to understand how you effectively communicate with normal, depoliticised people.'

In response to some ridiculous SWP luminary who once said, "It will be bullets, not ballots, which decide", the Socialist Party of Great Britain, who do advocate a parliamentary road to socialism, rightly riposted: "If you can't get people to vote for you, by the simple act of marking a cross on a ballot paper, how are you going to get them to fight and die for you?" Quite.

Andrew Northall

Kettering

Right party

Paul Demarty, in his interesting article, 'No concession' (May 4), acknowledges the French National Front as an unpleasant political party, but doubts that its supposed or imagined links to fascism are of concern. He may be right, but I think it is worth pausing to study the origins and current practice of this party, because there are nuances absent from any UK equivalent - an absence rooted in our respective countries' wartime situation.

In 1936, a new political party appeared in France, the Parti Populaire Français (PPF). It was anti-communist, anti-democratic, nationalist and corporatist. Beginning in 1938, the party espoused violent anti-Semitism, as well as being anti-masonic. After the occupation of France by Germany, the PPF became openly collaborationist and was the largest of the French pro-Nazi parties. In 1944, it set up a militant wing to assist the German Sipo/SD hunt down Jews and resistance fighters. After D-Day, with the Allies advancing across France, scores of party members fled the country, accompanying the retreating German armies. Installed on German soil, the PPF found itself immersed in the political futilities of the French collaborationist rump eking out its remaining days in the Third Reich.

If the PPF's demagogic leader, Jacques Doriot, is associated most closely with the party, he was seconded right from the beginning by Victor Barthélemy, who rose quickly in the ranks to occupy the key post of secretary general. In 1944, Barthélemy was the PPF's representative to Mussolini's Repubblica di Salò, where, at war's end, he was handed over to the French and imprisoned for several years as punishment for acts of collaboration.

Let me link this potted history of the PPF to Le Pen's National Front, in two important respects. First, on his release from prison, Victor Barthélemy immediately returned to fascist politics. Along with other unsavoury activities, in 1972 Barthélemy set up a new political party, le Front National, with Jean-Marie Le Pen. For five years, from 1973, Barthélemy was 'administrative secretary' to the National Front. Plus ça change ...

So now we have a historical link between fascism during and after the war - first with the PPF and then with the NF. What of Marine Le Pen? Here is the second link.

In April, Le Pen attracted controversy when she said that the wartime Vichy government was not responsible for rounding up French Jews for deportation. She based her argument on a fiction advanced by general de Gaulle, who pretended that there had been no interruption between the pre-war Fourth Republic and its post-war continuation. What, you might ask, happened to it between 1940

Fighting fund

Free expression

"Thanks for providing us with some hard-hitting debate," writes comrade CN in a letter accompanying his resubscription to the *Weekly Worker*. He was so impressed - not least with the "free expression encouraged on your letters pages" - that he threw in an extra £10.

By contrast, comrade FT declined to give us his thoughts. But sometimes action speak louder than words and his £50 cheque said it all. As did the £20 note handed to one of our comrades by PB - a regular donor and supporter. There was also a very useful £25 PayPal contribution from KC - but he was the only one out of 2,803 online readers to click on that button this week.

Finally 11 standing orders came

our way over the last seven days - thanks go to CG (£30), GD and RK (£25 each), DV (£20), NR (£18), SWS (£15), LM (£12), DG, SM and RK (£10 each) and, last but not least, RP, who donated his regular fiver.

All that comes to £285, and takes our running total for May up to £564. But that's a bit on the low side for this time of the month, considering we need to raise the usual £1,750 (I say 'usual', but last month we were £145 short). A bit of acceleration is called for, I think. Can you help? ●

Robbie Rix

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

ACTION

and 1945? Simple, said de Gaulle, the French government resided in wartime London, in the person of de Gaulle himself. On French soil, there was no government - only an administrative entity. Strange, because the US and many other countries maintained diplomatic relations with marshal Pétain and his Vichy 'non-government'. America only severed links with Vichy at the end of 1942.

We might ask ourselves, why does Le Pen bring up this matter of Vichy's culpability? The answer lies, on the one hand, in a particular action taken by Victor Barthélemy during the war; and, on the other, in a decision taken by president Jacques Chirac after the war. The single most important charge against Vichy and the collaborationist parties in the round-up of Jews is an event from 1942 known as the Rafle du Vel d'Hiv (the round-up in the Winter Velodrome), when 13,000 men, women and children were herded into a velodrome in Paris, over several days, to await deportation. Assisting the French police in this round-up was one secretary general of the PPF, Victor Barthélemy, who ordered hundreds of his PPF thugs to provide active help in the task.

In 1995, breaking with de Gaulle's fiction, president Chirac stood in the velodrome and pronounced that France, under its Vichy government, was guilty of collaborating with the occupying force in rounding up and deporting Jews. In assuming responsibility, Chirac angered many on the right and, sure enough, Le Pen has responded by repudiating Chirac's gesture.

Now you can understand Le Pen's comments. Although it was important not to bring any direct anti-Semitic taint to her party - and there can be no bigger taint than the wartime activities of its co-founder - as the trailing candidate she desperately needed to muster all possible votes.

For many older French, as well as their younger imitators, there is nostalgia for Vichy and its policies. Even when these nostalgiques acknowledge that collaborationist excesses were committed, there remains the fact, in their eyes, that collaborators were inspired by a desire to rid France of communists, Jews, Roma and other undesirable elements that threatened the purity of la France profonde, with its anti-enlightenment, pro-Catholic traditionalism.

Marine Le Pen's election results disappointed both candidate and party. Waiting in the wings to replace her aunt, is one Marion Maréchal Le Pen, who is much closer in ideology to the discredited Jean-Marie Le Pen than she is to Marine. Let's see where this party goes.

René Gimpel
email

No grasp

In a somewhat knockabout article, where he admonishes us for not "thinking strategically", Jack Conrad asserts:

"The end of oil was always a complete nonsense. So was peak oil, for that matter. In fact the whole thesis - that there is a certain amount of oil in the ground which will at some point begin to run out - takes no account of reserves, demand or price. Eg, if demand increases then one would expect the price to increase and that would make what are now totally unexploited or marginal fields viable. Exploration would also be stimulated and new sources discovered. Besides that you can make oil from a whole range of different substances - eg, tar sands, coal and methane - if you are prepared to pay the financial and environmental cost" ('Failed recipes', April 27).

Conrad completely misunderstands the concept of 'peak oil', which argues not that oil is about to run out, but rather that cheap oil - ie, easily accessible oil upon which capitalism was built and upon which it depends - is finite and

therefore will run out at some time. (Estimates range from 'we are already at peak oil' to 'the situation will be reached about mid-century'.) Arguments regarding supply and demand have only very limited purchase and will provide only short-term 'solutions'. For example, no doubt no effort would be spared to ensure that the military have sufficient oil regardless of cost. Obviously a situation which could not apply to wider society.

In "thinking strategically", it would be appropriate not to distort - peak oil has absolutely nothing to do with Malthusianism - and mock theories which it is obvious Conrad has very little grasp of.

Ted Hankin
email

Motto

Reading Mike Macnair on the narrowing of education ('What kind of education?', May 4), I came up with an appropriate motto: 'No more John Lennons'.

Post-1945, the Labour Party, and eventually the Conservatives, pushed for innovation as the saviour of British capitalism, while the empire fell away. However, the expanded education system not only brought us a lot of bright technology, but creatives like John Lennon - an art school guttersnipe who had the chance to help grow the music industry and, in the process, encouraged insubordination, especially against establishment wars.

Due to Lennon being a rock musician, the risk was that a large public were prone to be inspired by him, producing Germaine Greers and Bob Marleys galore and the 'horror' of the upstart 70s.

When today the media resounds with disapproval at the 'contempt for experts', remember that most don't mean expertise, as in research and grounded argument: they're simply dismissing people who haven't passed exams or been taught leadership at Eton.

Meanwhile, Beatle Lennon's recent equivalents, being academically 'slow' or having 'lazy' parents, must 'unfortunately' scramble for zero-hour contracts and uber jobs, where to speak up is the quickest way of becoming poorer.

Mike Belbin
email

Progressive role

Being equally against both sides in the war in Syria is a third-campist position and ignores the fact that the USA is the global hegemonic imperialist power, while Russia and China are not imperialist powers. So, like Trotsky in

1936 over Abyssinia, in 1937 over China and hypothetically in 1938 over Brazil, we are always for the defeat of our own and every other imperialist power, even by reactionary forces. Trotsky referred to Vargas in Brazil as a semi-fascist.

Of course, that did not mean political capitulation to bourgeois nationalist ideology, but always maintaining the political independence of the working class and offering revolutionary leadership. The 'anti-imperialist united front' was the term the revolutionary Comintern used for this tactic and, whilst Trotsky avoided it because the Stalinists were using it to promote stagism and socialism in a single country and political capitulation to bourgeois nationalism, nevertheless the three examples given above show he had not abandoned the tactics of the revolutionary Comintern and its first four congresses.

The likes of Cameron Woodford have done very good work in spelling out in detail not only the reactionary character of the 'rebels' sponsored by the USA, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, etc, but also the reactionary character of Assad - implying that he is unable to fight a revolutionary war because he was an imperialist client before the start of the war and wants to be one again after it ends. But we do have to say that, despite their self-serving motivation, Assad, Hezbollah, Iran and Russia - and China to a lesser extent - are playing a progressive role here in fighting and driving back imperialism and its sponsored jihadist proxies.

That is why east Aleppo did not 'fall', but was liberated. And that huge wave of imperialist propaganda against its liberation, the outright lies exposed by Vanessa Beeley and others about the relationship between the al Nusra Front and the White Helmets, shows it was a defeat for imperialism to be celebrated. Of course, Islamic State in Mosul were using civilians as 'human shields', as Milosevic, Saddam and Gaddafi had allegedly done before them, but the Russians and Syrians were deliberately targeting civilians in Aleppo and no human shield tactics were employed there, we must believe. Well, we have ample evidence now from several courageous reporters that these were war propaganda lies.

And the mass media campaign of disinformation was simply a repetition of jihadist lies with absolutely no independent verification. Everything turned out to be false, as we have already observed.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

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London Communist Forum

Sunday May 14, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimtz's *Lenin's electoral strategy from Marx and Engels through the revolution of 1905*. This meeting: Preface.

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

I, Daniel Blake

Friday May 12, 7.30pm: Film screening, The Leadmill, 6 Leadmill Road, Sheffield S1. Showing of Ken Loach's anti-cuts film. Limited number of free tickets available: <http://leadmill.co.uk/events/leadmill-cinematic-i-daniel-blake-free-screening>.

Organised by Festival of Debate: www.festivalofdebate.com.

The great unrest

Saturday May 13, 1pm: Public meeting, Wakefield Labour Club (the Red Shed), Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1. Free admission, light buffet. Speakers: Robin Stocks (author of *The hidden heroes of Easter week*), Alan Brooke (co-author of *Liberty or death*), Rob Turnbull (author of *Climbing Mount Sinai*).

Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group: www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html.

Stand Up To Racism

Regional summits to keep racism out of the general election.

Sheffield: Saturday May 13, 12 noon to 5pm, U-Mix Centre, 17 Asline Road, Lowfield, Sheffield S2.

Manchester: Saturday May 13, 1pm to 5pm, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2.

Bristol: Saturday May 20, 1pm to 5pm, Tony Benn House, Unite the Union, Victoria Street, Bristol BS1.

Organised by Stand Up To Racism: www.standuptoracism.org.uk.

People's Assembly

Saturday May 13: Annual conference - postponed because of general election.

See People's Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Firefighters under occupation

Monday May 15, 7.15pm: Film screening, Brady Centre, 192-196 Hanbury Street, London E1. Documentary about life as a Palestinian firefighter in the occupied West Bank.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org/events/film-screening-firefighters-occupation.

Labour, value and capitalist crisis

Tuesday May 16, 7pm: Political economy study, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. One of four classes by Simon Renton in the 'Labour, value and exploitation' series. £5.

Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk.

