



weekly
worker



**In the age of 'colour-blindness',
what accounts for targeting of
blacks by US police?**

- Italy's president
- Middle East interventions
- Jewish identity
- SWP conference

No 1040 Thursday January 8 2015

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

£1/€1.10

What if Syriza wins?



ΣΥΡΙΖΑ

ΕΝΩΤΙΚΟ ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΚΟ ΜΕΤΩΠΟ

Ανατροπή στην Ελλάδα

Αλλαγή στην Ευρώπη



LETTERS



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

Best guess

Jack Conrad's 'Neither meek nor mild' (December 18) begins with an acceptable summary of (often forgotten by Christians) struggles of Palestinians/Hebrews, before and after the turn of the first millennium AD against the occupying Roman armies. Disappointingly, Jack's essay degenerates, incredibly 'joining forces' with the later Christian apologists, virtually accepting there *really was* an individual as portrayed in the first three gospels, albeit one who was "a rabbi, a communist and a brave revolutionary".

Jack's comments relating to the putting together of the Christian Bible leave the reader without any comprehension of the *hundreds* of texts that existed at the time the so-called holy scriptures were being formulated; most of them deliberately destroyed by church founders. Today's versions of the Christian scriptures are the end-products of the contemporary peoples and cultures inhabiting the so-called 'holy lands' over many centuries.

Jack is correct to highlight the Palestinian people's longed-for 'messiah' of their scriptures. The messiah they sought was well described by the words often applied to the mythical Jesus - prophet, priest and king - words still sung in the churches, albeit with a *very different* meaning. Today's singers are thinking of a 'spiritual being' in a distant 'heaven'; the first-century freedom fighters were quite literally looking for a military commander.

The legendary Jesus was crucified by the Romans as a political revolutionary (as were the two who died with him). In so far as the Gethsemane incident, which Jack Conrad attempts to expand around a 'literal Jesus personality' to an unacceptable extent, the most telling evidence that the myth in part seems based on an actual incident is that John's gospel specifically states a "cohort" of Roman soldiers (up to 600 troops) was sent to arrest him. In my Sunday school years, I had wondered why the 'kiss of Judas' had been necessary for identifying the sought after prophet. Reading between the lines of the fragments we have - that it was a mass gathering of hundreds of armed individuals, not just the small group of a few disciples depicted in most biblical translations - the story begins to make sense. Anticipating the number of followers assembled and the difficulty of identifying even such a well-known individual, the Romans needed to bribe Judas Iscariot and dispatch a strong military force.

That there was a multitude of 'patriots' leading the fight against the Roman aggressors goes without saying - but Jack is moving towards absurdity when he attempts to take gospel references as being quite literally grounded upon a specific Jesus. The essential source for the person of the Christian messiah, in spite of the multitude of 'revisions' and 'editings', remain the earlier Hebrew scriptures: all the miraculous cures performed by Jesus are forestalled in the texts of Isaiah. Older myths from other cultures were incorporated, but the Hebrew writings provided the essential ingredients for inventing the Passion myth.

Although today's Christians continue to claim the Passion as a central theme of their faith, it just *cannot* have happened as portrayed by the gospels; and we have clear evidence that Jesus' dying words, which so impress Jack Conrad, are a scribal insertion. Has Jack never looked at psalm 22 - clearly the *original* text of the 'passion of Christ'? It opens: "My god, my god, why hast thou forsaken me?" - words later to become the cry of the dying Jesus. Even if he did repeat those words, who heard him? According to the oldest

gospel, none of Christ's 'own people' were present. All the apostles had fled.

The genesis of 'bad guy' Judas Iscariot is of special interest. Psalm 41 refers to a betrayal by a trusted associate, a friend with whom bread had been shared. Acts 1:16-18 interprets this passage as clear prophecy of the part destined to be played by Judas. The role of Judas as 'betrayed' is first known to Jesus, according to the Synoptics, at the last supper: that is, when his dastardly crime had virtually been perpetrated. However, according to John's version, Jesus announces the coming betrayal at the time of the previous passover - *a year before the event* (Jn 6:70); in fact, Jesus *knew from the beginning* Judas was a devil who would betray him (v 64).

As has been emphasised, the original gospels - or rather, those we have inherited - date from the period following the sacking of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple. It was a defeated and demoralised people who sought compensation and the need for new faiths. Sects and cults proliferated and many fragments of writings from this period (the final years of the first century AD) continue to be discovered. The years of revolt and beyond are recreated in semi-spiritual terminology rather than the historical disaster stories - the mythological Jesus was no doubt an amalgam of several active campaigners. But the gospels, however reworked, have become depoliticised, transferring the responsibility for the killing of their hero from the Roman oppressor to the transgressing Semites.

It's important to bear in mind there is no complete version of what we today call the 'New Testament' surviving which is earlier than the reign of the Roman emperor, Constantine (274-337 AD). Let's remind ourselves of his role. Remembered today as 'Constantine the Great' and 'the first Christian emperor', he came from an influential Roman royal family and proved himself a successful general, commanding an army full of Christians. Military successes encouraged the view that Israel's war god smiled on Constantine. In private, however, Constantine had little commitment to Christianity. Indeed, he had earlier been initiated into a cult worshipping the sun god. The Roman Senate celebrated his military victory by erecting a triumphal arch in the Coliseum, with an inscription reading "through the prompting of the deity" - but the deity referred to was not Jesus, but Sol Invictus, the pagan sun god.

All this history is relevant, for it indicates that from its earliest days the church hierarchy did not really take the Bible seriously. It is the Catholic church, not the scriptures, that divulge god's truth and purpose. One is perfectly free to accept the teachings of the church, but not to question or reject them. Freedom can only be expressed through submission - a curious definition of freedom!

Any theory on any topic can, at best, only be described as the 'best guess', given the information to hand. At the time the gospels began to be fabricated at the end of the first century, by definition the stance of 'truth seekers' was no longer based on continuous attempts at improving 'best guesses'. The central aim of the church philosophers became obfuscation - to a great extent, for many centuries, it proved a very successful enterprise.

Bob Potter
email

Ruminations

Mike Macnair mounts an unfortunate attack on my recent articles on Marxism and political party in capitalism, mistaking dialectical arguments for alleged "vacuous circularity" ('Fantasy history, fantasy Marx', December 18). This leads Macnair to draw conclusions from my writings that are the precise opposite of what I think.

I think that any socialist revolution will necessarily be a democratic revolution and so subject to bourgeois

social relations and the crisis and contradiction of them in capitalism; and that the problem of political party was recognised by Marxism as expressing a new need evident after the industrial revolution and the crisis of liberal politics - a crisis in civil society expressed by the metastatic state. It was capitalism that caused Marx to critique liberalism for its evident inadequacy in the face of new problems. But Marx's critique of the crisis of bourgeois society in capitalism was pursued by the immanent dialectical critique of liberalism, which Marx found socialism to follow. Dick Howard is not mistaken to draw the continuity between the young and mature Marx.

I use terms in their strict Marxist sense, which can be quite peculiar, rather than colloquially. Macnair thinks that finding coherence both within and among the thinking of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, Lukács and the Frankfurt School, among others, is either "fantasy" or "myth-making". But Macnair disagrees with historical Marxists, or agrees with them only selectively, leaving him free to subordinate their main theses to relatively minor points. Macnair takes the same approach to my writing, making the error converse to cherry-picking, nit-picking: picking apart arguments, and thus losing the forest for the trees. But a whole cloth do not nits make.

Macnair's anti-liberalism is striking. In denying what is new in modern, bourgeois society, Macnair doubts that free social relations could ever replace rule of force. Bourgeois society's liberalism was not only ideology, but also promise. If ideology eclipses promise in capitalism, the task is to find the socialist promise in capitalist ideology. It is not discontinuous with the liberal promise of bourgeois society. Otherwise, we are left with what Kant called mere "civilisation", which is barbaric. It was bourgeois civil society that meant to transcend the rule of law - to transcend the state as such. Socialism, too, wants this. As I pointed out in my article, Macnair elides the difference Marxists recognised between the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and socialism: democratic republicanism as a necessary means and not a desirable end to emancipation.

It goes back to 1848 and its ideology. Bonapartism was for Marx characteristic of the entire revolutionary cycle of 1848 in France, in which Napoleon's nephew, Louis Bonaparte, as the first elected president of the Second Republic (1848-52), and then, after his *coup d'état*, as emperor of the Second Empire (1852-70), could not be characterised as expressing the interest of some non-bourgeois class (the 'peasants', whom Marx insisted on calling, pointedly, "petit bourgeois"), but rather of all the classes of bourgeois society, including the "lumpenproletariat", in crisis by the mid-19th century.

Furthermore, Bonaparte's Second Empire was an international phenomenon, receiving support from British capital. When he took power, Bismarck announced: "The great questions of the time will not be resolved by speeches and majority decisions - that was the great mistake of 1848 and 1849 - but by iron and blood." Marx wrote of Bonaparte's coup: "Every demand of the simplest bourgeois financial reform, of the most ordinary liberalism, of the most formal republicanism, of the most insipid democracy, is simultaneously castigated as an 'attempt on society' and stigmatised as 'socialism' ... Bourgeois fanatics for order are shot down on their balconies by mobs of drunken soldiers, their domestic sanctuaries profaned ... in the name of property, of family ... and of order ... Finally, the scum of bourgeois society forms ... the 'saviour of society'."

This is what, according to Marxism, has repeated since 1848. Trotsky was repeating Marx word for word when he called Stalin an "outstanding mediocrity" - what allowed Stalin like Bonaparte to succeed. This expressed politically the greater failure of the "general intellect"

of society, its crisis in capitalism.

Liberalism is not merely a mistake facilitated or trap abetted by "material class interests" of elites; socialism is not proletarian collectivism, as against the alleged individualism of property. Bourgeois society has been, and so socialism will be, an intrinsic relation - a "dialectic" - of the individual and the collective, not some balance between the two. As opposed to Hobbes, Locke, with his profound influence on Rousseau, formed the basis not only for Adam Smith, Kant, Hegel and hence for Marx's own thought, but indeed for American and French revolutionaries (among others) in the 18th century. Bourgeois society has not been mere market relations, but those of labour, as "first property", according to Locke and those who followed him, such as the Abbé Sieyès, in the revolt of the Third Estate.

And labour is a social relation. Modern democracy is based on the social relations of commodity production, including politically. The question is what becomes of this in capitalism, and how the latter marks a potential qualitative change in history.

The dialectical crisis and contradiction of liberalism and socialism means that they are inextricable from each other: socialism must, according to Marxist Hegelianism, be the *Aufhebung* (sublation) of - must realise, as well as overcome, complete as well as transcend - liberalism in modern democracy. Marx thought that this was a new problem of the 19th century that made it impossible to proceed according to either the Jacobinism of the French Revolution, the liberalism of the UK's Glorious Revolution of 1688-89 or the July Revolution of 1830. Something new was revealed in the crisis of the 1840s, leading to 1848 - and to its failure.