From Palestine to Israel - the legacy of Balfour

Tuesday May 16, 7pm: Public meeting and discussion, Hebden Bridge town hall, St George's Street, Halifax HX7.

Organised by Halifax Friends of Palestine: <http://halifaxfriendsofpalestine.org.uk>.

Classic anti-war films

Film festival, Sands Films Studio, 82 St Marychurch Street, London SE16.

Tuesday May 16, 8.30pm: *Ashani Sanket* (1973 - Satyajit Ray)

Thursday May 18, 7.30pm: *Sir! No sir!* (2005 - David Zeiger).

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: <http://stopwar.org.uk>.

Free Raif

Wednesday May 17, 1pm: Vigil for Raif Badawi, Saudi Arabian embassy (Curzon Street entrance), 30 Charles Street, London W1. Release the blogger charged with apostasy and insulting Islam.

Organised by English PEN: www.englishpen.org.

Election Question Time

Thursday May 18, 6pm: Debate, Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2. Speakers include: Tariq Ali, Lindsey German, Richard Norton Taylor, Kate Hudson, Andrew Murray.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: <http://stopwar.org.uk>.

Social histories of the Russian Revolution

Thursday May 25, 6.30pm: Discussion meeting, Birkbeck, University of London, 26 Russell Square, London WC1. 'Alexander Shlyapnikov and the Russian metalworkers in 1917'. Speaker: Barbara Allen.

Organised by Social Histories of the Russian Revolution: <https://socialhistories1917.wordpress.com>.

Art for peace sake!

Friday May 26, 7.30pm: An evening of anti-war poetry, song and music, CB2 Cafe Basement, Norfolk Street, Cambridge CB1.

Organised by Cambridge Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/Cambridge-Stop-The-War-Coalition-301007410088989.

Artists for Spain

Thursday June 8, 7pm: Historical talk and exhibition, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speaker: art historian Christine Lindey on the Artists International Association and the Spanish Civil War.

Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marxlibrary.org.uk.

Peace pagoda

Sunday June 18, 10.30am: Cross-cultural peace ceremony, Brickhill Street, Willen, Milton Keynes MK15.

Organised by Peace Pagoda: <http://stopwar.org.uk/index.php/events/other-anti-war-events/2549-18-june-milton-keynes-peace-pagoda>.

CPGB wills

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

AGGREGATE**What happens after June 8?**

Peter Manson reports on last weekend's meeting of CPGB members

On May 7 comrades from the CPGB gathered in London for an aggregate meeting. Unsurprisingly, the main item on the agenda was the forthcoming general election, although towards the end of the day we also debated the new global situation in view of Donald Trump's foreign policy.

But first up was Jack Conrad, representing the CPGB Provisional Central Committee. He was moving a motion drawn up by the PCC in relation to our key tasks in the coming period (see opposite for the final, amended version). After the general election, he said, the stakes will be high. Comrade Conrad stressed that the *result* of the election was not really in doubt, as shown by the May 4 local elections, where the Tories gained 563 seats, while Labour lost 382.

Other big losers were, of course, the UK Independence Party, which lost all but one of its previous 146 councillors, and the Liberal Democrats, who lost 42 seats. The game is almost certainly up for Ukip, continued the comrade. Theresa May, with her hard Brexit stance, has stolen Ukip's ground, without risking the votes of Conservative 'remainers', who have nowhere to go - very few will switch to the Lib Dems.

So, barring some unforeseen development, the result of the general election seems pretty clear. Thanks to Labour's rightwing saboteurs, with the support of the media, the party cannot win under Jeremy Corbyn under current circumstances, and we should be honest about that. But the left is deluded. For example, *Labour Briefing* believes that the election offers an "unprecedented opportunity to take a clear socialist message to voters" - meaning Corbyn's "clear socialist message" apparently - and that Labour can therefore win.

In this context comrade Conrad mentioned the fact that the Rail, Maritime and Transport union has come out for a blanket Labour vote - a welcome move from an organisation that had previously wanted the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition to continue standing candidates against Labour. In view of the RMT's previous position, the Socialist Party in England and Wales had rowed back on its line of calling for the suspension of Tusc contests. But now, despite SPEW comrades standing for Tusc on May 4, it seems the coalition will not be contesting on June 8 after all.

Corbyn's victory was always contradictory, continued comrade Conrad. As a rebel within mainstream Labourism,

unacceptable to the establishment. Which means that, although he is no revolutionary socialist, his victory has presented us with the opportunity of fulfilling a vital task - the transformation of Labour into a united front of not only the trade unions, but the entire left.

At the moment the rank-and-file Labour left is very weak. It is politically uneducated and easily swayed by the media. That is why the experienced comrades in the Socialist Workers Party as well as SPEW could play a valuable role if they took Labour's internal battles seriously.

To sum up, comrade Conrad stated once again that the real question was not about what we do on June 8, but what happens afterwards. According to a recent poll, 57% of Labour voters say that Corbyn should resign as leader if Labour loses. Yet amongst the so-called left there are elements supporting the idea of a 'progressive alliance', including the Greens, Scottish and Welsh nationalists and even the Lib Dems.

The right will continue to dominate the Parliamentary Labour Party and, if Corbyn resigns, they will ensure there is no left candidate for leader on the ballot paper. That is why, after the election, a key task facing us is to persuade Corbyn to stay - the likely heavy defeat is the responsibility of the rightwing saboteurs, aided by the media.

Just to be clear about what this meant, comrade Conrad said that previously we had urged Labour members to give Corbyn their critical support. However, he has constantly sought accommodation with the right. Today he says nothing about questions like abolishing the monarchy, withdrawing from Nato and scrapping Trident; he even refused to condemn the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' campaign and defend those falsely accused. In fact all he promises to do is manage capitalism better than the Tories. He is, in other words, neither a reformist nor even a sub-reformist. So we should still defend Corbyn against attacks from the Labour right and the media. But there can be no support for his political programme.

Amendments

While all comrades present were broadly in favour of the PCC motion, comrade Carla Roberts had proposed a few amendments aimed at strengthening it. Comrade Conrad said he did not think any of the amendments were particularly necessary, although he was not going to oppose all of them.

However, although comrade Roberts herself was unable to attend, several comrades spoke in favour of some of her amendments during the following debate. Bob Paul thought they "added something" - he mentioned in particular comrade Roberts' call to "maximise the vote for left candidates".

Mike Macnair did not like comrade Roberts' first amendment much, which recalled the original CPGB position on critical support for Corbyn. But he agreed with another: that we should state in the motion our call for a Labour vote - although he disagreed with comrade Paul about "left candidates".

Comrade Macnair also made the point that the local election results did not necessarily point to a *disastrous* showing for Labour on June 8, but he still thought we were looking at a "very substantial Tory majority".

Vernon Price liked the idea of the PCC motion, aimed at helping us to clarify our

differences, but thought that the final sentence of point 11 represented a "chicken and egg" situation, implying that we first had to establish a mass Communist Party before we could aim for the transformation of Labour.

For her part, Sarah Stewart largely agreed with comrade Macnair on the amendments. She went on to report that SWP delegates at last month's conference of the National Union of Teachers had voted *against* a motion calling for NUT affiliation to Labour, which was as a result defeated narrowly. Like other comrades, she wondered what on earth the SWP was playing at.

Yasmine Mather noted Corbyn's continuous watering down of his positions, meaning that he was not, as he claimed, "anti-establishment". She noted the lack of any clear Labour position on Brexit - an absence that was emphasised later that day, when Corbyn in an interview repeatedly refused to answer whether under his premiership the UK would definitively leave the European Union, whatever deal was on offer. Comrade Mather also agreed with some of comrade Roberts' amendments - in particular, it was important to specify our call for a Labour vote within the motion, she said.

In his contribution, Stan Kelsey pointed out that, although Labour had been on a pre-election "war footing" since November, the right had ensured that there had been no process in place for selecting candidates, meaning that Corbyn supporters would remain a tiny minority in the PLP after June 8.

Following this, I responded to comrade Price's point about the "chicken and egg" situation: the fight to transform Labour and to build a mass Communist Party were two complementary tasks, in my view. I also pointed out that the left's false optimism about the likely general election outcome, plus its exaggerated praise for some of Corbyn's positions, were hardly helpful in assessing where we were at in the fight to transform Labour.

Simon Wells wondered about a possible contradiction between points 6 and 9: has there really been "one step forward organisationally" within Labour? And Phil Kent thought that we should only recommend a vote for Labour candidates who supported Corbyn - otherwise it was illogical to call for the expulsion of the saboteurs, he said.

Replying to the debate, comrade Conrad stressed that, while obviously we differentiate between left and right candidates, we should call for a vote for and canvass

for all of them. The point was to engage with Labour members. However, the task was not to maximise the Labour vote, irrespective of the left-right balance, but to "fight for socialist politics". Nor was it inconsistent to call for a vote for Labour rightwingers and then fight for their deselection.

The meeting then went on to vote by a clear majority in favour of some of comrade Roberts' amendments - namely the clause contesting the idea that "The worst Labour government is better than any Tory government"; and the insertion of our call to vote for all Labour candidates. But the meeting decided that two other amendments - one stating our position since Corbyn was elected, and the other naming particular saboteurs - were unnecessary. After this the motion, as amended, was carried unanimously.

Trump

In the final - rather shorter - session of the aggregate, comrades discussed the wide-ranging presentation by Yasmine Mather on Donald Trump's foreign policy, which is published elsewhere in this paper.

In her opening, comrade Mather pointed to the contrast between the Trump of the presidential campaign, promising less foreign intervention, and the reality of his threats against North Korea and his bombing of Islamic State targets in Afghanistan. She thought that the 'globalists' had won out and what we were seeing was in reality a continuation of Republican, neoconservative imperialism. So US foreign policy was not that different under Trump, she concluded: the US was "still calling the shots".

In the debate that followed, Moshé Machover, a friend of the CPGB, pointed to the fact that US policy was "riddled with contradictions". In fact Trump had been busy back-peddalling on Israel-Palestine - he seems to be shying away from recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital, a position which would have meant *de facto* acceptance of the incorporation of the West Bank.

Comrade Macnair noted in particular the change in US policy on the EU, which the nationalists had always wanted to undermine. But now Theresa May's Brexiteering was aiding Trump's old aim of reducing the EU to a free-trade zone. For his part, comrade Conrad said that Trump was enjoying some success in getting the likes of South Korea, Japan and Germany to pay for US hegemony. He stressed that the aggressive noises against North Korea reaffirmed that "we are living in a dangerous world", where the role of individuals is right now more pronounced.

Comrade Mather pointed out in her response to the debate that it would not look good for Trump to say, 'We're fighting Iran, but the Saudis are paying!' ●

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**Jeremy Corbyn:
neither a reformist
nor a sub-reformist**





Corbyn supporters: will they stay or will they go?

Final resolution

1. Since the summer of 2015, when Jeremy Corbyn began to look like he would win the Labour leadership election, the right wing, with the full backing of the media, has been conducting a civil war. Unlike George Lansbury and Michael Foot before him, Corbyn has hardly any support in the Parliamentary Labour Party.

2. The mistaken response of the Corbyn leadership has been to seek to appease the right. Hence, when it came to the barring, suspension or expulsion of socialists and leftwingers, Corbyn has been content to leave things in the hands of Iain McNicol and the Victoria Street HQ.

3. Most notoriously Corbyn adopted a totally aloof stance when it came to the campaign to equate opposition to Zionism with anti-Semitism. The Shami Chakrabarti inquiry found nothing and came out with the usual liberalistic platitudes. But Corbyn has not sought to expose the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' campaign for what it is, even though there is unanswerable proof of Israeli embassy involvement. Instead he chose to speak favourably about Israel when addressing Labour Friends of Israel.

4. Not that this has satisfied the right. On the contrary, they smelt blood and have repeatedly pushed Corbyn to resign. Encouragingly, though, he beat the hapless Owen Smith with an increased majority. That despite the massively increased fee charged for associate membership, despite denying many new members a vote and despite purging thousands of members.

5. Though he has a huge popular mandate in the Labour Party, Corbyn has committed himself to a programme that is barely distinguishable from Ed Miliband's. In essence he promises to run capitalism better than the Tories and in the interests of "the many, not the few". A tired cliché that could just as easily come from a Tory politician.