When Macnair recommends Chartism as model, he acknowledges that we still live in that failure. What Macnair doesn't recognise, however, is how Marx and later Marxists tried to diagnose as well as work through the problem of political party, which went beyond Chartism.

Regarding the purpose of my arguments, this may indeed be pursuit of "self-knowledge" in "small-e enlightenment". Marxism historically may have been right or wrong, but it can yet be food for thought. I apologise if my ruminations appear obscure.

Chris Cutrone
email

Alien aid

I think Jack Conrad underplays the need for space exploration ('Mission Mars and the final frontier', December 11). After all, if the human race is to live beyond the lifespan of this planet and this solar system, we have nowhere else to go but space.

True, the massive leap forward will not come until we achieve global communism. The much maligned J Posadas had put forward a simple proposition regarding this in the 1960s, a time of many alleged UFO sightings. Posadas said that in order to traverse the universe it was probable such intelligent beings had solved the basic problem of wage-slavery and achieved a communist world, freeing technological innovation. Which is a sensible enough Marxist hypothesis.

Sadly, an overenthusiastic comrade in Belgium, during a nationwide foundry strike, put out leaflets appealing to the intergalactic comrades to come to the aid of the workers! A bit premature indeed.

David Douglass
South Shields

Ancient aliens

Andrew Northall raised some interesting points about what he regards as the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration's continued obsession with the three ancient Egyptian gods and goddesses: Osiris, Isis and Horus (Letters, December 18).

The truth is, Nasa's obsession with

ancient Egyptian mythology is neither bizarre nor inexplicable. This is because the foundations of ancient Egyptian religious tradition and, in fact, the religious traditions of much of the ancient world - at least from around 3,000 or 3,200 BC - is mostly based on the Sirius star system. Why this ancient obsession with Sirius and Mars?

A possible reason for this may be found in Robert Temple's 1967 book - republished in 1999: *The Sirius mystery - new scientific evidence for alien contact 5,000 years ago*. What is the Sirius mystery? The mystery is that the Dogon tribe of Mali, west Africa, has possessed for thousands of years detailed knowledge, preserved in their religious tradition, about the Sirius system, knowledge which is not possible for humans to know without advanced radio telescopes. There have been attempts to undermine the work of Robert Temple regarding the Dogon tribe and the Sirius mystery, but in my view such attempts can only influence those who are not versed in the issues concerned and, furthermore, the general outline of much of what the Dogon believe finds corroboration in other traditions. When working on *The Sirius mystery*, Temple had a paper stolen by someone connected to the CIA, and the question naturally arises: why would this work attract the attention of the US intelligence service?

Ancient traditions worldwide claim that extra-terrestrial beings visited this world in the remote past and Dogon claims about beings from the Sirius system represent a particular expression of the general belief. The Dogon tradition also claims that another star, Sirius C, exists within the system, but science remained divided over this until Sirius C was discovered in 1995, thus confirming the Dogon claim. In relation to Sirius B, which the Dogon regard as the most important star within the system, the Dogon claimed for thousands of years that its orbit around the main star, Sirius A, was egg-shaped - in other words, elliptical. Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) only discovered that planets orbit elliptically around stars in the 17th century.

A connection has been found between the Dogons and the ancient Egyptians, and we know that Sirius was the foundation of the religious traditions of ancient Egypt and much of the world from 3,200 BC at least. And it is also quite possible that the name Assyria, or Syria, was derived from Sirius worshippers in ancient times.

The Dogon say their detailed knowledge of the characteristic of the Sirius system came from beings, which they describe as amphibians, who visited Earth thousands of years ago. Intelligent amphibious beings are described in other traditions. Also described in other traditions around the world is that beings, taking reptilian form, mixed their genes with humans. In the *Bible* (Genesis 6), we are told that the sons of 'god' interbred - ie, mixed their genetics with human women, creating the Nephilims who ruled ancient humanity. In most ancient traditions the gods took reptilian form, which would explain why ancient and modern culture is so preoccupied with reptilian, serpent or dragon themes.

This theme of reptilian control of humanity is taken up again by Zulu tradition. In *Children of the Matrix - how an interdimensional race has controlled the world for thousands of years - and still does*, David Icke relates how Credo Mutwa, the South African Zulu historian and shaman, was initiated throughout his life into the secret knowledge of the reptilian control. This, by the way, is the same Credo Mutwa who princess Diana phoned from London in March 1997, claiming she had information on the royal family which would shake the world, before she died in August the same year. What was Princess Diana doing phoning a man who was initiated into a secret knowledge about reptilian control of the world?

Unlike the ancients, I know that

many people today would find the theory of reptilian control of humanity, using reptilian-human genetic hybrid bloodlines, too bizarre to take seriously. But we can't deny that the old rulers claimed descent from the gods, and the divine right to rule by bloodline. We have only to establish who these 'gods' really were, before we can truly begin to understand the ancient past and its relation to the present world. So I would agree with Andrew Northall that Nasa may be studying the ancient Egyptian text for hidden astronomical reasons, which may relate to the ancient past and present. Or is Nasa trying to hide what it already knows?

Tony Clark
email

Back to Jurassic

With next summer's release of *Jurassic World*, I think it's worthwhile to revisit the original film in the paleontological franchise in light of the 2013 documentary *Blackfish*, with a focus on the inherent abuse captivity represents for wild animals and the potential dangers it creates for human handlers.

While I think it's safe to assume most readers have seen *Jurassic Park*, for those not familiar with the other title, *Blackfish* centres on Tilikum, an orca currently living in SeaWorld Orlando, who has been held captive for more than 30 years. During that time, he has killed three humans. The movie, which was nominated for the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival, suggests Tilikum's aggression was the result of his imprisonment. As journalist Jane Velez-Mitchell asked, "If you were in a bathtub for 25 years, don't you think you'd get a little irritated, aggravated, maybe a little psychotic?" Since the documentary's release, SeaWorld has posted dramatic financial losses.

Interestingly, the inciting incidents for Steven Spielberg's 1993 blockbuster and *Blackfish* are remarkably similar. *Jurassic Park* opens on an island off the coast of Costa Rica with a captive velociraptor killing an employee of InGen, the bioengineering company responsible for the titular resort. It's this specific action that puts the entire plot of the film in motion. Paleobotanist Ellie Sattler, mathematician Ian Malcolm and palaeontologist Alan Grant are invited to the island in the wake of this episode to assess the park's safety. Correspondingly, Gabriela Cowperthwaite's documentary begins with the brutal drowning of an experienced SeaWorld trainer, Dawn Brancheau, by Tilikum. From there, the remainder of the film seeks to answer the question of why this happened.

Dismissing conservative accusations of anthropomorphism, historian Jason Hribal encourages us to see such acts of violence not as random occurrences, but as intentional rebellions against speciesist confinement: "Through my research, the resistance became ever more evident. Captive animals escaped their cages," Hribal said. "They attacked their keepers. They demanded more food. They refused to perform. They refused to reproduce. The resistance itself could be organised."

Obviously there are differences between real-life orcas and fictional dinosaurs. As researcher Howard Garrett states in *Blackfish*, there is no record of orcas attacking humans in the wild. And, given the speculative nature of *Jurassic Park*, we have no idea how various ancient species would interact with humans. Existing predators, such as tigers, generally attack humans only if they can't meet their dietary needs. But say we concede, for the sake of argument, that free-living prehistoric animals would choose to hunt and kill us, absent unique circumstances. I don't think such predation would invalidate the view that specific non-human violence in *Jurassic Park* could be interpreted, to one degree or another, as an intentional form of resistance.

Jeffrey Ventre, a former SeaWorld trainer, says that Tilikum, an animal who should be travelling 100 miles a

day, is kept in what amounts to a small, concrete swimming pool. Similarly, in *Jurassic Park*, the resort's 'game' warden, Robert Muldoon, states that, like cheetahs, velociraptors can run 50-60 miles per hour, which presumably means the species would be accustomed to free access to large swaths of land. And yet the velociraptors are kept in a ludicrously small cage, about the size of a hockey rink, which they clearly do not enjoy. "She had them all attacking the [electrified] fences when the feeders came," Muldoon says, referring to the leader of the pride. "But they never attack the same place twice. They were testing the fences for weaknesses systematically. They remembered."

Indeed, the desire of these animals to escape is so great, the owner of the resort, John Hammond, concedes InGen has been forced to take extreme precautions to prevent this from happening: "The viewing area below us will have eight-inch tempered glass set in reinforced steel frames," Hammond says.

One must assume that Spielberg and others involved in the creation of the box-office smash that was *Jurassic Park* did not intend it to be a sci-fi parable of non-human revolt against captivity. The filmmakers' view appears to be expressed through the voice of Dr Malcolm, who has nothing to say regarding animal treatment or use, and sees the threat posed by the island's dinosaurs purely as a result of scientific arrogance run amok. But I'm not sure that authorial intent matters that much. Ultimately, there's enough evidence in the film to make credible an anti-speciesist interpretation of *Jurassic Park* as a sort of fictionalised *Blackfish*.

Jon Hochschartner
email

Pariah status

Nick Tan's letter (December 18) proposing a "blanket ban" on employers hiring non-permanent residents cites a demand of Jules Guesde and his wing of pre-World War I French Social Democracy as historical justification. But Guesde's demand does not correspond to comrade Tan's: obviously, demanding that employers be banned from employing migrant workers at lower rates is a demand for equality of payment and thus rights, whereas comrade's Tan's demand for a ban on employing workers who lack permanent residency rights is a demand for *inequality* of rights.

The idea of putting the onus on employers for the prohibition, and not the migrant workers themselves, changes little. It is a very similar demand to that of some of the more reactionary feminists concerning sex workers: that their clients be criminalised instead of the sex workers themselves. In reality, despite a degree of sophistry and even self-deception in such stratagems, they are still aimed at stopping a stigmatised part of the working class from earning a living, and are hence reactionary, divisive and anti-working class.

The only way to stop undercutting is to abolish the pariah status of illegality and semi-illegality that drives migrant workers to accept exploitative conditions, by abolishing all restrictions on migrants and refugees. This demand has to be advanced with that of abolishing all restrictions on trade union organising, and for working class union and political organisation across national borders that can unite 'indigenous' and migrant workers internationally and bring an end to both undercutting and workers being set against migrants by racist demagogues like the UK Independence Party.

The social-chauvinism of those who seek to 'protect' the jobs and working conditions of 'indigenous' workers by demands for restrictions on migrants only plays into the hands of the right. It won't lead to victories for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition or any other putative socialist campaign, and even the Labour Party can only retreat further from working class interests though bending to such agitation.