6. That some sections of the Labour left have celebrated this as an advance shows that the election of Corbyn as Labour leader has been a case of one step forward organisationally and one step backwards politically.

7. Yes, defend Corbyn against the attacks from Labour right and the media. But there has to be principled criticism.

8. There has been no call for the abolition of the monarchy and House of Lords, the disestablishment of the Church of England. No call for a republic. No demands for the abolition of the standing army, a popular militia, withdrawal from Nato and decommissioning of nuclear weapons. Certainly no call for ending capitalism and establishing a socialist Europe.

9. The same goes for the Labour Party itself. There are a few tinkering proposals. But no bold call for all leftwing groups to be allowed to affiliate, conference to be restored as the sovereign body and the drafting of a new clause four. No call for a full-spectrum labour movement media and a campaign to back up Labour's new mass membership with a solid programme of socialist education. Indeed so determined is Team Corbyn to appease the right that the old practice of mandatory reselection of MPs - half-won in the 1980s - is now considered a dangerous embarrassment. Meanwhile, Momentum has been left under the control of one man, cynically demobilised, dumbed down and denied even the possibility of developing as any kind of democratic organisation.

10. Because of the civil war conducted by the right (with the full backing and active connivance on the media) it is hardly surprising that, when Theresa May finally called the much expected June 8 general election, Labour was trailing far behind in the opinion polls.

11. Too many on the left seem to

believe that street demonstrations, strikes and a few populist gestures are enough to win mass support ... and even take us to socialism. An obvious delusion. Winning the mass of the population to socialism cannot come about through mere economic demands. It requires mass consciousness. It requires solid mass organisation. Hence the necessity for the highest form of working class organisation. Without a mass Communist Party the fight to transform the existing labour movement, including the Labour Party, is bound to be stopped short or end in defeat.

12. But, just like the Labourite right, the Labourite left is committed to a Labour government for the sake of a Labour government. 'The worst Labour government is better than any Tory government,' runs their shared slogan. In other words, managing capitalism, though it may entail vicious attacks on the working class, is preferable to resisting capitalism and organising the working class for the struggle for socialism.

13. We call for a vote for all Labour Party candidates on June 8. However, it is reasonable to expect a substantial Tory majority, a minor Liberal Democrat revival and a continuation of Scottish National Party domination in Scotland.

14. Under these circumstances the Labour right will be demanding that Corbyn falls on his sword. They will blame him for Labour's poor performance. We should expect some former leftwingers to join in what will be a media-magnified chorus. However, the genuine left should put the blame squarely where it belongs. For two years the right have acted as saboteurs.

15. The genuine left must demand that Corbyn stands firm. Through the growth of Marxist organisation, the full flowering of democracy and initiative from below, the saboteurs must be crushed ●

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USA

Campaign and reality

In this edited version of her speech to the CPGB aggregate, Yassamine Mather looks at Donald Trump's foreign policy after his first hundred days



Trump turns out to be an old-time Republican, not a Russian puppet

The main slogans that dominated Donald Trump's election campaign were to a certain extent contradictory. He kept saying he wants to make America 'great again', but, on the other hand, he appeared to propose an isolationist foreign policy, without money being wasted on foreign wars. But making America great again surely means retaining or enhancing the US role as the world hegemon - you cannot be isolationist at the same time.

So, for all the hype we saw after Trump's inauguration, all the demonstrations by those worried about fascism being on the march in the world's largest economy, it turns out that his foreign policy is not that different from standard neoconservative Republicanism - and not that different from Obama's foreign policy or, for that matter, what Hillary Clinton was promising. While, of course, the language of the new president remains unconventional - and many people comment about Trump's flip-flops in his Twitter messages, etc - the substance of the foreign policy pursued by his administration so far is very much in line with that of recent presidents.

I am not denying the fact Trump is quite capable of expressing extremist views - it even looked as though the US and North Korea were on the brink of war a couple of weeks ago. However, the fact that the threats remained just that speaks volumes. So let us look at the last 100-plus days - what he had promised and what he has done.

China

If you remember, Trump said that he would force China - which he claimed was responsible for unemployment and poverty in the US - to accept new tough conditions prior to trade deals. Well, we can say quite categorically that he has not followed through this tough talk. The new administration has not imposed high tariffs or any other protectionist measures, contrary to what he threatened to do during his campaign. Of course, international capital is happy about this, which is reflected in the way markets have reacted to the first few months of the Trump administration. So we haven't heard the kind of rhetoric we heard during the election debates calling China a currency manipulator. There is much talk of two warring factions within the administration - led by Steve Bannon, the super-nationalist, and Jared Kushner, the globalist. But, as far as China is concerned, it appears the globalists have

won out over the nationalists, at least for the time being.

After originally suggesting that Washington's historical 'one China' policy concerning relations with Taiwan might be used as a leverage to extract concessions from China on other issues, Trump is now saying he wants to reduce tension between the two countries. After repeatedly saying that China must help solve America's 'North Korea problem', Trump is now telling us: "Beijing's relationship with North Korea is quite complicated."

Trump recently won a legal battle for his name to appear on a trademark for real-estate-agent services in commercial and residential properties in China. Critics claimed the Chinese government wanted to "curry favour" and Senator Dianne Feinstein claimed: "China's decision to award president Trump with a new trademark, allowing him to profit from the use of his name, is a clear conflict of interest."¹ According to the website, Think Progress, the deal is also problematic for China: the decision violated a Chinese rule prohibiting trademarks that are "the same as or similar to the name of leaders of national, regional or international political organisations."²

All this has coincided with a reversal of Trump's position regarding the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation. He had claimed to be very much against it, yet he is now a convert and might even go to the next summit.

Everyone knows that Trump was going to build a wall along the Mexican border in the first few weeks of the new administration - which, of course, the Mexicans were going to pay for. During the election campaign, he claimed the wall would make US inner cities free of drug dealers and stop US citizens losing their jobs to immigrants. His failure to make that a reality, although predictable, has caused resentment amongst sections of his supporters.

He was also going to scrap the North America Free Trade Agreement (Nafta), while the US was also going to leave Nato. On this issue too, there has been a U-turn - although Trump is now trying to encourage Germany and other European countries to make larger contributions to the costs.

Middle East

During the election campaign Trump made a number of accusations about

Saudi Arabia and the Emirates of the Persian Gulf, claiming they were helping to finance Clinton's campaign, while not doing enough to fight Islamic State. He stated that Russia was the only country doing that, but, if he was elected, he would ensure that IS was destroyed within weeks of gaining office.

All this changed almost overnight. The current US policy towards Saudi Arabia is very much a continuation of the neoconservative strategy, as outlined by the Project for the New American Century. In fact Trump has overtaken Bush junior in this respect.

It is pretty clear that members of the Saudi royal family, as well as senior figures in the emirates, have contributed to the finances of IS, al Qa'eda and other offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood. Yet the US administration dispatched CIA director Mike Pompeo to Riyadh in February to meet prince Mohammed bin Nayef, the head of Saudi counterterrorism, to award him the George Tenet medal for "his years of success in battling al Qa'eda and Islamic State".

How can anyone take US claims seriously when the very people who have sponsored such jihadi groups are rewarded by leaders of the 'free world'? We also see increased US support for Saudi involvement in Yemen - despite reports of genocide and mass starvation caused by the war, the state department has approved the resumption of arms sales to Saudi Arabia that was previously blocked by Barack Obama. While Obama and Clinton both courted the Saudi kingdom, they also paid lip service to democratic and women's rights. Trump does not need to pretend he cares about such issues. In fact US-Saudi relations have one aim: combatting Iranian influence in the region. In this respect King Salman and Donald Trump are singing from the same hymn sheet.

The new administration's relationship with Turkey is as complicated as it was under the previous administration. On the one hand, the US likes to promote Turkey as an example of Islamic democracy; on the other, it is promising Kurds in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria the possible establishment of an independent Kurdish state. By redrawing current borders they hope to weaken Iran, destroying in the process what is left of Iraq and Syria. We should

also mention that after the recent referendum that will undoubtedly curb democracy in Turkey, Trump was quick to congratulate president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

But Trump is an admirer of a number of unsavoury characters - the list also includes Marine le Pen: Trump was one of the few foreign leaders to congratulate the Front National leader's success in reaching the second round of the French presidential elections.

Throughout the presidential campaign, even when there were accusations of Russian involvement in the leaking of Clinton's emails, Trump remained consistent in his admiration for Putin. But now the US has gone along with the general consensus of supporting Ukraine over the Crimea. After the launch of 59 Tomahawk missiles on Syria, Trump claimed US-Russian relations were worse than ever (although the US media were quick to remind him that there was such a thing as the cold war).

As far as I can gather, Trump is going to be an even stronger supporter of Israel than Obama was - his main advisor (and son-in-law), Jared Kushner, has financial and political links with Israel. Trump has already declared his opposition to a two-state solution, but we have not seen the dramatic improvement in US-Israel relations some had expected. The fact that the new administration is now expressing the same kind of reservations as Obama when it comes to the issue of settlements has disappointed some Zionists.

While Trump invited Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas to the White House, his visit was not covered as prominently as that of Binyamin Netanyahu. During the Abbas visit he focussed on the Palestinian Authority's 'security commitments' - which basically means that Palestine does Israel's dirty work. Having ridiculed John Kerry and Obama for trying to find a peace deal in the Middle East, Trump is now going down the same route, claiming that as a company CEO he is a "deal-maker".

Iran

Here there is some consistency. One of the most important targets of Trump's foreign policy is Iran: throughout the presidential election campaign he lambasted the Iran nuclear deal, calling

it "the worst deal ever made". And now Trump is trying to establish a coalition against Iran's Islamic Republic - an Arab 'Nato', uniting Saudi Arabia, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey against Iran and its regional allies, Syria and Hezbollah.

But again this singling out of Iran is very much in line with the historic neoconservative line of the Republican Party. Trump wants to make Iraq an ally against Iran, which is why the country hosting one of the largest concentrations of IS jihadists was removed from the list of countries affected by the Muslim ban. Iraq has been promised financial support in return for its retreat from the Shia axis under Iran.

Another part of Trump's plan for this new alliance was to get Russia involved and he sent secretary of state Rex Tillerson to Moscow with his proposals. The Russians were promised the lifting of sanctions, plus greatly improved relations if they moved away from supporting Iran and Syria. But by all accounts this was a miscalculation, and the Russian response was a firm *nyet*. There are good reasons why Russia supports Assad, including operating in the Mediterranean using the Syrian port of Tartus.

Nonetheless, an alliance against Iran is the cornerstone of the current foreign policy, which the two factions of the Trump administration - the isolationists and the globalists - support for different reasons: while Bannon wants to make America "great again", Kushner is a staunch supporter of Israel.

I have to confess I find this obsession with Iran bizarre. For all its anti-western rhetoric, the Islamic republic is part of global neoliberal capitalism. It has given up any ambition of exporting its brand of Islam - its operations in Syria and Iraq and its arming of Hezbollah should these days be seen as 'defensive', in that they are mainly concerned with the Tehran regime's own survival. Of course, it remains a repressive, anti-working class, reactionary regime, but the Trump administration does not even pretend to have any concerns about such issues.

On the face of it, IS and other such groups present more of a threat. So why Iran? In my opinion many Americans remember the humiliation of the US hostages in Tehran in 1979-80 and they want revenge. Amongst them are Bannon, who was a junior officer in the navy at the time and was on the ship carrying the helicopters used in the failed rescue attempt. Apparently Bannon regards that as "one of the defining moments of his life".³

In fact, contrary to the assumptions made in Washington, it is US policy and attempts at regime change from above that have aided the survival of Iran's Islamic Republic. Iranians are well aware of the consequences of regime change in Libya and Iraq. They would rather vote in rigged elections within the current order than seek the support of a dubious alliance, organised by Trump and paid for by Saudi Arabia and the Emirates ●

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Notes

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ITALY

Playing into Grillo's hands

Toby Abse reports on the balance of forces following Renzi's re-election

On April 30, former premier Matteo Renzi gained an overwhelming victory in the Partito Democratico (PD) primary (leadership contest). He scored 69.17% against justice minister Andrea Orlando's 19.96%, and Puglian regional president Michaele Emiliano's 10.87%.