What this underlines is that we do

not need loose coalitions like Tusc, but a party that can unify the most advanced, revolutionary-inclined sections of the workers' movement, where these ideas can be fought out freely without worrying about upsetting those whose politics are limited by trade union narrowness, as is true with many in Tusc. Nor, for that matter, upsetting the prejudices of those like the CPGB leadership, whose posture of being in favour of the freedom of migration has a curious exception where it comes to some who need it most: Palestinians expelled from their homeland by Zionist Israel, whose territorial integrity - created through ethnic cleansing - the CPGB supports.

Ian Donovan
Communist Explorations

Ted said so

Of course the demand should be for "Syriza to take power" and "form a workers' government with socialist policies" ('Troika demands more blood', December 18). Marxist should mobilise to get Syriza elected. Now, Marxists understand that Syriza will not carry out a proletarian revolution - at best it will be a reformist government - but Marxists should support all reforms of the government, and put forward their own programme in contrast to the reforms.

The mass of the working class support Syriza. If we say that Syriza is going to let us down, then the Marxists will be sidelined. Eddie Ford says: "Surely it is reckless and irresponsible to spread illusions in Syriza. As it is, the party subscribes to a mealy-mouthed left Keynesianism that is utterly doomed to failure." Surely it is the duty of Marxists to contrast their programme to that of Syriza. Marxists should support the left government, but campaign for their programme, thereby exposing the false policies of Syriza.

"Quite clearly, a Syriza-led coalition, enjoying minority support across the country, would have problems of legitimacy from the very beginning. It would too come under extraordinary pressure from the markets, and would be relentlessly demonised by the media domestically and internationally. Under such circumstances would its leadership not be tempted to make all sorts of unprincipled compromises?"

Any government that fought for the working class would come under pressure from the capitalist class, both in Greece and internationally. Of course, the leadership would come under such intense pressure, and they would make rotten compromises. This again would give the Marxists the opportunity to contrast their policies with that of the left reformists.

"We argue in the strongest possible terms that as a general principle the left should avoid the temptation of prematurely taking power. Till we have a clear majority, till there is the strong likelihood of the working class in other countries forming their own governments - ie, the conditions where we have a realistic possibility of fulfilling our entire minimum programme - then it is best to constitute our forces as those of the extreme opposition. In other words, we fight to enlarge the democratic space available to us in society. Under these conditions our forces can organise, be educated and further grow."

So if there was a huge vote for Syriza, but they don't gain a majority, even though they may have the most votes they should say, 'We will not take power'. This would not go down well amongst the workers, who would see it as a defeat. As for "enlarge the democratic space", Eddie, you are talking bollocks.

The masses learn through events, not by Marxists standing on the sidelines slagging off the left government and putting forward a pure revolutionary programme. As Ted Grant used to say, "Events, events, events will teach the masses".

Alun Morgan
email

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

Every Monday we upload a podcast commenting on the current political situation. In addition, the site features voice files of public meetings and other events: <http://cpgb.org.uk/home/podcasts>.

London Communist Forum

Sunday January 11, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and *Capital* reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. This meeting: Vol 1, appendix: 'Results of the immediate process of production' (continued). Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology
Tuesday January 13, 6.30pm: 'Conservatism and how to fight it: lessons from evolutionary theory'. Speaker: Lesley Newson. Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, London NW1. Talks are free, but small donations are welcome. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>

Russian avant-garde

Ends Sunday January 25: Exhibition, Victoria and Albert Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7. 'Russian avant-garde theatre: war, revolution and design 1913-1933'. Free entry. Organised by Victoria and Albert Museum: www.vam.ac.uk.

The sensory war 1914-2014

Ends Sunday February 22: Exhibition, Manchester Art Gallery, Mosley Street, Manchester M2. The impact of military conflict on the body, mind, environment and human senses between 1914 and 2014. Organised by Manchester Art Gallery: www.manchestergalleries.org.

Save Hartlepool hospital

Saturday January 10, 11am: March against removal of NHS services from Hartlepool hospital. Assemble Seaton Carew bus station, Brenda Road, Hartlepool. Organised by 999 Call for NHS: <http://999callfor NHS.org.uk>.

A year in the West Bank

Sunday January 11, 2pm to 5pm: Report-back, Highbury Church Hall, Oxford Street, Cheltenham, from activists back from Palestine. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

Close Guantanamo

Sunday January 11, 2pm: 13th anniversary protest, outside National Gallery, Trafalgar Square (north side), London WC2. Organised by London Guantanamo Campaign: www.londonguantanamocampaign.blogspot.co.uk.

'Families of nakba'

Wednesday January 14, 7pm: Book launch, Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Event page: <http://familiesofthenakba.weebly.com>.

Reclaim the union

Saturday January 17, 2pm to 5pm: National meeting for Unison activists, Mechanics Centre, 103 Princess Street, Manchester M1. Pooled fare system in operation - please book transport in advance to save on costs. Organised by Unison United Left: unisonunitedleft@unionlists.org.uk.

A new year of war?

Monday January 19, 6.30pm: Meeting, Boothroyd Room, Bridge Street, Portcullis House, London SW1. Speakers include: Seumas Milne, *Guardian* columnist, Andrew Murray, Unite. Hosted by Jeremy Corbyn MP. Supported by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Wrap up Trident

Saturday January 24, 12noon: Demonstration. Assemble ministry of defence, Horse Guards Avenue, London SW1 Westminster, for march to rally at Parliament Square, London SW1. Organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: www.cnduk.org.

Palestine solidarity

Saturday January 24, 9.30am to 5pm: Annual general meeting of Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

Tusc and the 2015 elections

Saturday January 24, 11am to 4.30pm: Pre-election conference, Student Central (formerly ULU), Malet Street, London WC1. £10 waged, £2 unwaged/low-waged. Registration form: www.tusc.org.uk/txt/318.doc. Organised by Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition: www.tusc.org.uk.

No to Iraq III

Monday January 26, 7.30pm: Meeting, Friends Meeting House, 12 Jesus Lane, Cambridge CB5. Speakers include: Andrew Murray, Julian Huppert (Lib Dem MP), Dr Sanaa Al Khayat (Iraqi author and activist). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

From SAS to Veterans for Peace

Tuesday January 27, 8pm: Meeting, Cheese and Grain Market Yard, Frome. Speaker: former SAS soldier Ben Griffin. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

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.

GREECE

What if Syriza wins?

Is the left obliged to spread illusions in a Syriza government? No, quite the opposite, argues **Eddie Ford**

Greece is preparing itself for a general election on January 25 after Antonis Samaras, prime minister and New Democracy leader, failed to get his candidate chosen as president by the 300-seat parliament. Samaras's gamble was always a long shot, leading some to believe that he *wanted* to trigger a snap general election. The more conspiratorially minded have suggested that Samaras was quite happy to let a government led by Alexis Tsipras of Syriza be stuck with the burdensome task of continued talks with the European Commission-European Central Bank-International Monetary Fund troika over the exact terms of the bailout programme - and take the blame when it all goes wrong. At the moment, Greece needs to repay IMF loans worth about €2.8 billion by the end of March.

Anyhow, opinion polls show that Syriza is still ahead of New Democracy. For instance, E-Voice on January 3 has Syriza on 34.1%, ND on 30.1% and Pasok on a humiliating 4.3% - trailing behind the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and even the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn.¹ Other polls have Syriza leading ND by as much as 10% and at the very least, it seems, Syriza will finish ahead of ND by about a 3%-4% margin.

However, matters have been complicated - or made easier, depending on how you look at it - by the fact that on January 2 George Papandreou, former prime minister and ex-Pasok leader, suddenly announced the formation of a new party, the Movement for Change/Movement of Democratic Socialists (Kidiso). Pasok officials immediately denounced the move as an "unethical and irrational political act" - and you can see why. Five Pasok MPs are expected to join the new party, including the former minister, Filippos Sachinidis, and the former parliamentary speaker, Filippos Petsalnikos. Kidiso has issued a 16-page founding declaration attacking the failure of the current system of nation-states to "humanise" globalisation and international capital, criticising the "conservative majority" in the European Union that fails to acknowledge the "imperfections" of the euro. Instead, Kidiso calls for a "progressive, socialist, ecological Europe" - trying to place itself well to the left of Pasok, but to the right of Syriza: the sensible, progressive option.

Fairly obviously, Kidiso is going to take far more votes from Pasok than from Syriza. First opinion polls suggest that Papandreou's new party will get around 4% to 6% of the vote (it has to reach the 3% threshold to enter parliament), meaning that Pasok - the party that has *dominated* Greek politics since the overthrow of the colonels in 1974 - faces potential wipe-out. How the mighty fall. As with Samaras's presidential gamble, you have to ask what end game Papandreou has in mind - surely he must know that he is going to split the Pasok vote, not to mention the centre-left vote in general. One possible explanation is that he sees himself as a potential governmental partner for Tsipras, using his extensive political connections and experience to act as a 'moderating' influence upon the supposed firebrand - constantly whispering sensible advice in his ear.

One thing is certain though. Even with the anti-democratic 50-seat top-up for the leading party in a general election, Syriza will struggle to form an outright majority - the forecasting group, Oxford Economics, calculates that you need at least 36% of the final vote to stand a chance of securing a workable majority (although a few



People reach for free fruit and veg

of the very latest polls do actually have Syriza on 40%).² Therefore in all probability Syriza will be looking from day one to do deals to *its right*, such as with Kidiso and/or Democratic Left - however, support for the latter has collapsed spectacularly and it is barely registering in recent polls. Then there is always Potami (The River), a party which was formed less than a year ago by TV presenter Stavros Theodorakis on the basis of "tackling the recession and unemployment". Whatever exactly happens, any Syriza-led government would come under *immediate* and *immense* pressure (both domestically and internationally) to water down those policies perceived to be beyond the pale - "worse than communism", as one investment manager recently put it.

In reality, of course - verbiage aside - Syriza's programme does not amount to much more than run-of-the-mill Keynesianism, and indeed has moved significantly to the right in recent times. For instance, it has abandoned nationalisation of the banks.³ It is not even clear if a Syriza government would leave Nato, rather than hope it "breaks up on its own".⁴ Indeed, Tsipras's pledge to "tame the oligarchs" who dominate much of the economy, sometimes at the expense of foreign competitors, has actually been cautiously welcomed. The *FT* reckons that the idea of a "crackdown" on the oligarchs would get a "sympathetic hearing" from the EU and the IMF.⁵

Solidarity?

Some sections of the left are saying that we are at an historic moment, or juncture - the first time since 1936 (in France and Spain) that a "workers' government" has been elected, as comrade Andrew Burgin wrote on the Left Unity website.⁶ OK, let us go along for now with this historic analogy, leaving aside that there is no Soviet Union, fascist governments or a build-up to generalised war. What would we expect a government led by Alexis Tsipras to deliver?