However, somebody less arrogant than Renzi would have had cause for concern, since the reduced turnout demonstrated the waning influence of the PD over its traditional voters. The reduced turnout - 1,900,000, compared with 2,800,000 in December 2013 - meant that Renzi actually got fewer votes - 1,390,000 - than the 1,895,000 he had scored in his 67.5% victory on the previous occasion. The fall in turnout was most marked in the three 'red regions' - Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany and Umbria - as well as in Piedmont, of which Turin is the capital. Significantly, the most marked fall was in Emilia-Romagna (capital: 'Red Bologna'), where only 200,000 voted - half the 2013 figure. The other marked feature of the primary was that 66% of the voters were over 60, with only 10% being drawn from the 16-34 age group.¹

Renzi has used the primary to reassert his control over the party - and drag it further to the centre - but he has done so in a way that reduced the PD's chance of beating Beppe Grillo's Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement - M5S) at the polls in the next few months. He seems to have divided his opponents - gaining the support of Emiliano's delegates at the May 7 national assembly for his candidate for the PD presidency and isolating the more serious opposition from Orlando's supporters.

Renzi was determined not only to obtain a new mandate as PD secretary in a bid to wipe out the memory of his humiliating defeat in the December 2016 referendum on constitutional reform, but also to make absolutely sure that he would be the leader in the forthcoming general election, and therefore guarantee that he had the final say over which forces the PD might ally with, before or after the election, since it stands no chance of gaining the 40% required under the current law to gain the majority premium of 55% of the seats and form a single-party government. Renzi completely rejected the notion that the two roles of party secretary and prime minister were in practice incompatible - a view expressed by some of his critics, who claimed, with some justification, that during his premiership from February 2014 to December 2016 he had neglected the PD's internal affairs: weakening its organisation on the ground in cities like Rome and Naples, and allowing membership to decline.

Weakened opposition

By provoking a split in the PD on the eve of the primary,² he had ensured that the internal opposition to him would be considerably weakened, now that Pierluigi Bersani - his predecessor as secretary - and a large proportion of those who had come into the PD from the ex-'official communist' Democratici di Sinistra (DS) had departed for the more social democratic Articolo Uno - Movimento Democratici e Progressisti (MDP). As a result of the breakaway, in the initial qualifying phase of the primary, confined to PD branches, he had already obtained two-thirds of the vote. His two opponents - the broadly social democratic Orlando and the erratic populist Emiliano - had got 25.3% and 8% respectively.



Beppe Grillo: is his party heading for government?

Although the division amongst his internal opponents probably strengthened Renzi's position, he would have been victorious even in a straight fight with Orlando, who, despite the contradictions involved in his own role as justice minister in both Renzi's government and Paolo Gentiloni's current administration, had gathered the support of all Renzi's serious opponents within the PD, and endorsements from some people with no DS past, such as former premier Enrico Letta and, implicitly, another former premier, Romano Prodi. On the other hand, Renzi had the support of the majority of the remaining party apparatchiks, once most of the layer of older, ex-DS activists associated with Bersani had gone.

Moreover, Renzi tried as far as possible to avoid debating with his opponents - the only television debate Renzi deigned to participate in was on Sky, limiting the audience to those fanatical sports fans willing to pay for their satellite dishes: not necessarily the portion of the viewing public with the deepest interest in the PD leadership, or even Italian politics in general. Renzi actually withdrew at the last minute - with a lame excuse - from a programme that intended to run parallel interviews (rather than a genuine debate) with all three candidates, as well as turning down invitations for interviews from a number of well-known presenters of current-affairs programmes, with whom he had fallen out in the past, and from whom he feared tough questioning.

In the course of the campaign, it became clear that one of the main issues at stake concerned the political forces with which the PD would ally itself if, as seems very likely, it is not in a position to form a majority government after the next election. Renzi has made it clear that he will not form an alliance with the MDP or any other political party to the left of the PD, branding all those who have broken away in opposition to his neoliberal policies as "traitors". Whilst Renzi still claims

that he would be willing to reach some agreement with Giuliano Pisapia, the former mayor of Milan, and his rather nebulous movement, the Campo Progressista, he has emphasised that he would have no further interest in a deal with Pisapia if it meant also having to include the MDP.

On the other hand, Renzi has refused to reject out of hand any notion of an alliance with Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia in a 'grand coalition' against populist forces such as M5S and Berlusconi's own nominal allies, the Lega Nord and the neo-fascist Fratelli d'Italia (FdI). Emiliano's position was rather confused, but he appeared open to a hypothetical deal with M5S. Orlando, on the other hand, was committed to the idea of a "broad centre-left" as the only way to block both M5S and the traditional centre-right. He was implacably opposed to a deal with Berlusconi, saying that Renzi should put that idea to a referendum of all PD members, assuming that, however far they had moved towards the centre, they would never swallow this. Given that the MDP, the Campo Progressista, Sinistra Italiana and other lesser fragments of a similar nature are all fundamentally social democratic, Orlando's proposal was perfectly viable and quite likely to allow a broad PD-led centre-left coalition to win the next election.

Given Renzi's obstinacy, it is possible that there may be a further split from the PD in the aftermath of his re-election as secretary. There are rumours that a centre-left list in direct opposition to the PD may be formed - one that would involve figures close to Prodi,³ as well as the more leftwing fragments, such as the Campo Progressista, MDP and perhaps Sinistra Italiana. Indeed, it has been rumoured that the former premier and head of the European Commission may give this combination his official endorsement. Significantly, Prodi has said in the aftermath of the 2017 primary result, "Effectively, my votes⁴ were numerically almost three times

higher than those of last Sunday, but they were other times, there was a great hope ... If the party wants to win an election, it must be inclusive."⁵ This is a clear indication of his contempt for Renzi, and may well signal further moves towards involvement in an alternative centre-left.

All these divisions were reflected in the April 25 Liberation Day commemoration march in Milan, when Renzi's PD adopted blue flags with the EU stars in a rather ham-fisted effort to identify themselves with French presidential candidate Emanuel Macron, whilst the MDP and Campo Progressista marched in a different part of the procession with banners containing (a certain amount of) red.

M5S deal?

As things stand, it is likely that the next general election will be fought on some kind of relatively pure proportional system, in which M5S will emerge as the largest party. Mainstream journalists in *Repubblica* and *Corriere della Sera* have been suggesting for some time that M5S will make some kind of post-electoral deal with the Lega Nord and FdI, given their shared hostility to the euro and the EU, as well as to the current wave of immigration reaching Italy from Libya. M5S's official position is to deny this, repeating its shop-worn assertions of purity and its 'neither right nor left' sloganising, but its recent rightward shifts are not explicable on any other basis.

M5S is in favour of a referendum on the euro, bringing it back into line with the Lega's reiterated desire to return to the lira. Moreover, M5S's pronouncements on immigration have once again taken a strongly racist and xenophobic turn - a few weeks ago, M5S's Luigi Di Maio claimed that 40% of Romanian criminals had come to Italy; and the latest M5S campaign suggests that the NGOs involved in saving migrants from death by drowning in the Mediterranean are in league with the human traffickers who, according to M5S, are their

chief financiers. The M5S campaign has, as a secondary theme, made some allegations about George Soros playing an important role in financing the humanitarian NGOs. Regardless of whether Soros - himself a refugee at an earlier stage of his life - has or has not given any money to any of the nine NGOs involved, it should be obvious to anyone familiar with the weird world of internet conspiracy theories that this is an implicit reference to our old friend, the world Jewish conspiracy - the notion that Jewish financiers are flooding Italy with black migrants could have come straight from the pages of *Mein Kampf*.

It needs to be emphasised that these incitements to racial hatred come not from some maverick local councillor, but from the very top of M5S - repeated statements by di Maio, backed up by repeated endorsements by Beppe Grillo, on what Renzi and the mainstream press sarcastically describe as "the Sacred Blog". Whilst it is possible that some prominent M5S members privately find this murderously xenophobic rhetoric distasteful, they have yet to criticise either Di Maio or Grillo publicly. While M5S has distanced itself from Trump's recent military escapades in Syria and elsewhere, in marked contrast to Grillo's initial public rejoicing at Trump's triumph in the US presidential election, this shift is entirely due to M5S's pro-Putin stance. Once its two anti-EU heroes clashed, it had to take sides.

Manlio Di Stefano, the M5S 'expert' on foreign policy⁶, destined for the foreign ministry in the event of an M5S electoral victory, is solidly pro-Putin. Di Stefano has had a number of meetings with Sergei Zheleznyak, the deputy leader of Putin's United Russia Party and vice-president of the Russian duma. Di Stefano has also given numerous television interviews to *Russia Today*, and in June 2016 at the congress of United Russia made a speech in fluent English defending all Putin's actions, including the invasion of the Crimea. This pro-Putin M5S line tallies with that of the Lega, whose leader, Matteo Salvini, has visited Moscow - there have been unconfirmed rumours of Russian financial assistance to the Lega. Obviously there are limits to the extent that M5S can follow the Lega and the FdI, but all these indications of an ideological convergence make the suspicions of mainstream journalists about a post-electoral alliance rather more credible than M5S's official denials.

Projections based on current opinion polls would suggest that Renzi will not have the requisite numbers in a parliament elected on a proportional basis to realise his grand coalition of the PD, Forza Italia and centrist fragments like Alleanza Popolare (formerly known as Nuovo Centro Destro), so his hope of returning to Palazzo Chigi (the prime minister's office) is probably delusional anyway, and merely opens the way to an M5S-led government ●

Notes

1. All figures from *Repubblica* or *Corriere della Sera* between May 1 and May 7. In some cases they were either provisional or rounded up or down, but, there is no doubt about the accuracy of the general trends.
2. See 'Hit by corruption scandals' *Weekly Worker* March 30.
3. In other words, people from the left of the old Christian Democratic tradition rather than the former DS members involved in the MDP split from the PD.
4. In the centre-left coalition primary of 2005.
5. *La Repubblica* April 28.
6. At least, unlike Di Maio - who notoriously talked about Pinochet's "Venezuelan" dictatorship - he appears to have some grasp of history and geography.

THEORY

Unplanning delusions

The collapse of the Soviet Union does not prove that planning is impossible, argues **Mike Macnair**

This is the second part of my review of Paul Auerbach's *Socialist optimism* (2016). Perhaps it is better described as my discussion of some ideas which are posed by the *general shape* of Auerbach's arguments; since, as I said in the first part,¹ the methodological weaknesses of the book are such that to engage its arguments in detail would be pointless.

In the first part I argued that the claim that antecedent 'human development' was foundational to capitalist 'development' and, relatedly, to international 'competitiveness' was unsound. I went on to argue that the fashionable quality of this idea in the late 20th century flowed from the 'educational reform' agenda in the US and UK.

I argued that this agenda was, itself, the product of three sub-agendas: first, 'declinism' in relation to the rise of German and Japanese industry in the later 1960s-70s; second, business lobbies' efforts to externalise the costs and risks of training staff; and, third, conservative efforts to enforce Gradgrind-style degradation of mass state education, motivated by a 'never again' response to the youth radicalisations (right as well as left) of the 1960s-70s. I suggested that all these projects had illusory end goals, which would, because of their very unattainability, lead to increasingly irrational persistence in pursuing them.

At the end, I went on to a particular aspect of the process of degradation: the 'national curriculum' and its relationship to the insistence on *individual* 'human development' found in Auerbach as well as among the 'orthodox' 'human development' writers. My point was that the aim of *uniform* education, even in the name of 'equality of opportunity' produced a reduction in *collective* capabilities. Individualism of aims mandated deepened bureaucratic control.²

The same turns out to be the consequence of 'consumerist' approaches to education (league tables, 'freedom of choice', the sovereignty of 'student feedback' and so on): just as competing car manufacturers and supermarkets offer narrowing ranges of choice, so do schools and higher education institutions. In fact, more so, since it is far harder to be a 'niche producer' of education than of clothes, books or other products.

But the other side of this coin is that the alternative - open acceptance of diversity of education - immediately poses to adults the 'collective action problem' of how to *combine* our diverse capabilities. This problem is, of course, no more than a special case of the general collective action problem of how to combine our different activities - so far as they affect others - more generally. Which, in turn, is the general problem of economic coordination.

Austrians

Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich von Hayek and similar authors argue that this collective action problem is solved, and can *only* be solved, by pure free-market mechanisms under a regime of law which rigorously excludes any redistributive mechanisms. For Hayek in his 1970s *Law, legislation and liberty*³ this legal regime would need to be buttressed by entrenched constitutional provisions against state interventionism - some limited forms of such entrenchment were adopted in the European treaties of Maastricht (1992).

Diluted versions of the argument, to be used to critique 'central planning', are commonplace - and are present in Auerbach. But it is important to be clear



No planning, no hope

about the nature and implications of the 'Austrian school' arguments about economy and state. They are arguments at a very high level of abstraction and rigour - such that they are either *wholly true* or *wholly false*. The claim is that collective action problems *cannot be solved* except by market arrangements.

If they are wholly true it is not merely the case that central planning of the economy is an illusory goal: the same *equally* applies to *all other non-market expedients in public policy*. This includes rejection of - obviously - all sorts of nationalised industry and all forms of public welfare; but also, and equally, public education institutions, public highways and other rights of way, public parks and open spaces, planning/building controls and *any* forms of taxation (or particular tax rules) designed to create incentives of one sort or another, or which are merely not neutral in effect (the 'principle of tax neutrality').

Hayek himself is unrigorous on this front. He recommends 'anti-trust' legislation to control the development of monopolies; but on the assumptions of the Austrian school, if market competition issues in monopoly, then monopoly is the market-efficient outcome chosen by the consumers. It is also doubtful - on the basis of various side comments in his writings - if Hayek would actually have been comfortable with a society characterised by the 'feast of Malthus': ie, the routine presence of the unburied corpses of the starved unemployed on the privately owned streets - which is, again, logically implied by the case against non-market decision-making.⁴

This ultimately unrigorous quality reflects the fact that the Austrian-school writers cannot at the end of the day defend a concept of law, or the rules of law, or, hence, *the right of property itself*, as anything other than a collective action independent of the market.⁵ And the right of private property is completely foundational to the possibility of the market. The Austrian school critique of all forms of non-market collective action is therefore merely self-defeating.

Analogous grounds apply with equal force to the analogous but distinct arguments of idealist philosopher Michael Oakeshott against 'rationalism'. Although distinct from Austrian school arguments (if anything

by being a bit more rigorously anti-rationalist than them), Oakeshott's arguments suffer the same *petitio principii* in relation to the rules of law and rights of property.

The supposed 'escape' from this problem offered by Hayek and Oakeshott alike is to appeal to Edmund Burke's narrative of the long, gradual evolution of English law and explain it in terms of a supposed Darwinian natural selection process in the precedents: 'real' law is taken to be precedents, not statutes. Appeal is made to Fritz Kern's early 20th century book *Kingship and law in the Middle Ages*⁶ as showing a supposed preference of the medievals for 'ancient laws'.⁷

The reality is that the ancient property rights celebrated by Burke as the product of tradition and the gradual development of precedent were not ancient at all. They were to a very considerable extent the product of *relatively recent intentional statutory redistribution*: of the statutory dissolution of the monasteries, chantries and other charitable foundations under Henry VIII and Edward VI, and sale of the land thereby acquired by the crown; of the parliamentary ordinances abolishing the court of wards and then the feudal tenures during the civil war and republic, and their confirmation at the Restoration by the Tenures Abolition Act 1660; and of a series of enclosure decrees in chancery, and parliamentary private enclosure acts, expropriating the commons over the later 17th and 18th centuries.

(It should be said, incidentally, that the 'national curriculum' arrangements and so on, discussed last week, have implied for most kids that schools stop teaching *any* of this history about the origins of 'actually existing' property rights. The current standard focus on 20th century history, supposedly justified by 'relevance' and the accessibility of primary sources to students, actually amounts merely to a means of teaching standard media narratives and depriving the generations affected of the means of *criticising* standard media narratives.)

Some supporters of Hayekian, Oakeshottian or similar views attempt to 'save the phenomena' in face of the massive evidence against Hayek's, Oakeshott's, and so on, views of the development of law and of property rights. They do so by arguing that

the whole process, including the statutes, the revolutions, etc, is to be regarded as a natural selection process or Hayekian 'catalaxy', by way of creating market order through unintended consequences. It would follow, however, that the whole history of the Soviet regime was *also* a natural selection process or catalaxy by way of unintended consequences. So the level of abstraction on which such Hayekian or Oakeshottian 'critics of enlightenment rationalism' are arguing is such that their assertions are completely empty of testable content or explanatory value.

The flip side of the point I have just been discussing is that the flat falsity of Austrian school claims in itself has no *positive* implications as such for the merits of Soviet-style central planning, or of 'golden age' European social democracy, or of the British 'official communist' and Labour left 'alternative economic strategy'. It means one thing and one thing only: that you cannot argue from von Hayek's, von Mises', or Oakeshott's *general* claims directly to the failure of Soviet-style planning, or of social democracy, or of the AES: to do so is to rely on an abstract, pre-emptive, general argument which is simply logically false.

The various 'planning' options which have been tried so far may well turn out to be unacceptable. But if they are, it will not be because non-market decision-making for common action is impossible or *inherently* tyrannical in the way in which these authors and those who hold similar views argue.

The relevance of the issue to Auerbach is the point I already made. Hayek's and similar are general logical arguments that the impossibility of *knowledge* of the economy and society as a whole entails the impossibility of conscious planning, which then turns into a mere tyranny or impoverishment of the society. The nature of the argument is such that it is either wholly true or wholly false; and, in fact, it is wholly false.

But Auerbach - as he shows in chapter 1 of *Socialist optimism* and elsewhere episodically throughout the book - wants to borrow *parts* of the Hayekian anti-rationalist argument to critique Soviet-style general planned economy as a fundamental misconception due originally to Marx's and Engels' enlightenment rationalism.

But at the same time he insists that in reality markets operate within frameworks set by states and laws. The second point entails the general falsity of the Hayekian argument, disproving the first. The contradiction is due to a basic misunderstanding by Auerbach of the level of abstraction and generality of the issues addressed by Hayek and similar authors.

Plausibility

Hayekian and similar arguments are untrue; but they have, since the 1980s, had a degree of spurious plausibility. Why?

In the first place, the argument is merely an extended and more systematic version of Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' from *The wealth of nations* (1776). Smith's concept was itself a toned-down version of Bernard Mandeville's openly immoralist *Fable of the bees* (1714). The 'Austrian' line of argument argues that, even if the 'invisible hand' does not produce perfection, nothing better is possible because of the claimed impossibility of more than local knowledge.

An alternative line of argument is based on Leon Walras's *Éléments d'économie politique pure* (1874) which argues from a marginal subjective utility theory of value for a possible perfect economic equilibrium - reinterpreted by Arrow and Debreu in the 1950s as what is commonly referred to as 'dynamic stochastic general equilibrium' (DSGE). Arrow's and Debreu's account makes clear that the assumptions of DGSE are, in fact, as artificial and unrealistic as a gravity-free physics (ie, *more* unrealistic than flat-earthism); in addition, subjective utility theories of value necessarily entail undisprovable Panglossian results, because the result itself is the only possible evidence of the underlying subjective utilities.

Both the Austrian school version and Walrasian general equilibrium obtain their general plausibility from the conditions in the growth-to-boom phase of the business cycle. In this phase (and overall in longer 'up' periods, like the post-1948 'long boom') the idea that markets tend towards a dynamic equilibrium has a degree of attraction. It is still profoundly misleading; in reality, the growth of 'free markets' is necessarily accompanied by the growth of the bureaucratic and interventionist

state, and in the absence of this state intervention markets tend not to equilibrium, but to extreme instability.

This tendency to fly apart is increased to the extent that market players act according to 'rational' utility-maximising, but mitigated by the fact that a substantial proportion do not aim to maximise utility, but merely to 'satisfice': ie, to do 'well enough'. Since marginalist economic theory assumes utility-maximising in order to generate predictions, 'satisficers' are a problem for the theory.

However, the combination of state interventions and other non-market interventions (charitable foundations, and so on), with the activity of satisficers, is sufficient to create an appearance of economic equilibrium in boom periods. In slump periods - especially in prolonged periods of tepid booms and deeper slumps - natural equilibrium theories tend to lose some of their attractive power.

Actually, during the post-1948 'long boom', general equilibrium and Austrian school theories were predominantly taken to have been disproved in theory by Keynes's *General theory* and in practice by the course of events in and after the crash of 1929 and through World War II.

The reappearance of these ideas from the margins in the later 1970s and through to the present involved in very broad terms two elements. The first was that the US state abandoned its former policy of 'containment' of 'communism' and the associated Bretton Woods regime, support for right social democracy and so on, in favour of 'rollback'. The US policy was not to create what actually happened (collapse at the centre of the USSR), but to get rid of open US support for military-nationalist 'modernising' regimes in the third world, seen to be vulnerable to 'communist subversion', and to accentuate national contradictions between the various bureaucratic regimes.

The most spectacular coup on this front was Nixon's 1972 China turn, making China into a US ally against the USSR. But equally important were the 1971 adoption of the floating dollar, and the recycling of petrodollars through New York and London to make syndicated loans available to third world and Soviet-bloc countries through the 1970s, thus allowing Poland, Romania and Hungary to get some new western industrial investment.⁸ These turns created perceptions that integration into the international financial system could allow more rapid 'development' than either the full Soviet-style 'command economy' regime or mitigated forms of industrial planning and protection.

Going along with this policy came Jimmy Carter's 'human rights' turn (1977) - always an explicit aspect of 'rollback' in which 'economic freedoms' were as important as political ones and much more important than the so-called 'social rights' (access to food, work, housing, health). At the same time, the US state funds which had been directed to right social democratic periodicals, lobby groups, etc through the 1950s-early 1970s were redirected to 'neoliberal' groups. The weight of the USA as a state was thus thrown behind what had formerly been marginal rightist views.

The second element was, of course, the Gorbachev 'reforms' from 1985, the fall of the eastern European regimes in 1989, and the collapse of the USSR itself in 1991. It was, of course, already true from the time of Khrushchev in the 1950s that 'reformers' in the Soviet economic policy apparatus aimed to imitate market structures in order to improve the functioning of the economy. But by the later 1980s it was easy to find Soviet economists willing to advocate radical 'shock therapy' of the sort which was, in the event, delivered after 1991, and to accept the fundamental arguments of Mises, Hayek and similar authors. One such

apparatus figure is cited, for example, in Auerbach's 1989 *New Left Review* article, 'The transition from actually existing capitalism', co-authored with Meghnad Desai (since 1991 a Labour peer) and Ali Shamsavari.⁹

Once the eastern bloc and Soviet Union fell, in 1989-91, the narrative was complete and closed; any suggestion of an alternative to capitalism had to incorporate a standard gesture to the idea that generalised economic planning was impossible. This in spite of the fact that there had already been extensive critiques of Hayek on knowledge, and that the narrower 'mathematical complexity' arguments of von Mises against planning were seriously called into question by the development of computing power by Paul Cockshott and Allin Cottrell as early as 1993.¹⁰ The fall of the USSR was taken as a sufficient disproof of the possibility of economic planning, without considering whether there might be more limited and specific features of Soviet-style planning which led to the fall.

There were - obviously - interests at stake in this choice to leap from the failure of the USSR to the impossibility of planning in general. The argument for the impossibility of planning was not merely a case against Stalinism made into a case against socialism in general. It was a case for the full 'neoliberal' package of deregulation, International Monetary Fund 'shock therapy', 'Washington consensus', and so on. In this respect it reflected the particular interests of the USA (against other capitalist countries' protectionism) and of US and British financial capitals (against ideas that anyone other than financial markets had the capacity to make rational resource-allocation decisions).