Yes, true, in 1936 a Popular Front government in France - led by the Socialist Party and Communist Party - resulted in substantial gains for the working class. Having said that, there was a *gap* between the government getting elected and then actually coming to power (as per the constitution) and this was filled by a huge wave of strikes, occupations, demonstrations, etc. As Trotsky famously pointed out, the masses were delivering what they *imagined* the programme of the PF government to be: putting it into practice on the ground. In Spain, on the other hand, general Franco brought his troops over from Morocco and began

out its historical mission - or become an agent of capital. Communists should therefore constitute themselves as a party of extreme opposition to austerity, not the *instrument* of austerity. And, unfortunately, as things stand at the present, there is no prospect whatsoever of, say, the Italian working class coming to the rescue of Greece - let alone France, Germany, Britain, etc. Hence we repeat our call for Syriza *not* to 'take the power'.

And, make no mistake, the chances are that the troika will not retreat. Hardly surprisingly, there are those like some writers in the *FT* who are questioning the wisdom of burdening Greece with a debt it cannot possibly ever pay back - the country has lost a third of its GDP. Why not just kick the can way down the road and have some sort of debt programme stretching over 50 or 60 years, similar to the US approach towards Britain after World War II? The latter, after all, only paid off the last instalment in *December 2006*.⁷ From the standpoint of the Euro-bureaucracy that would be all well and good, if Greece was a purely isolated case. Then you could either force it out of the euro zone or just shrug your shoulders and write off its debt - at the end of the day it only amounts to around 1.5% of total euro zone GDP, hardly a fiscal disaster (more like an accounting detail).

But, of course, the real world is not like that. If the EU climbed down over Greece, then, as sure as night follows day, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Cyprus etc would all want a similar deal - never mind all the eastern European countries. Then there is Italy - which *does* matter in terms of GDP. Matteo Renzi is bound to ask why he has to suffer the unpopularity of imposing austerity and suffer protest general strikes - give me the Greek treatment. What is the answer supposed to be? Greece is different because it has elected Syriza? Imagine what sort of message that would send out to the other euro-zone countries - rebel and you will be rewarded. Sinn Féin and Podemos too would be emboldened and demanding an end to the austerity regime.

For this very reason, to avoid the nightmare scenario, there are loud voices within Angela Merkel's government that insist on softness should be shown towards Greece - no concessions, no exceptionalism.

Instability

The most likely outcome of the January 25 election is that Syriza wins, but is unable to come to a deal with the other parties, or if it can then Tsipras finds he cannot do a deal with the ECB - which in turn means another election and continued instability. But even if this happens, or Syriza does not actually win the election, it is now a serious player in Greek politics - its support is projected to go up by around 8% from the last election in June 2012. Not that long ago, of course, Syriza was a fringe party barely able to get 5% in the polls - quite a journey.

Which brings us to the Socialist Workers Party's sister organisation in Greece, the SEK - which is part of the Front of the Greek Anticapitalist Left (Antarsya). Some *Weekly Worker* readers might recall that in 2001 there was a split within the SEK, a minority forming the Internationalist Workers Left (DEA) - that went on to enter into a sisterly relationship with the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the United States. With wonderful irony, the International Socialist Tendency central command in London vociferously denounced

the DEA faction for paying too much attention to the 'old left', as opposed to the 'new social movements' - they were the future. Now DEA is part of Syriza, which could muster over 30% of the vote in a few weeks, whilst the SEK is an insignificant part of the insignificant Antarsya - in the last general election it got 0.33% of the vote and might do even worse this time.

The very latest issue of *Socialist Worker* features a relatively lengthy article by Panos Garganos, editor of the SEK's *Workers Solidarity*, bearing the anxious headline - "Another government falls, but will Syriza break with austerity?" (January 6). Of course, says the comrade, we in Antarsya "stand with Syriza against government attacks on workers", but argues that "the signs are" that Syriza's approach "will be appeasement" - its leadership wants to support candidates with "openings to the right", such as the Democratic Left. Yes, we agree with comrade Garganos that if in government the Syriza leadership could easily buckle to the right and impose a new version of austerity. But what political *answers* does the SEK have? Precious little: just keep on fighting the cuts, going on strike, and so on (leave the EU?). But Greece has had 32 *general strikes* so far, and yet austerity remains. In other words, the SEK - just like the SWP - is fatally disarmed by its economism.

On the other hand, we have Owen Jones taking to the pages of *The Guardian* to actively peddle illusions in Syriza - writing that it could "kill off" austerity in the EU in "alliance" with forces such as the "surging" Podemos by demanding that the bloc abandon crippling austerity policies in favour of "quantitative easing" and a "growth-led recovery" (December 22). He takes comfort from the fact that Die Linke in Germany "could be given a boost" by a Syriza victory, not to mention the possibility that it could "strengthen those who wish Labour to offer a genuine alternative" or even lead at some stage to "Britain's own Syriza-style party".

Then there is Kate Hudson, LU's national secretary. On January 1 she wrote an open letter to Syriza offering solidarity greetings to its congress, saying the party had been a "great inspiration" to the founding of LU "in its policies and principles".⁸ Unfortunately, it is absolutely true that LU was founded on the basis of left Keynesianism. We also remember those who originally wanted to call LU the Left Party - *à la* Die Linke - regardless of the latter's position on austerity, Israel, governmental coalitions, etc.

If Syriza forms a government after the January 25 general election and subsequently capitulates (or worse), we want LU members to remember comrade Hudson's words. Even more, we want them to remember the disastrous legacy of popular-front governments - something to be *avoided*, not emulated ●

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Notes

- [1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_Greek_legislative_election,_2015](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_Greek_legislative_election,_2015).
- [2. www.ft.com/fastft/257212/syriza-set-decisive-victory-report](http://www.ft.com/fastft/257212/syriza-set-decisive-victory-report).
- [3. http://socialistnetwork.org/the-new-programme-of-syriza](http://socialistnetwork.org/the-new-programme-of-syriza).
- [4. www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_ws-ite1_1_08/09/2014_542723](http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_ws-ite1_1_08/09/2014_542723).
- Financial Times* January 6 2015.
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- [7. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-American_loan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-American_loan).
- [8. http://leftunity.org/solidarity-greetings-to-syriza-congress](http://leftunity.org/solidarity-greetings-to-syriza-congress).

ITALY

After old man Napolitano

As the Italian president prepares to step down, Toby Abse looks at the likely contenders

Giorgio Napolitano's new year's eve message explicitly confirmed his intention to resign as president - an office he has held for almost nine years.¹

It is widely believed that he intends to quit on January 14, the day after the last speech required of him as Italian head of state in relation to Italy's presidency of the European Union. However, if the Partito Democratico (PD) prime minister, Matteo Renzi, had any residual belief that he could persuade Napolitano to remain in office a little longer to ensure the smooth passage of the proposed constitutional and electoral reforms through both chambers of the Italian parliament, the televised address indicated that the old man, who will be 90 in April, has had enough. Given his age when he agreed to serve a second term in April 2013, his resignation - although coming unprecedentedly early² - seems far more defensible than his allegedly reluctant acceptance of what was nominally a seven-year mandate at the age of 87.

There is no reason to doubt Napolitano's claim in his farewell message that he felt he no longer had the capacity to continue - "I say simply I have the duty of not undervaluing the signs of fatigue", as he put it. He emphasised that it was a personal decision on the grounds of health and age, not one intended to influence the government or parliament, nor one influenced by them. Whether or not there is any truth in the rumours that he was increasingly irritated by the reluctance of the arrogant young Renzi to accept his advice in the way that Renzi's immediate predecessor, PD premier Enrico Letta, had, it would be wrong to see Napolitano's resignation as primarily motivated by such tensions - his farewell address clearly endorsed both the constitutional and the electoral reforms, even if he spent less time on them than might have been expected, and showed a greater awareness of Italy's deteriorating economic situation.

Napolitano's references to the "regression in productive activity and consumption", the "fall in the national income and family incomes", the "emergence of serious phenomena of environmental degradation and, above all, ... the spread of youth unemployment and the loss of jobs" were in stark contrast to Renzi's relentless and facile optimism. This was particularly noticeable in the premier's Christmas Eve press conference - about the imminent end of the Italian recession and the 'recovery' to be expected in the coming year.³

Insofar as Napolitano's speech had any political content - as opposed to moralistic appeals to all citizens to do their duty, of a kind reminiscent of Christmas messages from pope Francis or our own queen - it emphasised national unity and the importance of the European Union. It specifically attacked those who want to abandon the euro and any continent-wide economic strategy, even if neither Beppe Grillo's Movimento Cinque Stelle (Five Star Movement - M5S) nor Matteo Salvini's Lega Nord - the two major Italian political forces with a Europhobic orientation - was actually named.⁴ Napolitano's enthusiasm for the EU was qualified by his approval of Renzi's efforts during the Italian presidency of the EU to obtain some change in economic policy to assist the "relaunch" of "our economies"; needless to say, no mention was made of the failure of these efforts to have any discernible impact on Angela Merkel or Jean-Claude Juncker, who remain committed to endless austerity, as the recent statements of both the German

chancellor and the president of the European Commission about the coming Greek election have made only too plain.

Succession

Napolitano's official farewell was in no sense a genuine surprise - rumours of his imminent resignation had been rife for at least a month and speculation about the succession had been a major topic in all the Italian dailies for some time. Renzi seems very keen to achieve a consensus between the PD and Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia on a mutually acceptable candidate rather than to hope that on this occasion the PD could elect its own chosen candidate.⁵ The treachery of the 101 PD parliamentarians who stabbed Romano Prodi in the back in the April 2013 contest is in everybody's mind. Prodi himself has claimed that he has no interest in making a second attempt, but his name is still one of those most frequently cited in press discussions.

Initially Berlusconi gave the impression that almost any other PD candidate would be acceptable to him, but that Forza Italia would do its utmost to veto Prodi, who was Berlusconi's one consistent adversary in what became the PD - and the only centre-left leader to defeat him in a general election (indeed two general elections: 1996 and 2006). More recently Berlusconi, however, has encouraged rumours that he may actually favour Prodi on the grounds that you can only make a lasting peace with your real enemies - the implication being that only somebody with a reputation for intransigent anti-Berlusconiism could dare to give Berlusconi some sort of pardon which would override the six-year ban on parliamentary office or candidacy imposed upon him, after his definitive tax fraud conviction in 2013.

Berlusconi's only real concern in the coming presidential contest lies in its impact on his own current and indeed future legal and financial situation.⁶ Some in Forza Italia and others in centre-right groupings like Angelino Alfano's Nuovo Centro Destra (NCD - New Centre Right) or Pierferdinando Casini's Unione del Centro (UCD) argue that it is time for an avowedly Catholic president, since both Napolitano and his immediate predecessor, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, were *laici* (secular). They say this is a breach of the tradition of the cold war years of the 'First Republic' (1946-92), with its rigorous alternation between Catholics and *laici* as head of state. But this is of no interest to Berlusconi - a factor which seems to have reduced the chances of potential PD candidates like Dario Franceschini, the only PD secretary before Renzi who came from a Christian Democratic rather than ex-communist political background. Admittedly Prodi himself could in fact be seen as a Catholic candidate, but it is unlikely that those who have raised this issue had him in mind.

Quite apart from the objections that many on the centre-right might raise to his anti-Berlusconian record, Prodi has never enjoyed much support from the church hierarchy - at least during the Wojtyła/Ratzinger years - despite his greater personal commitment to live by Catholic concepts of family values, demonstrated by his long marriage and large family, than the divorced UCD leader, Casini, or the libertine, Berlusconi. The latter was favoured by the Curia until the advent of pope Francis - an outsider who finds some of the hypocritical traditions of the upper ranks of the Italian church rather distasteful and seems set on promoting more congenial cardinals from the third world.

Another potential candidate is the

PD's founder, Walter Veltroni, whose deliberate avoidance of personal attacks on Berlusconi during the 2008 general election endeared him to the tycoon, but probably helped him to lose the election by a large margin. However, whilst this craven record of sycophancy towards the felon might make him one of Forza Italia's favourites amongst the potential PD candidates, the deep involvement of his right-hand man during his years as mayor of Rome, Luca Odevine, in the Mafia Capitale scandal has probably lessened his chances. Berlusconi's initial enthusiasm for former premier Giuliano Amato may have done the erstwhile Socialist protégé of Bettino Craxi more harm than good - although Napolitano himself, who always had a weakness for the Socialists in the Craxi era, is supposed to have some sympathy for his candidacy and played a key role in his appointment to the Constitutional Court.

Inevitably in this epoch of neoliberal technocracy, some bankers have been mentioned as allegedly less partisan choices.⁷ European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi has repeatedly disclaimed any interest in the post of president, but Renzi's current economics minister, Carlo Padoan, seems to have more credibility.

In the 2013 contest M5S intransigence played into Berlusconi's hands - whilst the M5S favourite, Stefano Rodotà, was probably the best of the serious candidates, there was no hope of electing an honest and intelligent constitutional expert from the PD's left wing if the PD itself opposed him. A more constructive engagement by either M5S or the growing group of parliamentarians who have been expelled or have resigned from M5S may tip the balance on this occasion. Whilst Renzi favours a deal with Forza Italia over one with M5S or ex-M5S dissidents, there is no guarantee that an official PD/Forza Italia consensus candidate could in a secret ballot actually achieve the score such a person ought to have on paper.

The problem of disloyalty within the PD has already been mentioned - whether or not the phenomenon of the 101 traitors who destroyed Prodi's chance in 2013 is repeated, there is a large amount of hostility to Renzi on the PD's left. Indeed those who lacked the courage to rebel when it really mattered - to the working class at any rate - over the Jobs Act might be more inclined to express clandestine dissent in a secret ballot. Only the fearless maverick, Pippo Civati, who probably will leave the PD sooner or later, has publicly stated that he would vote for Prodi or Rodotà, but not for a candidate chose by the PD in conjunction with Berlusconi. However, Berlusconi no longer has the control of Forza Italia's parliamentarians that he used to enjoy before his own exclusion and the restrictions of his community service order. This order does not expire until February 15 - in other words, too late to impact on the presidential contest, which everybody expects to take place at the end of January.

Raffaele Fitto has been a constant thorn in Berlusconi's flesh as a result of the large number of preference votes he gained on the Forza Italia list in the May 2014 European elections. These enabled him to win followers amongst Forza Italia's parliamentarians not just

in his native region of Puglia, but also elsewhere in the south. Despite some verbal threats by Berlusconi a few months ago, it is quite obvious that his loyalists do not have sufficient control over the party to move towards Fitto's expulsion without risking a serious split. In addition Berlusconi also has a problem with some of the old guard of Forza Italia parliamentarians like Renato Brunetta, who, despite personal loyalty to their patron, have no liking for the pact with Renzi, the Patto del Nazareno, and might well be tempted to express their hostility to the PD leader in a secret ballot.

Nichi Vendola, the leader of Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (SEL - Left Ecology and Freedom) has voiced public support for Prodi's candidacy and urged the PD to ally with SEL in backing him. This was obviously intended as a means of undermining, if not destroying, the Patto del Nazareno, and instead reviving the alliance between the PD and SEL that former PD leader Pierluigi Bersani entered into for the February 2013 general election. Renzi subsequently rejected it by pursuing an aggressively neoliberal programme culminating in the Jobs Act, with its attack on the workers' rights embodied in article 18 of the 1970 workers' statute. However, SEL's capacity to influence the outcome of the presidential election is minimal, unless there is a much larger rebellion against Renzi within the PD than at present appears likely, or M5S proves far more willing to form a tactical alliance against Berlusconi and Forza Italia than it did in 2013.

Worst outcome

The worst outcome would be the election of a banker, who might well act as an agent of Brussels, Berlin and Frankfurt, preventing any lessening of the deflationary death spiral of current austerity policies. The second worst outcome would be the election of Giuliano Amato - not called *Dottore Sottile* (Doctor Subtle) for nothing, Craxi's former right-hand man has never been charged with financial wrongdoing and currently enjoys high judicial office, but reeks of the very worst kind of 'First Republic' politics, proving a dismal purveyor of anti-working class austerity policies during both his short premierships.

Whilst Stefano Rodotà might perhaps be the dream candidate, in reality Romano

Prodi is probably the best we can hope for, whatever some British Europhobes obsessed with Prodi's period as European commission president might claim. With any luck he might still want to get his revenge on Berlusconi and he has no liking for Renzi, whose extreme ideological neoliberalism is not really to the taste of a man whose intellectual formation was based on Catholic social teaching and whose early career was in state industry ●

Notes

1. The full text is available at www.repubblica.it/politica/2014/12/31/news/il_commiato_di_napolitano. Napolitano read it out word for word, giving rise to some criticism from those who would have preferred an improvised - or more likely memorised - speech.
2. Although he is not the first Italian president to resign before the end of his official term, the other instances were due either to evident extreme physical incapacity (Antonio Segni) or to the sort of allegations of serious wrongdoing that would have given rise to impeachment in American context (Giovane Leone and Francesco Cossiga).
3. Italy is in the third consecutive year of a recession with a GDP now lower than it was in 2000. The figures for the last three years were all negative: -2.4% in 2012, -1.9% in 2013 and -0.4% in 2014. The growth forecasts for 2015 range from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's 0.2%, through the government's 0.6%, to the International Monetary Fund's 0.8%.
4. Needless to say, both Grillo and Salvini were vociferous in attacking Napolitano's farewell message - after announcing a boycott in advance, which in Grillo's case consisted of delivering his own address to the nation simultaneously and in the case of the Lega's Radio Padania of broadcasting an old new year's eve message by the long dead Socialist president, Sandro Pertini.
5. On paper the PD is very close to having an absolute majority in the electoral college - recent regional elections, as well as parliamentary defections to the PD from SEL's right wing, have given it slightly more grand electors than it had in 2013.
6. Leaving aside Prodi's reluctance to grant Berlusconi any pardon, he is probably the only serious candidate who might be seen as favouring legislation about either a conflict of interest between concentrations of media ownership and political office or television monopolies as such.
7. The first banker to be elected president was Luigi Einaudi, so this is not such an innovation in historical terms. More relevantly, Napolitano's immediate predecessor as president (1999-2006), Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, was a former head of the Bank of Italy.



Giorgio Napolitano: jumped, not pushed

USA**Terror in the streets**

Methods of social control

In the age of 'colour-blindness', what accounts for the targeting of blacks by police? **Jim Creegan** critiques a recent influential book

Since my last article,¹ the focus of the conflict sparked by police killings of unarmed black civilians has shifted away from Ferguson, Missouri, to New York City. The news from here is dominated less at the moment by street protests against police tactics than by the backlash against the protests being led by the Fraternal Order of Police, the largest of the unions that claim to speak for the city's 35,000-member force, known as the NYPD.

On December 20, Ismaaiyl Brinsley, a 28-year-old black man, approached the passenger window of a parked police car in one of Brooklyn's most dangerous neighbourhoods, and fired a 9-millimeter pistol point-blank at the heads of its two occupants. One of the slain policemen was Latino, the other a Chinese immigrant. The assassin then ran into a nearby underground station, where he shot and killed himself. Brinsley had earlier left a message on Instagram that read: "I'm putting wings on pigs today. They take one of ours, let's take two of theirs." The message was hashtagged 'Michael Brown' and 'Eric Garner', the two men whose shooting by police had sparked the recent wave of national protest. Earlier the same day, the killer had taken a bus to New York from Baltimore, where he had just shot his girlfriend in the abdomen, non-fatally as it turned out. Brinsley had a prior record of 19 arrests, one for firing upon a woman's car in Atlanta. He had been under psychiatric care at one point in his life, and had attempted to hang himself a year ago. He had apparently never participated in any of the demonstrations against police violence.

But the fact that the murders were obviously the act of an apolitical and mentally disturbed individual did not prevent the police union from attempting to pin the blame on New York's left-of-centre Democratic mayor, Bill de Blasio. According to Patrick Lynch, the head of the police union, "There is blood on many hands

... those that incited violence on the streets under the guise of protest, that tried to tear down what New York police officers did every day. That blood on the hands starts on the steps of City Hall, in the office of the mayor." The union chief was angry because de Blasio had appeared months earlier at a press conference on police policy flanked by the reverend Al Sharpton, a Democratic Party loyalist, who is also a self-appointed black spokesman and a critic of the NYPD. Lynch was chagrined in addition by the fact that the mayor had permitted those demonstrating against police abuse a wider latitude on the streets than marchers were allowed under the previous city administration. But what probably rankled most was de Blasio's remark, shortly after the killing of Eric Garner, that he, like so many black and Latino parents, had had to warn his biracial, teenaged son (the mayor's wife is black) to be wary of the police in public.

When, on the night of the shootings, de Blasio appeared at the hospital where the bodies of the two slain officers lay, the cops on duty turned their backs on him. Some showed him their backs again when he spoke at the funerals of the two murdered lawmen. Since then, police-issued summonses for traffic violations, as well as minor criminal offences, have decreased by 90% compared to January of last year, and arrests for major felonies are 40% lower. Despite union denials, the police are obviously conducting an organised slowdown.