At this point we have arrived at 1992 and the date of Auerbach's original *NLR* article, 'On socialist optimism'. It is highly symptomatic that in that article Auerbach could write that

... in India, Mexico, the economies of eastern Europe and many other countries, the engendering of an economic environment relatively open to the influence of international market forces may be the only effective weapon available for combatting the stagnation emerging from the damagingly intimate relations that develop between a state bureaucracy and local producers.

The book, retaining the fundamental structure of the arguments of the article (if varying them very considerably in detail) remains a violently '1990s' product. But since 1992 a very great deal of water has passed under bridges.

Market testing

First, 'shock therapy' in the former Soviet Union turned out in the 1990s to mean not modernisation of the economy, but substantial deindustrialisation (and, indeed, reduction of agricultural production too¹¹).

It is incidentally to be observed that the USSR's highly educated workforce turned out *not* to be an asset that could be parlayed into reindustrialisation after shock therapy, as Auerbach argued could happen on the basis of post-1945 Japan and Germany. In Japan and western Germany it reflected *US geopolitical interests in the cold war*; the non-reindustrialisation of the former USSR reflects US geopolitical interests after the fall.

Already by 1995, Peter Nolan's *China's rise, Russia's fall*¹² documented in depth consequences of 'shock therapy' in the USSR and the circumstance that the Chinese bureaucracy's gradualism, failing to take the advice of the western 'development' snake-oil merchants, was massively more successful than the post-Soviet leadership's acceptance of this advice. Nolan makes the point at an early stage that the Russian command

regime cannot really be said to be a variant of 'planning'; his argument is that the transition to even partial use of market mechanisms requires a lot of ... planning.

Second, the so-called "great moderation" turned out to be delusive. The 'east Asian' and 'long-term capital management' crises of 1998 were followed by the dot.com crash of 2001; both were solved by bailouts and soft money policies; when the Fed attempted to raise rates in 2007, the result was to set in motion a chain of events leading to the crash of 2008-09. There is little doubt that the capitalist economy has been addicted to cheap money since then; but, in reality, the event itself was a symptom of a failed attempt to overcome an existing cheap-money addiction without imposing the costs primarily on large 'saver' and creditor interests.

Third, the ruinous consequences of 'shock therapy' in the former USSR are very far from being unique. Every rapid development of an 'open economy', celebrated by the free marketeers and their nodding choruses among the Labour right, the ex-Eurocommunists, etc, has as its converse in the last 30 years 'capital flight' from elsewhere. Yves Marchand's and Romain Meffre's art-book *The ruins of Detroit*¹³ is aptly symbolic. This, of course, is in the heartlands of the American mid-west; and, though Donald Trump did not take Detroit city in the November election, he did take Michigan state. The ruins reflect the tendency to financialisation of the US economy - not, as yet, remotely as far developed in the UK, but already there.

The ruins left behind by the free movement of capital elsewhere also imply victories of rightwing populism of one or another sort: Trump, but also Salafi Islamism in the Middle East, strongman Putin backed by holy Russia orthodoxy, Hindutva communalism in India, Yasukuni Shrine Shinto revanchism in Japan, Brexitism, and so on, and so on ... Neoliberalism is increasingly visibly intolerable. *The same is true of left variants of neoliberalism.*

Going alongside this is increasing war. Tony Blair came to office in 1997 saying that his priority would be "education, education, education". By 1999 he was presiding over British participation in military intervention in the former Yugoslavia. In 2000 a smaller-scale unilateral British intervention in Sierra Leone followed. In 2001 he took Britain into the Afghanistan war, and in 2003 into GW Bush's 'war of choice' invasion of Iraq. The Afghan war is still going on; the Iraq war after several mutations now takes the form of the 'war' on Islamic State. "Education, education, education" turned out to be private finance initiatives transferring property to the private sector, while risks remained with the public sector; and alongside it, "war, war, war".

Auerbach's underlying argument against planning was not so much that it could not work. That was assumed from the Soviet experience. Rather, in the 1989 Auerbach/Desai/Shamsavari article, Engels - *via* Kautsky and Iurii Larin - was blamed for Stalinist 'planning'. In the 1992 article, Auerbach blamed Marx for allegedly being influenced by authoritarian utopian socialist Claude Henri de Rouvroy, comte de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) and, boringly following Eduard Bernstein, for 'chiliasm'. In the book, clarity of argument is buried in the mess, but the same line seems to persist.

More generally, Auerbach's claim was that competition and planning are 'dialectically' interpenetrated, so that there is no *tendency in capitalism* towards monopoly or towards the displacement of market exchange by planning or even bureaucratic administration. Hence, central planning does not grow as a tendency out of 'actually existing capitalism';

therefore, he argues, it is utopian.

I make this point *at this moment* because we can now see the *objective tendency in capitalism* which grows out of setting the forces of competition free for Schumpeterian 'creative destruction' under conditions of highly developed capitalism and industry. Yes, there is some 'creative destruction'. But there is enough *uncreative* destruction to set up a marked tendency towards nationalism and towards war (itself a form of uncreative destruction). The wars have got larger and more destructive in character. Recent US operations in Ukraine and in east Asia threaten - though not absolutely immediately - even larger, great-power wars, with some threat of the use of nuclear weapons.

Auerbach poses his alternative to the existing order primarily in terms of some sort of 'mixed economy', but with a priority for education. As an immediate alternative to capitalist rule, that is not an unattractive idea. The problem is that, in order to have it, it is necessary to get rid of the free movement of capital and to create mechanisms to hold capitalists in subordination.

The 'cold war' regime was *half way* to such an arrangement: Soviet tanks on the Elbe, the Chinese overshadowing the far east and mass communist parties in a good many capitalist countries meant that the capitalist class was willing to make concessions: the US making concessions to rival national capitals at the level of protectionism, and so on; and capital concessions to the working class in many 'front-line' states (especially in Europe).

Any such subordination of capital requires some degree of planning. It thus certainly requires rejection of the claim that planning is impossible. It probably requires *the acceptance of some loss of the 'efficiency' gains of capitalist competition.* We need to make the choice, because the logic of unfettered competitive capitalism is the line of development we have seen since the middle 1990s: gradually slipping towards global war. The belief that this choice can be dodged is the fundamental illusion in Auerbach's work.

Satisficing

I am going to say relatively little more, because I have already written on the issue at some length two years ago.¹⁴ I agree with Auerbach on the fundamental point that the aim of socialism is the emancipation of human potentials generally, not the maximisation of productive output. I also agree that part of the problem with the USSR and its imitators was precisely that they set the aim of socialism in terms of maximisation of output. The paradox, however, is that Auerbach's (and in 1989 his co-authors') critique of the failure of Soviet planning is precisely its *failure to maximise output and productivity*, relative to the capitalist 'west'.

The USSR and its imitators failed for a number of reasons, but *not* for the reason that planning is inherently impossible.

Firstly, socialist construction in a single country is impossible, because industrial production depends on an international division of labour. Further, the idea of backward countries overleaping the advanced through 'combined and uneven development' was illusory and rested on a misunderstanding of the emergence of capitalism. Russia's relative lack of infrastructure and population density, and the persistence of some pre-capitalist social relations, continued to hobble its economy throughout the 20th century.¹⁵ The 'advanced capitalist countries', drawing on a global division of labour and global profits, could afford both guns and butter. The USSR could not.

In addition, the regime of informal property rights in information (via state secrecy and bureaucratic and managerial confidentiality) and in bureaucratic 'turf' (via the absence of freedom of speech

and the right to organise) were fetters on the development of production. A fairly recent example is Slava Gerovitch's account of why political and bureaucratic concerns about control of information blocked Soviet proposals, from 1961 on, to build a net comparable to the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network.¹⁶ More generally, control of information, and bureaucratic incentive structures, produced managers 'gaming the plan' - and no means of preventing them doing so without undermining the underlying claim to bureaucratic and managerial competition.

Conversely, a substantial level of 'waste' has to be *accepted*: Marx from an early date argued for "continuous relative overproduction" to allow leeway for problems of one sort or another.¹⁷ The standard critiques of planning emphasise its waste, but underestimate the very extensive waste in capitalism. The 'planning illusion', which was a real problem, was to imagine that socialism could become more efficient than capitalism by eliminating capitalist waste without producing *its own* forms of waste. An economy without waste is like a machine with zero tolerances on the moving parts, apt to seize up.

More fundamentally, a planning regime inherently contains no automatic incentives for random economic growth. In class societies in general the aspiration to live like the class elite (and, on the other hand, the fear of starvation) drive effort and random innovation. In a planned economy these incentives are taken away. But in a world where random innovation and 'growth' is taking us into serious human-induced climate change, this is a virtue, not a vice. Planning as a rational maximiser probably will not work. But planning on satisficer principles can show us a way out of the gradual downwards spiral affecting global society ●

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Notes

1. 'What kind of education?' *Weekly Worker* May 4.
2. A point also made by David Graeber in *The Utopia of rules* (New York 2015).
3. London 1973-79.
4. Eg, in *Law, legislation and liberty* Vol 2, p139: "Nobody capable of useful work need today lack food and shelter in the advanced countries, and for those incapable of themselves earning enough these necessities are generally provided outside the market." The statement, besides being empirically false of the USA when it was written and of the UK soon afterwards, demonstrates that Hayek was *not* willing to defend the 'feast of Malthus' in spite of willingness to do so being foundational to the strength of his claims against non-market collective decision-making.
5. That law is a non-market product is *prima facie* obvious and apparent even to libertarian and anarcho-capitalist writers far more consistent than Hayek and Mises. On a property regime as itself a 'commons' posing a non-market collective-action problem, see C Rose *Property and persuasion* Boulder 1994.
6. Oxford 1939; translation and abbreviation by SB Chirnes of *Gottesgnadentum und Widerstandrecht im früheren Mittelalter* (1914) and *Recht und Verfassung im Mittelalter* (1919).
7. Kern, writing mainly about the early Middle Ages, ignored the rather active Anglo-Saxon king-legislators (P Wormald *The making of English law* Oxford 1999). This is not catastrophic for that period. But then to use his work to support a Burkean narrative of English legal history down to the modern period, in despite of the fat volumes of the *Statutes of the realm* beginning at 1225, becomes fantastical.
8. There is a discussion of the particular case of Poland, with some broader context, in F Bartel, 'Fugitive leverage: commercial banks, sovereign debt, and cold war crisis in Poland, 1980-1982' *Enterprise and Society* Vol 18, pp72-107 (2017).
9. *New Left Review* first series, July-August 1988, pp61-78 (p76, note 37).
10. 'Calculation, complexity and planning: the socialist calculation debate once again' *Review of Political Economy* Vol 5, pp73-112 (1993).
11. G Ioffe, T Nefedova and I Zaslavsky *The end of peasantry? The disintegration of rural Russia* Pittsburgh 2006.
12. New York 1995.
13. Göttingen 2010.
14. 'Socialism will not require industrialisation' *Weekly Worker* May 14 2015.
15. Cf also O Sanchez-Sibony *Red globalization: the political economy of the Soviet cold war from Stalin to Khrushchev* Cambridge 2014.
16. S Gerovitch, 'InterNyet: why the Soviet Union did not build a nationwide computer network' *History and Technology* Vol 24, pp335-50 (2008).
17. K Marx *Capital* Vol 2, p469; *Theories of surplus value* Vol 1, pp359-60.

KOREA

A story of isolation

Unification under capitalism can only but perpetuate inequality, writes **Michael Roberts**



Kim Jong-un: dysfunctional regime

Tensions in Asia have been rising sharply, as North Korea continues its missile testing in defiance of US demands for them to cease. President Trump has been upping the ante with threats to bypass China and the stalled so-called six-party talks, which is supposedly working out a 'peace solution', and opting to "deal with" North Korea on his own. As US naval battalions enter Korean waters to impose Trump's will, I thought it might be worth looking at the state of the North Korean economy.

The end of the Korean war in the early 1950s left Korea with over one million dead and still divided in two, in the same way that the 'cold war' between the US and the Soviet Union left Germany split in two. Both parts of Korea were poor, but interestingly it was the south that was poorer, because most of the natural resources (coal, etc) and industry were in the north, although the mines were mostly destroyed.