Perhaps the police are hoping by their inaction to bring about an uptick in the crime rate that would galvanise public sentiment in their favour, as a police protest had over two decades before. In 1992, 10,000 off-duty cops staged a virtual riot on the steps of City Hall against the black Democratic mayor, David Dinkins, perceived as anti-police and indulgent toward criminals. Rudi Giuliani, a public prosecutor with a tough-guy reputation, was there to urge on the

beer-swilling law-and-order mob. He was swept into office the following year on the crest of a crime rate that had reached all-time highs, and a growing perception that things were spinning out of control in a city that is not only the country's largest, but, with London, a principal hub of international finance capital. Giuliani's election inaugurated an uninterrupted 20-year Republican municipal reign, during which more cops were put on the street, armed with the enhanced powers that led to the sense of impunity which they feel is under threat today.

But the cops may be overplaying their hand. The New York of today is one of the safest cities in the country, with murders and violent crimes less frequent now than at any time since the early 60s. Much of Manhattan, even parts of its famous Harlem ghetto, as well as many neighbourhoods in the outer boroughs, have since morphed into stylish, high-rent districts, whose boutique-lined streets are friendly walkways for the yuppies and tourists who form the most visible part of the daytime urban population. Affluent New Yorkers are much less nervous about crime than in the 80s and 90s, and thus less likely to rally behind a law-and-order demagogue.

Yet the memory of the older, grimy New York, with its crumbling infrastructure and undercurrents of menace, has not entirely disappeared. Many are subliminally aware that the drug dealers, homeless persons and aggressive beggars who intruded so rudely upon the horizons of respectable residents 25 years ago have not vanished because they have found good jobs or decent housing. They still subsist somewhere in the margins - out of sight, but not quite out of mind. Even de Blasio and his supporters cannot escape the suspicion that the city's transformation is due at least in part to the police-prison regime pioneered on both local and national levels by many who now denounce him. For this reason he is reluctant to tamper with

the regime in any but superficial ways. He fears a return of the repressed; he fears that, with any weakening of the police apparatus, those now rendered invisible could once more begin to make an unsettling appearance on the streets. And anyone deemed responsible for opening the floodgates could all too easily meet the fate of de Blasio's last liberal predecessor.

Police-prison regime

No one maps the contours of the current police-prison regime better than the black law professor, Michelle Alexander, in her influential book, *The new Jim Crow: mass incarceration in the age of color blindness*. We shall therefore analyse that regime by summarising portions of the book's contents, as well as by criticising its explanatory framework.

Alexander argues that the contemporary American penal system has a lot less to do with apprehending and punishing criminals than exerting control over broad swathes of the minority population, with the so-called war on drugs as its principal instrument. A glance at some statistics bears her out. Over the past 30 years, the prison population has soared from about 300,000 to 2.3 million. The US now has the highest incarceration rate in the world, 10 times larger on average than that of other advanced western countries. Less than half the inmates of federal and state prisons, taken together, are serving time for violent crimes. Drug offences constitute the largest single crime of those now locked away. Between 1990 and 2011, violent crime per 100,000 of the population declined from over 700 to about 400, yet incarceration rates per 100,000 climbed to over 700 from about 450 during the same period. Although people of colour, mainly blacks and Latinos, constitute roughly 30% of the population, they make up more than 60% of the prison

population. One in three black men can expect to acquire a criminal record in the course of his lifetime.

The road to prison begins on the streets of minority neighbourhoods. Starting in the early 90s, New York City became a pioneer in so-called zero-tolerance, or broken-windows, policing methods. This school of criminology argues that the enforcement of laws for petty street offences - like public drinking, urination and small-time drug dealing - is the key to preventing bigger crimes (just as fixing a single broken window is the first step in preventing the deterioration of an entire building or city block). The maintenance of an orderly public atmosphere will supposedly discourage potential criminals. Needless to say, the weight of such measures falls disproportionately upon homeless people and ghetto youth, whose cramped living quarters, lack of public recreational facilities and lack of spending money for cafes, pubs, etc make them far more likely to be passing their time *al fresco*.

And even if ghetto youth are not caught violating any laws they are likely to fall foul of a major concomitant of 'zero tolerance': New York's infamous 'stop and frisk' procedures, imitated in many other cities. Under this policy, anyone can be thrown against a wall or made to lie spreadeagled and be searched on the mere suspicion that he has committed, or is likely to commit, a crime. Refusal to comply immediately and without hesitation can lead to arrest. In a number of notorious cases - Patrick Dorismond, Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell - and no doubt in many that never made the headlines, a cross word, a misunderstood gesture or an attempt to run away have been answered with bullets. But even instant compliance may not be enough. Possession of small amounts of marijuana is not a punishable offence under New York law, as long as it is not on public view. But the subject of a police search,

having been ordered to empty pockets that happen to contain a joint, must place it on view, hence making himself liable to arrest. (Aggressive stop-and-frisk procedures were held by a federal judge to be unconstitutional; de Blasio has dropped the appeal to this ruling filed by his Republican predecessor, and promised to curtail the practice.)

Once charged, the prisoner finds himself facing a battery of draconian criminal penalties that were put into place, as reform attempts were increasingly abandoned from the 1970s to the 1990s and the War on Poverty was replaced by the War on Drugs. Whereas the maximum federal sentence for possession of drugs of any kind had been a year in prison, laws passed by Congress during the presidencies of Reagan and Bush the First introduced long mandatory sentences, even for first-time offenders. The possession of crack cocaine, used mostly by minorities, was penalised much more severely than possession of the drug in its powdered form, more commonly used by whites. But the principal toughening of the criminal code occurred not under a Republican administration, but under the Democratic presidency of Bill Clinton, whose nomination by his party represented the triumph of the 'New Democrats': pro-business, social programme-averse and 'tough on crime'.

Clinton pushed for and signed into law the Crime Bill of 1994, the biggest such piece of legislation in US history. The bill greatly expanded the use of the death penalty, and introduced the 'three-strikes-and-you're out' principle into federal law, making life sentences mandatory for the commission of certain repeated violent crimes and drug offences (three strikes refers to the number of times a batter in baseball can swing at the ball before being out). All discretion on the part of judges in such cases was removed. And the same president who abolished aid to families with dependent children allocated billions for the construction of prisons and the hiring of 100,000 new policemen. The bill set up boot camps for juvenile offenders and eliminated government grants for inmate education.

Two years later a second piece of legislation, the Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, made it well-nigh impossible to seek relief from state-imposed death sentences in federal courts. Similar 'three-strikes' laws were passed in many states. Particularly notorious was a California statute mandating a life sentence even if the 'three strikes' consisted of misdemeanours like possession of small amounts of drugs. The US Supreme Court has consistently rejected almost every challenge to these inflexible and cruel laws.

Michelle Alexander cites cases in which mandatory sentencing was denounced even by Reagan judicial appointees. One such judge, William W Schwarzer, was "not known as a light sentencer". She writes:

Thus it was that everyone in his San Francisco courtroom watched in stunned silence as Schwarzer, known for his stoic demeanour, choked with tears as he anguished over sentencing Richard Anderson, a first offender Oakland longshoreman, to 10 years in prison without parole for what appeared to be a minor mistake in judgment in having given a ride to a drug dealer for a meeting with an undercover agent.²

Long mandatory sentences are not the only consequence of such laws. They also give prosecutors increased plea-bargaining leverage, allowing them to pressure prisoners to forego their right to a trial, even if innocent, and plead guilty to lesser offences under threat of being convicted of greater ones, carrying long compulsory prison terms.

Nor does the inmate stop paying for his/her alleged crimes after leaving prison. Ex-convicts face discrimination in hiring, are often deemed ineligible for low-cost federal housing and are effectively barred from voting in many states. They must wear the felon's brand for the rest of their lives. The penal system seems almost designed to encourage recidivism. Having once entered under the control of the courts and the prisons in their youth, many black and brown people can never escape.

Contradictions

In *The new Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander rightly traces the origins of the new penal regime to the criminalisation of black people that became the stock in trade of politicians and media hacks during the backlash against the civil rights movement that began in the 1970s. It is, however, when it comes to explaining the institutional basis for the regime that she runs into contradictions.

As the title of her book makes clear, the Ohio State law professor and former Supreme Court clerk has set herself a double task: on the one hand, she argues that the web of enforcement practices and laws that entangles minorities is a latter-day incarnation of the racial caste system that has always existed in America - a new form of the infamous southern Jim Crow apparatus of repressive laws and lynch-mob terror that kept black people at the bottom of the heap in the former Confederacy for a century after the civil war. Only instead of branding black people as inferior by the colour of their skin, the current system of mass incarceration performs the same function of stigmatising and separating them from the rest of society with the seemingly race-neutral label of 'criminal' and 'felon'. On the other hand, she attempts to explain how this system has managed to reassert itself *despite* the fact that its individual agents may be free of any strong animus toward blacks: ie, despite the fact that it is colour-blind.

In my view, Alexander never quite succeeds in accomplishing this dual task. She does recognise the efficacy for elites of diverting the potential anger of the white working and lower middle classes toward the existing order into resentment against minorities. But such resentment must be there in the first place in order to be stoked. What is its basis? And is it essential to the functioning of the new Jim Crow?

Alexander's answers to these questions are not to be found on the surface, but rather stem from assumptions lodged deeply in the interstices of her argument. Why, for instance, are minorities disproportionately victimised by anti-drug laws that are supposed to be applied even-handedly? Alexander explains:

... The first stage is the roundup. Vast numbers of people are swept into the criminal justice system by the police, who conduct drug operations primarily in poor communities of colour ... they are rewarded ... for rounding up as many people as possible, and they operate unconstrained by constitutional rules of procedure that once were considered inviolate ... Because there is no meaningful check on the exercise of police discretion, *racial biases are granted free rein* [emphasis added]. In fact, police are allowed to rely on race as a factor in selecting whom to stop and search (even though people of color are no more likely to be guilty of drug crimes than whites) - effectively guaranteeing that those who are swept into the system are primarily black and brown (p185).

So it would seem that higher authorities, in their zeal to prosecute

the war on drugs, are willing to give wide discretion to police, who *are* driven by racial animus, and that it is, in fact, this animus that is at bottom responsible for the grossly unequal enforcement of laws. This seems to contradict her earlier claim that the new Jim Crow, unlike the old, has the effect of victimising blacks even in the absence of active racial bias.

Yet, in another passage, the author seems to be making the opposite case: that the old and new Jim Crow are alike in that neither depends upon race hatred. She suggests that both are colour-blind because they are based upon what she calls racial indifference:

All racial caste systems, not just mass incarceration, have been supported by racial indifference. As noted earlier, many whites during the Jim Crow era believed that African Americans were intellectually and morally inferior. They meant blacks no harm, but believed that segregation was a sensible system for managing a society comprised of fundamentally different and unequal people ...

The notion that racial caste systems are necessarily predicated on a desire to harm other racial groups, and that racial hostility is the essence of racism, is fundamentally misguided (p203).

The above reasoning is absurd on its face. Alexander may just as well argue that the Nazis hated Jews because they held in all good conscience that the latter were moneylenders by nature, and were responsible for stabbing Germany in the back during World War I. Abstract racist beliefs have a way of turning very quickly into murderous hatred, once races deemed inferior give any indication of their humanity, which, being human, they unavoidably do.

Alexander is at her best when describing the current system of unequal justice, and pointing out its glaring inequities. Her attempts to explain it, however, are weak and inconsistent. She essentially views American racism as a static and ahistorical phenomenon. It is for her fundamentally a question of white attitudes. Despite half-hearted attempts to account for it sociologically, the 'new Jim Crow' is seen as the latest permutation of American society's unchanging - and ultimately mysterious - determination to degrade and subjugate black people. The word 'bias' occurs throughout the book; the word 'capitalism' never. But, as we shall now see, her central historical analogy is greatly overdrawn.

Old v new

The old Jim Crow was supported by the racial ideology that grew up to rationalise slavery. One dilemma for the southern ruling class was that slavery was expanding at the very time when big slaveholders were among those proclaiming human equality to the world in their struggle for the independence of the American colonies. The same hand - that of Thomas Jefferson - that wrote the Declaration of Independence, with its ringing assertion that "all men are created equal", also penned advertisements for runaway slaves.

Another dilemma was that the majority of southern whites were not slaveholders, but poor and middling farmers. Slavery could only be reconciled with doctrines of equality by portraying African-descended people as an inferior subspecies; and poor southerners could only be reconciled to the prevailing class system, and prevented from making common cause with slaves, by the belief that they, along with their social betters, belonged to an inherently superior race. Though born in the south, notions of white racial solidarity did not end at the Mason-Dixon line separating north

from south, and are far from extinct in the country today. But the position of black people has greatly evolved, especially during the past half century.

As James Forman, a critic of Alexander and other writers of similar views, points out, classical white racism demanded a strict line of demarcation:

Just as Jim Crow treated similarly situated whites and blacks differently, it treated differently situated blacks similarly. An essential quality of Jim Crow was its uniform and demeaning treatment of all blacks. Jim Crow was designed to ensure the separation, disenfranchisement, and political and economic subordination of *all* black Americans.³

In addition to being freed from formal segregation and enfranchised in the last 50 years, the black population has also experienced a growing class differentiation. Many have benefited from government and university affirmative-action policies, which, while constantly challenged and curtailed, have not been completely abolished. Forman cites statistics to demonstrate the dramatic rise of the black middle class:

... in 1967 only 2% of black households earned more than \$100,000; today, 10% of black families earn that amount. Going down the income scale from upper middle class to middle class, we also see robust growth. Since 1967, the percentage of black households earning more than \$75,000 a year has more than tripled, from 5% to 18% today. The percentage earning \$50,000 or more has doubled - from 17% in 1967 to 33% today ... The educational attainment numbers reveal a similar pattern. In 1967, 4% of the black population over the age of 25 had a four-year college degree; today 20% do.⁴

It is not the newly arisen black middle class - one member of which was elected president - that is the target of the current regime of police intimidation and mass incarceration, although its members are sometimes caught in the dragnet. It is rather directed toward those whose class status has not changed, or worsened, and who, because of this country's long history of racial oppression, find themselves represented disproportionately among low-wage workers and the unemployed. Society has relegated this segment of the population to a semi-lumpenised ghetto existence which is, in fact, characterised, if not by greater drug use, certainly by higher rates of both petty and violent crime than found in most white communities.

For their part, the white middle and working classes have no doubt lost more to the gigantic financial swindles of recent years than to muggings and burglaries. But neither are they likely to run into a CEO or hedge fund manager on a dimly lit street. White-collar criminals pose no immediate threat to their physical safety or possessions. Their lingering fear is one basis for wide support for a strong police presence not only among white racists, but - though acknowledged somewhat less candidly - among white liberals as well, and, to a lesser but significant extent, among middle class and older blacks and Latinos.

However, the police-prison regime does not allow itself to become overly preoccupied with questions of individual guilt or innocence among people who do not count in society's eyes. It rather works by the law of averages, harassing and imprisoning the guilty and innocent alike among a young male black and brown

population deemed most likely to violate public order and commit street-level crimes. This is the basis of racial profiling, and of the racial stigma that all minority members continue to bear, regardless of who they are as individuals, merely by virtue of their skin colour and place of residence. The current police-prison regime is not the newest avatar of eternal race hatred. It is indeed buttressed by the traditional racism of many of its enforcers, but it is chiefly an expedient for social control of populations, for which the present capitalist economy has no place.

Alexander lists certain concrete measures for the amelioration of minority conditions: education, job training, public transportation and relocation assistance to help people move closer to suburban jobs. It is perhaps symptomatic of our times that she omits the one thing that could, more than any other, lift millions from poverty: the creation of decently paid government jobs. Alexander would probably welcome such an initiative, but it is so far removed from the present-day political thinking that it seems not even to have entered her mind.

There are many pressing social needs that government jobs could fill - the repair of decayed infrastructure, the creation of safe energy sources, the building of high-speed railway lines - and most of them need not be highly skilled. But, then again, who would want to work at Wal-Mart or McDonald's for \$8 an hour if such jobs became available. In addition to requiring additional tax revenue from the rich, any serious public works programme would play havoc with the entire low-wage service economy now in place. The Marxist economist, Joan Robinson, once remarked that it would be hard to eliminate the ill effects of capitalism without abolishing capitalism itself.

But that is also the point of what Trotsky called transitional demands (among which public works are included) - demands that answer urgent mass needs, while at the same time pointing beyond capitalism. And the need for living-wage jobs has certainly become more urgent since 2008, as the present campaign of McDonalds and other fast-food workers for a \$15-an-hour minimum wage attests.

Adding weight to the conclusion that hers is a discourse of attitudes rather than structures, Michelle Alexander ends *The new Jim Crow* with a plea for the only thing she believes stands any chance of abolishing the punitive regime she so vividly depicts: greater compassion on the part of white people. We Marxists, on the other hand, are aware that few social transformations have ever occurred as a result of compassion. They are rather the products of social struggle. The struggle against racism will not be furthered by moral preaching, but by seeking points of common interest between white and minority components of the working class.

Perhaps the tens of thousands of mostly young white people that joined the recent protests over the killing of black men were partly animated by an abstract sense of fairness and social justice. Yet one cannot but suspect that the prospect of leaving university - if they were fortunate enough to attend - under mountains of debt to compete more fiercely for ever-fewer jobs at shrinking pay had something to do with their presence.

As the post-2008 realities sink in, the gap between racial realities narrows and the possibilities for inter-racial struggle could possibly become more than a noble wish ●

Notes

1. 'The cauldron boils over' *Weekly Worker* December 18.
2. M Alexander *The new Jim Crow: mass incarceration in the age of color blindness* New York 2010, p93.
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4. *Ibid* pp133-34.

MIDDLE EAST

Disastrous legacy

Why do some on the left call for the west to step up its intervention against IS? Yasmine Mather looks at the results of past efforts

On January 4 the Iranian president, Hassan Rowhani, addressing an economic conference in Tehran, declared his readiness to use what he called his “constitutional right” to hold a referendum on the future direction of the country. In what appeared to be a threat against hard-line opponents of a nuclear deal with the US, he proposed seeking public support for his policy of negotiations that he says will end Iran’s isolation.

“Our political experience shows that the country cannot have sustainable growth when it is isolated,” he said. “Our ideals are not bound to centrifuges. Our ideals are bound to our hearts, brains and determination.” Iran’s economy has been suffering from the devastating impact of international sanctions over the last few years. However, the recent drop in the price of oil to below \$50 a barrel seems to have had a far more detrimental effect on the Iranian currency and the economy as a whole.

The conference heard grim reports of the economic situation. The official rate of inflation is 17%, while the forecast for the coming year is bleak. Rowhani’s initial budget proposals for the Iranian year 1394 (March 2015-March 2016) were based on the sale of oil at \$120 a barrel, and clearly he will have to revise this urgently. But the president’s speech and unexpected announcement are above all else a public admission that no capitalist country can survive in political or economic isolation. The proposed referendum is either a calculated bluff to stymie his opponents or he already has the consent of Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader, at least as far as the public ballot is concerned. Contrary to Rowhani’s claim, the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran only allows the supreme leader or the *majles* (Islamic parliament), provided there is a 2/3 majority, to initiate a referendum.

If the economy is dire, on the political front Iran can claim some success. On December 13, according to figures released by the Shia government in Baghdad, 17 million pilgrims gathered in the city of Karbala for the annual Arba’een ceremony.¹ The Iranian press reports that some 1.3 million Iranians, including government officials and revolutionary guards, joined the pilgrimage. Arba’een marks an important date in the Shia calendar, commemorating the 40th day after the anniversary of the martyrdom of Shia Imam Hossein, killed in the 7th century.

The pro-government media in Tehran is not shy about claiming victory in the country’s latest intervention in Iraq. After all, only a few months ago the Iraqi capital was in danger of falling to Islamic State, yet revolutionary guards are now boasting about their appearance there. In early December, a senior Iranian official admitted to his country’s air strikes against IS in northern Iraq, emphasising that they were carried out at the request of the Baghdad government. Iran’s deputy foreign minister, Ebrahim Rahimpour, said the purpose of the strikes was “the defence of the interests of our friends in Iraq”, whom he defined as the Baghdad government and the Kurdish autonomous region in the north of the country. Even before the official

pronouncement, everyone knew that the Russian-supplied Sukhoi jets of Iran’s airforce have been used since July in air raids in northern Iraq.

The western press, from *Newsweek* to the *Financial Times* and even the *Daily Mail*, has been quick to praise Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, who, according to *Newsweek*, is regarded as an “excellent and highly strategic commander”. The *Financial Times*, under the headline, “Iranian general is new hero in battle against Isis”, reminds us: “He is known for his loyalty to the supreme leader, ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and is responsible for implementing his policy of promoting Iran as a regional power.” Soleimani until recently appeared on the United States list of known terrorists and here lies the irony in all this: the former enemies, Iran’s Islamic Republic and the United States, are now in an undeclared alliance against IS. In fact the group has its origins in the Iraq war of 2003 and the coming to power of a Shia state in Baghdad, which, of course, also increased Iran’s influence in the region.

Oil war

So, as Tehran and Baghdad celebrated Arba’een and recent military successes, the backers of IS in Saudi Arabia, in the Persian Gulf emirates and in Turkey will be furious. Their continued financial and military support for Islamic State will help ensure the region is the scene of more bloody conflict in 2015. It is only a matter of time before IS - or another jihadist group supported by Saudi Arabia - starts challenging the kingdom and its allies. As Hillary Clinton put it in 2011, “You can’t keep snakes in your backyard and expect them to only bite your neighbours.”²

Both the Iranian intervention and US air raids (in the case of the latter often off the mark and quite ineffective, by all accounts) are drawing new recruits to IS. Every time Iranians celebrate a military victory in northern Iraq, IS gets more funding from Sunni states, strengthening the existing support it enjoys in the ranks of former Ba’athist military personnel (historic enemies of Iran), and from Sunni tribal leaders.