That changed in the ensuing decade or so. Huge amounts of foreign investment were ploughed into the south, where a military regime was imposed, keeping wages to the minimum and establishing large monopolistic corporations (*chaebol*), heavily integrated into the state machine. Investment was state-directed and the profitability of capital rose sharply through massive exploitation of labour.

Meanwhile in the north, the one-party state machine - resting on nationalised industry and farms, and built in the image of its mentors, Russia and China - received no such investment support as in the south. In 1961 an ambitious seven-year plan was launched to continue industrial expansion and increase living standards, but within three years it became clear this was failing. The failure was due to reduced support from the Soviet Union, when North Korea aligned more with China, and military pressure from the US, leading to increased defence spending.

In 1965, South Korea's rate of economic growth exceeded North

Korea's for the first time, though the south's *per capita* GNP remained lower than the north's. North Korea did recover somewhat under its national plan, but by the early 1970s *per capita* income in the south exceeded that of the north for the first time and the gap then accelerated.

North Korea's planned economy struggled with its isolation in trade and investment; the lack of support from Russia and China (which had their own problems); and the stifling totalitarianism of the Kim dynasty, now firmly enshrined as the 'great leader' (one after the other). The south had its own autocratic regime with no democratic rights, but at least it had trade and investment to exploit its people more effectively.

The collapse of the Soviet Union presaged an unprecedented disaster for the North Korean economy. Weighed down by heavy military spending to defend the regime, North Korea saw the disappearance of its export markets for coal and other minerals, which led to a collapse in industrial output. This was accompanied by terrible harvests, leading to a major famine resulting in between 500,000 and a million deaths. Living standards fell by half, as the average real GDP growth rate in the 1990s slumped to -4%!

In 1999, the economy showed some signs of recovery. And the Kim regime decided to mimic the 'reforms' introduced in China to allow some private-sector production and some markets in agriculture and for small businesses. There has been steady if low economic growth since the late 1990s, even if the country is still the poorest in east Asia. During the period 2000-05, the north grew at an average rate of 2.2%. There was a downturn yet again in the global great recession and, between 2006 and 2010, positive growth was registered only in 2008. But since 2010 an element of growth has resumed.

North Korea continues to depend on the foreign currency it needs to import goods by selling coal to China (one-third of all exports). In addition, the regime sends thousands of North

Korean workers in forced labour conditions to China, Russia and the Middle East to work in mining, logging and construction, which also results in the remittance of foreign currency.

Estimating GDP in North Korea is a difficult task because of a dearth of economic data and the problem of choosing an appropriate rate of exchange. In 2014, the Seoul-based Bank of Korea estimated that the real GDP of North Korea in 2014 was KRW 4.2 billion - just one 44th of the size of the South Korean economy. Although that is probably an underestimate of the North Korean economy - GDP per person was KRW 1.388 million, or just one 20th of the average in South Korea - this is a mighty huge gap.

A significant part of the population is still malnourished and the average North Korean family considers itself reasonably affluent if they can afford a new bicycle. However, this year, North Korea enjoyed an exceptionally good harvest, which for the first time in more than two decades will be sufficient to feed the country's entire population. Ironically, in this year of possible attack by the US and the sabre-rattling of the Kim regime, the economy is growing by around 3%-4% a year - a record level since the 1970s.

Private sector

The government appears to have allowed the private sector to grow. Some 'state companies' are in effect owned by rich individuals, usually well-placed or related to senior state officials. According to the most recent estimates, about 75% of North Korean household income now comes not from the state, but from assorted private economic activities - activities that are now tacitly tolerated by the government. North Koreans today tend their very own private plots, run their own food stalls, make clothes, footwear (and even counterfeited Chinese cigarettes) in unofficial workshops, and, of course, they trade. Since 2010, the number of government-approved markets in North Korea has doubled to 440, and satellite images show them growing in most

cities. In a country with a population of 25 million, about 1.1 million people are now employed as retailers or managers in these markets, according to a study by the Korea Institute for National Unification in Seoul.

So the law of value is inevitably beginning to operate and strengthen in an economy that is unable to expand through state planning run by a dynastic autocracy. But with the law of value and markets come rising inequality, fostered by the corruption of the bureaucracy.

But even if the political tensions were to subside there is no way that the North Korean economy can really deliver sustained economic growth and living standards for its 25 million people. The key is foreign investment and a democratic plan. North Korea will have neither under the current regime. First, there are US-inspired sanctions against investing in the north, while it pursues its aim of having effective nuclear weaponry - and that aim is seen as essential by the Kim regime for its own survival.

The regime sees foreign investors as institutions to be milked, not as (albeit junior) partners in expansion. They have not learnt from the Chinese here. For example, the Egyptian telecommunications firm, Orascom, created a North Korean mobile phone network virtually from scratch, but the North Koreans not only refused to pay the Egyptians from the proceeds of the network, but confiscated all the assets. Foreign capital is not likely to come on that basis.

The obvious immediate solution is the unification of north and south. Koreans should be united, as the Germans were. But the only option offered is, of course, unification on the basis of capitalism, not democratic socialism. Capital would dominate in the north as well as the south - something that has proved a failure even in Germany, where the gap between east and west in living standards remains wide, despite billions being 'transferred' to the east and expansion in a unified

Germany has been slowing for nearly a decade. Those living in the east have real incomes at just two-thirds of those in the west and one-third of easterners have moved to the west.¹

And here is the rub. The cost of unifying north and south Korea would be way more than it was to bring Germany together. Whereas East Germany had 17 million people against 60 million in the west - a ratio of one to four - north Korea has 25 million, compared to 50 million in the south: a ratio of one to two. A report from the south still reckons it would be possible to unite Korea on a capitalist basis and raise the income per head in the north to \$10,000 (compared to \$1,800 now and \$25,000 in the south) and North Korea's economy to 70% of the south's by 2050, making a unified Korea the seventh-largest economy in the world.

But this is really a pipe-dream. Even this optimistic report reckons that the south would have to commit 7% of its GDP every year to the north to achieve this target (compared to 4% of West German GDP to the east). That is clearly impossible on a capitalist basis, given the increasing economic problems facing the south since the great recession. As I posted only last March,² South Korea's political elite is mired in corruption and its economy is increasingly sclerotic - its monopoly *chaebol* are facing increasingly difficult conditions in global trade, which is vital for the south's expansion. No wonder political support for unification in the south has waned in recent years, even though the newly elected president Moon Jae-in will strive again for a rapprochement with the Kim regime.

There is strong evidence that a planned and predominantly state-owned economy could succeed and do even better in a unified Korea. If you compare, for instance, the development of Mexico and the Soviet Union from 1913 until the year the Berlin Wall fell, "the Soviet Union's growth over the period of communism put Mexico's to shame", according to Charles Kenney, a senior fellow at the Center for Global Development.³ He points out that Soviet income *per capita* was 46% greater than Mexico's in 1989, compared to just 1% larger in 1913. And there is the story of China's phenomenal and unprecedented economic expansion,⁴ taking hundreds of millions out of poverty.

Unification was tried back in the 1950s through a bloody war that decimated Korea. Unification would only be successful peacefully if there were a unified, democratically elected regime under the control of the working class in both south and north. It would only be successful economically if the *chaebol* in the south were taken over and the resources of the north were integrated into a national investment plan. The capitalist regime of the south and the cultist dictatorship of the north would have to go before that ●

Michael Roberts blogs at <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com>.

Notes

1. See www.spiegel.de/international/germany/germany-s-disappointing-reunification-how-the-east-was-lost-a-703802.html.
2. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2017/03/19/korea-corruption-cults-and-chaebols>.
3. See <https://fortunetodotcom.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/russ6.pdf>.
4. <http://ablog.typepad.com/keytrendingglobalisation/2016/08/data-shows-chinas-socialist-development-model-outperformed-capitalist-development-strategies.html>.

REVIEW

Alienation and augmented humanity

Rupert Sanders (director) *Ghost in the shell* general release

Does this story sound familiar? A person's mind, taken from their previous existence, is given a new physique, a body supposedly enhanced. However, their mind is unstable, perhaps suffering some trace of the past or a desire for human connection. At some point, the inventor of this new entity wants to discard their creature as the 'experiment' has thrown up something too challenging.

Many readers will probably think of Frankenstein - either the Mary Shelley classic or subsequent Hollywood movies. Others no doubt will come up with more recent 'new body' films like *Robocop* or the android tale *Blade runner*. There may even be some who suggest that it sounds very much like history, like Britain's industrial revolution, where the people from one sort of life - on the land - were 'given' a new one in the factories and towns of modern capitalism. Maybe some will recognise an analogy with the even earlier days of plantation slavery, when millions were taken from their life in Africa and 'remade' in the Americas and Caribbean, becoming that new being: a 'negro'. All these are quintessentially modern tales of transformed people.

The Ghost in the shell began as a picture-strip series, or 'manga', by Masamune Shirow in 1989. This Japanese story told of a dystopian city, where a young woman's brain - her mind the 'ghost' - is placed in a manufactured body, the shell; as this new entity, Major, she joins a state security team called Section 9, combating criminal threats in cyber and material space. Later in 1995 there was an anime (cartoon) film, available under the same title, followed by various sequels and TV series. All the different manifestations displayed both heavy gunplay in grubby cityscapes and reflection on robotics, computers and the human/technology interface. Amongst it all Major and her colleagues chased and faced hackers and subversives with names like Puppet Master and the Laughing Man. Now DreamWorks have released a (mostly) live action film based on the same story world.

So have director Rupert Sanders and his range of Asian, European and even New Zealand collaborators taken a Japanese mythos and reduced it to a crude action movie sub-*Robocop*?

Ghost is truly in the tradition of Japanese 'cyborg' stories as well as western science fiction, where artificial, but by no means totally enhanced, beings find a new consciousness of their situation, claiming their human selves. Yet this particular version, whether it knows it or not, outstrips the rest, managing to allude to all the texts mentioned above, but in a simple, clear-headed, even, poetic way that could stir you to think about just how old this idea of a transformed human is - of just how many kinds of remade, and then redundant, people there have been in our history.

Ghost is a futuristic text, not a far-off space-opera like *Star trek*, but a fiction that projects current trends into possible near-futures. It was once called 'cyberpunk', but now could encompass any story, speculation or gesture about where we are going or being taken, socially, politically, technically or even in fashion. For example, recent observations about the way cities are developing in line with the movements of the global business class, from Russian oligarchs and Shanghai investors to Israeli security expertise and western arms hardware for Saudi princes. Futurian discourse can be complacent or critical - the newest app or the latest troll - trans-sexual,



Geisha robot

post-human or anti-establishment, but also providing sharp comment for those pursuing a more human world with the new technology.

Ghost speculates too on the possible urban landscape. For example, simulations abound, not only Major's prosthetic body (curiously sexless in its stereotyped bumps and curves), but also in holographic communications, appearing solid before you and then disintegrating like smoke. Nearly every character here has something prosthetic about them: Major's bear-like buddy, Batou (Danish actor Pilou Asbæk), acquires new eyes during the plot and even the scientist-designers have artificial limbs - which might classify them as cyborgs or just mechanism-assisted humans, as with spectacles and hearing aids.

Even a full robot - the geisha-sniper who is dissected after being shot up - has memory banks like an imagination. Scarlett Johansson's Major mentally travels 'inside' it and glimpses degraded images of a night club, which she will later visit in the city's red-light district. Haunting her own memory is a mental picture of something like a Shinto temple, which later turns out to be a hologram too and a gateway to her actual past. Meanwhile the city roads and side streets she and her comrades move along are overhung with advertising holograms as tall as the towers they nestle between and presenting bland figures enjoying the good life of perfect family and consuming life.

Small and friendly

In his comprehensive book *Manga* Paul Gravett suggests that Japanese fiction has a different approach to robots and prosthetic humans than the west:

They are conceived as tools and weapons for humans, often youngsters, to drive like a vehicle or operate by remote control, or to wear as suits of armour. Robots in manga who have their own personalities tend to be small and friendly ... By and large, the bigger the robot, the less likely it is to be independent or individualised (p57).

Post-1945 Japanese capitalism became famous, of course, for its reliance on new technology as the key to international competition, from compact motorbikes to mini CD players. This followed the

Pacific war, when Tokyo scientists conceived of new human-operated fighting machines, which, as the war neared its end, would win the battles against the US flying fortresses. Subsequently, post-war manga and 'anime' had an interest in characters part-human/part machine long before the recent internet-inspired notions of the 'digital human'. Yet compare the British attitude shown in the Daleks from the British TV series *Doctor Who*, where some alien people's original soft tissue has long since been reduced inside mini-tanks to hateful mechanicals existing only to 'exterminate'.

The original manga of *Ghost* took the concept of the cyborg even further and added computer interface too. On those pages, Major met and melded with her opponent - the Puppet Master - 'inside' the data of an extensive PC. DreamWorks' *Ghost* does indeed owe much to this difference of approach, but in mixing it with the Frankenstein theme achieves a truly international (check the credits) futuristic work that acknowledges both east and west, criticism and possibility.

One unexpected turn in the plot is where - not to be too spoiler precise - the enemy turns out to be the key to where cyborgs similar to Major went: those failed experiments of Hanka Robotics no longer fit for purpose, like brawny steelworkers in the US rust belt.

In fact anyone identified as a 'terrorist' in this movie is finally exonerated as closer to the truth and the need for justice than the counter-terrorists. Major is changed from an official 'weapon' to a person conscious of her source and almost looks as if she could cross the floor to total opposition. There are, of course, no options other than inside the status quo or its disruption, no movement to join or start. There is an unseen prime minister, who can be appealed to and who sanctions summary justice from Section 9 against the one 'corrupt' corporation exec. But this climax is so brisk that it is not exactly an example of due process which restores our faith in the state. It is not underlined, but it is the nearest a big-budget film like this has got to being, so to speak, pro-'terrorist'.

In some internet debate the film has been accused of racism and cowardice in not casting an east Asian as Major. Her other name used in all the previous incarnations, Motoko Kusanagi, does

finally emerge here. However, the fact that Major's current shell is superficially European is a vital part of the story. When she discovers a relative from her previous life, they turn out to be Japanese. There is a moving scene between them. The Section 9 team itself is multicultural and mixed, while the recurrent imagery of the whole movie is that of mixing and trans-whatever (cue visual joke of an apparent woman using a male urinal). Major is initially given the name 'Mira Killian' and encased in a white body, but this is the denial of her past by her designers, not just the usual star casting for a film. Meanwhile Scarlett Johansson is asked to do more than in some previous roles, playing Major with a range of emotion subtly conveyed by changes in her facial expression (compare Luc Besson's *Lucy*).

You could probably keep on finding allusions to previous futuristic movies, such as *The matrix* and various pop videos, as well as *Robocop* and *Blade runner*. If you have seen the original 1995 'anime' you will appreciate how this *Ghost* echoes its design, incorporating high-rise and street-level Hong Kong. *Blade runner's* city is also referenced; the difference being that here the occidental/oriental mix is integrated with the themes of simulation and exploitation and not just a series of exotic distractions. Furthermore, the humanism of the DreamWorks company - Major proving herself not "merely a robot" - amounts to something more than a preference for the traditional flesh and family.

Ghost avows that there is nothing wrong with being augmented, but the movie is not afraid to raise the challenge - what do these new creatures serve and are they entitled to the treatment they receive? It would seem that such issues cannot be avoided. Major reconnects with her 'old life' not to return to it, but to challenge the masters of her new. By implication the workers and the slaves need not return to the joys of feudalism, but can work out a new relationship to their transformed life.

Do I read too much into a popcorn movie? Or is this a reading based on the text's very themes of alienation and augmented humanity? Isn't pointing out such implications and connections what a vanguard is for? ●

Mike Belbin

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

Free urban
public
transport

Standing idly by while Britain chokes

'Killer air' represents a public health emergency, writes Eddie Ford, yet the government wants to do as little about it as possible

Many years ago Karl Marx talked about the "metabolic rift" which had opened up between humanity and nature - between town and country - which was a reflection, and product, of capitalist class rule over the workers; of the power of dead labour over living labour. This rift results in polluted, hellish, crime-ridden mega-cities - to the point where the conditions of human existence come under threat.

This was illustrated by the recent 'killer air' alert on January 23 in London, when mayor Sadiq Khan felt compelled to warn Londoners about alarmingly high levels of pollution that made the city on that day more 'toxic' than Beijing - the latter a by-word for near dystopian environmental degradation. People were advised not to exercise and avoid main roads - not very practical if you have to get to work or have a physically demanding job. We had also discovered a few weeks earlier that within the first five days of this year parts of London had breached *annual* limits on air pollution - an extremely worrying statistic: it was roughly estimated that each year in the capital about 9,500 die prematurely due directly to air pollution; and, of course, the numbers of people affected by respiratory problems and other diseases related to pollution will be far higher. Naturally, to one degree or another, the grim situation in London is replicated in other cities. The Royal College of Physicians calculated that air pollution across the UK is responsible for at least 40,000 unnecessary deaths every year.

Just as revelatory, if not more so, has been the reaction of the government - which has been to do as little as possible, whilst pretending it is taking action. The government is unable to keep within European Union limits on some pollutants, particularly nitrogen dioxide, which is mostly produced by diesel engines - and they are far from a 'green' alternative to petrol, as the original lie went. Yes, diesel cars get better *mileage* (going about 30% further) and emit fewer carbon dioxide emissions, but they also emit more toxic nitrogen oxides (NO_x), which help form smog, and particulate matter, which can severely damage lungs.¹

Some 37 of the 43 regions of the UK are now in breach of nitrogen dioxide limits, with one study maintaining that almost 90% of urban areas in the country have had unlawful levels since 2010. According to the government's very own estimates, air pollution causes £27.5 billion in costs every year and was called a "public health emergency" by MPs in April 2016.² In the same month, an exhaustive report commissioned by *The Guardian* - using the most comprehensive set of data yet published - showed that 97% of all modern diesel cars emit more NO_x pollution than the official limit, with a quarter producing at least *six times* more.³ In February, UK ministers - albeit reluctantly - backed tougher European Union regulations, but these still allow new vehicles to emit *double* the official limit until 2021 and 50% more afterwards.

Understandably frustrated and

outraged by this state of affairs, the non-profit making, non-governmental organisation, ClientEarth, has mounted a series of legal challenges to force faster action - or any sort of *real* action at all. Thus in November the high court, for the second time in 18 months, ruled that government plans to tackle air pollution are illegal, on the grounds that by law they must cut the dangerous levels of nitrogen dioxide in the "shortest possible time" - judge Neil Garnham stated that ministers knew that "over-optimistic" pollution modelling was being used, based on flawed lab tests of diesel vehicles rather than actual emissions on the road.⁴

Instructively, documents uncovered during the above case revealed that the treasury had blocked plans to charge diesel cars to enter towns and cities blighted by air pollution. They were obviously wary about angering motorists, with an early general election on the cards. Both the environment and transport departments recommended changes to vehicle excise duty rates to encourage the purchase of low-pollution vehicles - but the treasury rejected that idea too. Other documents showed that the government's plan to bring air pollution down to legal levels by 2020 for some cities - and 2025 for London - had been chosen not because they were considered the "shortest possible time", but rather as they were the dates ministers thought they would start facing European Commission fines.

Toothless

Anyhow, after more delaying tactics from the government - such as ministers arguing that it was necessary to keep their plans *secret* until after the general election in order to "comply with pre-election propriety rules" - and several judicial decisions in favour of ClientEarth, the government finally published its draft proposals, which were ... totally feeble, of course.

Indeed, according to ClientEarth, the plans are actually weaker than those ruled unlawful in November - the London mayor describing them as "woeful" and "toothless". In time-honoured tradition, the proposals were sneaked out on May 5, when most of the media was preoccupied with the local election results. Nearly all the more radical ideas trailed in previous weeks were unceremoniously dumped by a government solely determined to gain a thumping majority on June 8 - its legal 'commitment' now almost seven years past the final date for fulfilment.



Private cars in urban areas are a health hazard

The consultation period for the proposals closes on June 15 and it is likely that ClientEarth will mount further legal challenges.

As we all know, motorists bought diesel cars in large numbers due to earlier government financial incentives - yet, as government advisors realise perfectly well, the most obvious way of cutting emissions is to end the private car as a means of urban transport and make public transport free. Alongside that there would need to be innovation: hybrid buses, electric taxis, vehicle pools, bringing work nearer through the provision of inner-city public housing, etc. But, of course, that would present a huge political challenge. Leave aside the so-called 'driver vote' - there is the hugely powerful car industry lobby.

Unsurprisingly, the government is reduced to fudge, obfuscation and passing the buck. So we read that local councils are "already responsible for improving air quality in their area", but "will now be expected to develop new and creative solutions" to reduce emissions as quickly as possible, while "avoiding undue impact on the motorist". Meaning that local councils will be *required* to exhaust all other options before introducing charges for diesel and other cars (as will happen in London), such as removing speed bumps, which force drivers to brake and then accelerate, and rephrasing

traffic lights - gimmicks more likely to *increase* traffic and emissions than cut them - and retrofitting buses, trucks and taxis.

The main proposal is to increase the number of 'clean air zone' (CAZs) from the currently planned six to 27, which would allegedly cut more than 1,000 times more NO₂ than a scrappage scheme (even if that scheme requires old diesels to be replaced by electric cars). But nowhere does the consultation document specify the cities and towns where polluting vehicles might face charges, the level of any charges or the scope or value of any scrappage scheme. But, as most experts say, it is hard to see how CAZs for urban areas would be effective without measures stopping the most polluting vehicles.

Instead, the government plan cites funding for electric taxis and hydrogen vehicles that had already been announced - theoretically taking 15,000 diesel and older petrol cars off the road within two years - and commits only to "exploring" vehicle tax changes to incentivise reduced pollution. The documents also say the government "will engage with vehicle manufacturers on what role they might play in helping to improve air quality" - but even *new* diesel cars produce far more NO₂ on the road than in official regulatory tests. The only conclusion you can draw is that the UK will still

have illegal air quality for *many* years to come - if not permanently - under these proposals. Totally dishonestly, Tory ministers have sought to blame previous Labour administrations for giving tax breaks for diesel cars, yet this is what *all* governments have done since the 1990s.

Doug Parr, Greenpeace UK's chief scientist, denounced this "half-baked plan" that "puts poll ratings before people's health". The "only real winners" were the car manufacturers, who, "despite misleading customers about their cars' real emissions and causing this mess in the first place", are "getting off scot-free". In the view of Caroline Lucas, co-leader of the Green party, the government was "standing idly by while Britain chokes".

Obviously, 'killer air' is an issue affecting rich as well as poor - though grossly unequally. Therefore, tackling pollution is an issue that has been taken up by a whole range of opinion. In that sense, 'killer air' is rather like the cholera epidemics of the 19th century - especially in London. From the 1830s to the 1860s, cholera cast a wide net of destruction over the city, creating widespread panic and claiming 40,000 deaths. At first, the rich and wealthy were positively hostile to any suggestion of public health measures, regarding it as interfering in the natural order of things, as ordained by god - especially as the disease spread more rapidly through the poorer districts, so why get too concerned about it? Indeed, at the time, some believed that the wealthy were actually purposely poisoning the poor as a form of 'social cleansing'.

However, as a water-borne disease, cholera is ultimately no respecter of money and due to the city's extremely inefficient sewage system it inevitably spread - with waste pouring directly into the Thames, which in turn became a giant sewer. Thus cholera was not confined to the poor - and the rich suddenly became enthusiastic for public health measures ●

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Notes

1. NO_x is a mixture of mainly nitric oxide (NO) and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂). Diesel cars produce much more NO_x.
2. www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/apr/27/uk-air-pollution-public-health-emergency-crisis-diesel-cars.
3. www.theguardian.com/business/2016/apr/23/diesel-cars-pollution-limits-nox-emissions.
4. www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/nov/02/high-court-rules-uk-government-plans-to-tackle-air-pollution-are-illegal.

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