And the Saudi rulers are attempting to punish Iran for its intervention in Iraq and Syria through economic warfare - by forcing through a major drop in the price of oil. From 2010 until June 2014, world oil prices were stable at around \$110 a barrel. However, since the summer of 2014 prices have almost halved. According to the *New York Post*, “Saudi Arabia had already started retaliation against Iran. The Saudis believe they can no longer rely on the US to contain Tehran’s imminent nuclear threat, so they’re out to do what our lukewarm sanctions couldn’t.”³

The Saudis have also made it clear that, together with Turkey, they want to see the fall of Bashar Al-Assad in Syria - and the drop in the price of oil targets both Iran and Russia, Assad’s main international supporters. Iran’s economy just about survived the severe sanctions imposed by the US and its allies, thanks to high oil prices. But it needs oil to sell at over \$100 a barrel. The catastrophic drop in the price and the collapse of the latest round of negotiations with P5+1, leading to perceptions of insecurity

in the region, are bringing Iran’s economy to a standstill and, as always, the victims of the Islamic Republic’s military expansionist policies in the region are the Iranian workers, who are facing another year of severe hardship, combined with prospects of military intervention for regime change from above, in the event of economic collapse.

The solution to this conflict, as with all other conflicts in the region, is not yet another military intervention. For all the talk of the threat from IS, the US shows no willingness to force its allies, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, and coalition partners, the Persian Gulf states, to stop their military and financial backing for the group. The US silence in the face of last month’s Israeli military incursions into Syrian air space near Damascus international airport and the town of Dimas - which, according to Israel, were supposed to “help the Syrian government’s opponents” - is yet another example that, for all the hype about fighting IS, US and Israeli firepower is still aimed at Syria and Hezbollah, with the aim of putting more pressure on Iran.

Proxy supporters

Having learnt nothing from the lessons of the Afghan and the Iraq wars, leftwing supporters of imperialist intervention, however well meaning they are, completely fail to understand the causes of the current conflicts in the region. It was the barbaric carpet-bombing of Fallujah and other Iraqi cities in the early 2000s that paved the way for the current escalation of religious and national conflict in northern Iraq. Sunni and Ba’athist Arabs have not forgotten the support of the Kurdish Democratic Party and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan for the American land invasion of Iraq.

Many IS militants are former prisoners of the US and some learnt their barbarism first-hand from CIA torturers in Abu Ghraib and elsewhere. It is the brutality of the US war, the daily humiliation and torture in CIA prisons, that is the source of the kind of barbaric violence we witness from Islamic State jihadists. Under such circumstances the idea that anyone on the left can believe that any form of US/UK intervention can play a role in resolving this situation is beyond me. All it will do is bring new recruits into IS.

Both at a recent Left Unity meeting I addressed in Sheffield and at the LU conference, some comrades defended foreign intervention, comparing the current situation in northern Iraq and Syria to the Spanish civil war. Historical comparisons are always problematic, as the specific circumstances rarely match, but in this particular case my main difficulty is understanding how the parallel is supposed to work in the first place.

In the Spanish civil war, the governments of Germany, Italy and Portugal financed, armed and sent military personnel to support rightwing nationalist forces led by general Francisco Franco. The Soviet Union, and to a certain extent France and Mexico, were initially involved in supporting the Republicans of the Second Spanish Republic. This aid came even after all the European powers had signed a non-intervention agreement in 1936. The argument put forward is that, despite widespread

support for the Spanish Republicans, the fear of another world war prevented more western countries from providing arms. Throughout this time rightwing forces continued to get help from Hitler and Mussolini.

So who is exactly who here? Is the Syrian dictator the Franco of our time? If so who is Mussolini? Who is Hitler? What about Iran? And how would we classify US support? Is it progressive? At the moment, far from non-intervention, we have constant imperialist interference in the region. Until recently the US and its allies were supplying arms to the Syrian opposition, including IS. What made them change their minds? Under what conditions would they arm what is presumably considered by some comrades as the equivalent of the Republican movement in Spain? Surely a principled demand would be to call on the US and its allies to stop supporting IS and to stop blocking aid from Kurds living in Turkey to their Syrian compatriots.

During the dark days when Kobanê was under siege, hundreds of thousands of Kurds demonstrated in Diyar Bakr and other cities of Turkish Kurdistan, demanding the right to cross the border. This was the kind of mass intervention that could have relieved the plight of Kurds in northern Syria. The Turkish state refused this and the US supported Turkey’s position. The last thing the Americans and the semi-religious Turkish state want to see is a more powerful PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party).

The US/UK have a long history of supporting a wide range of Islamic Wahhabi and Shia forces, from Afghanistan in the 1970s, through anti-Ba’athist Shias in Iraq, to jihadists fighting Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. This has been part of a strategic, long-term policy aimed at weakening radical, secular forces in the region, forces that could have posed a challenge to the rule of local dictators - both those subservient to the US and those more rebellious. After all, the war in 2003 deposed a secular dictator, Saddam Hussein, and brought to power a religious Shia state. How on earth can anyone believe that the US and UK will drop this strategy and instead arm leftwing Kurds?

What sort of ‘non-intervention’ is it when US military forces in the Persian Gulf now include more than 300 combat aircraft, 30 ships and armed personnel numbering about 35,000? When the UK is proposing to open a permanent naval base in Bahrain, in addition to its existing base in the United Arab Emirates?

Legacy

As for the future of IS, there are conflicting reports about its organisational and financial capabilities. However, six months after major military conquests in northern Iraq, it is clear that IS is unable to provide basic services in cities under its occupation, that the population of those cities continues to face serious threats - although many do not hesitate to speak out against IS, taking every opportunity to inform the outside world about the hardships in Mosul and elsewhere.

According to these reports, the one million Iraqis who have remained in Mosul face a life of deprivation, violence and fear: “There is no electricity in most of the city, the

town’s water is contaminated and undrinkable, many citizens of Mosul have to chlorinate, boil or filter water for their daily use ... Although the Islamic State has vowed to erase the Iraqi government, it relies on Baghdad to pay doctors, nurses, teachers and others who keep civil institutions running ... In hospitals, factories and schools, the Islamic State has appointed ‘emirs’ to oversee operations.”⁴

In what looks like a repetition of al Qa’eda’s military victories in Iraq in the mid-2000s, IS is not winning any allies in the cities under its occupation and it is unlikely that the group can maintain the support of former Ba’athists and Sunni tribal leaders, who are becoming weary of the jihadists’ obsession with violence and imposition of Sharia at all costs.

Last month we also witnessed more consequences of that other US/UK intervention in the region, the occupation of Afghanistan, in the horrific bombing of a school in Pakistan, organised by all accounts by the Afghan Taliban. The effects of the US intervention in Afghanistan - which started in the mid-1970s, long before the Soviet invasion - continue to create chaos. There too, Saudi military and financial help for jihadists paved the way for the creation of a monster, al Qa’eda, as Hillary Clinton herself admits.⁵

In 2001, in the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy, we were told that ‘humanitarian intervention’ in Afghanistan would save women from Taliban misogyny, and would bring democracy and prosperity. In 2014, the year of the withdrawal of American and British combat troops, the title of a series of books on Afghanistan, *Worse than a defeat*,⁶ summarises the current state of affairs in that country.

British and American forces are leaving behind “a country where only 10% of its GDP of \$1 billion comes from legitimate economic activity; of the remainder, 30% comes from underground narcotic trade and 60% from foreign aid.”⁷ Yet for every dollar of foreign aid, only 30 cents remains in the country. High-ranking officials make sure the rest is invested in their personal bank accounts abroad. Afghan security forces, both army and police, now number 350,000 at an annual cost of \$4 billion. Yet it is normal for there to be at least one major bombing every day in Kabul.

Those on the left who support imperialist military intervention in northern Syria should explain why they are not calling for a return of Nato forces to Afghanistan. I can assure them that the bombings and atrocities in that part of the world are equal to what is happening in northern Syria. The only difference is that the western media are paying little attention to that particular conflict ●

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REVIEW

The meaning of Jewish identity

Shlomo Sand *How I stopped being a Jew* Verso, 2014, pp102, £9.99



Definitely not secular: but what about other Israelis?

Shlomo Sand is a history professor at Tel Aviv University. He has written two widely read books which have demolished the national myths that Zionism has used to justify a 'Jewish' state. The first, *The invention of the Jewish people*¹, which was in the Israeli best-seller lists for 19 weeks, deconstructs all the Zionist fables - for example, the Romans forcing the population of Judea into exile in 70 AD after a failed revolt. The contents of the book are not themselves new, but Sand's originality lay in demonstrating how Zionism constructed a foundational myth of an eternal people, exiled from and desirous of returning to Palestine. It was in fact a Christian myth of 'the return of the Jews' that Sand was demolishing.

His latest book, *How I stopped being a Jew*, differs from his previous writings in that it offers nothing new by way of historical discourse. Having stripped the Zionist narrative bare, Sand offers his own interpretation of what it means (or does not mean) to be a secular Jew in the modern world. In a nutshell, Sand maintains that there is no cultural or political basis for the existence of a secular Jewish existence outside Israel. In Israel itself, Sand accepts that to be Jewish is to be entitled to privileges that non-Jews - ie, the Palestinians - do not possess and he therefore wishes to 'resign' from being Jewish.

That, however, is far from easy. The obvious problem with Sand's thesis is that he wishes to continue living a privileged existence as a tenured professor. He does not wish to exchange these privileges for the life of the Palestinians and therefore his renunciation of Jewishness is essentially meaningless - a gesture confined to words. His whole life in Israel is predicated on the fact that he is defined as a Jew for racial purposes and by continuing to live there he accepts that. It is reminiscent of a meeting that the first Israeli prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, had with Martin Buber of *Brit Shalom*, the Jewish-Palestinian peace alliance of Jewish intellectuals, founded in 1925, with a membership that never exceeded 100. Ben-Gurion asked Buber whether he had come to Palestine with the consent of the original inhabitants, and that was the dilemma of Zionism's 'peace wing'.²

Sand's argument is symbolised in the meeting in 1952 between Ben-Gurion and Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, 'the visionary' (*Hazon Ish*), an extremely influential ultra-orthodox rabbi, who compared the conflict between secular Zionism and religious orthodoxy with the ruling in the *Talmud* that, where an empty cart and a full cart meet in a narrow lane, the empty cart must give way. Ben-Gurion was not best pleased that the achievements of Zionism - the colonies, the 'return' of the Jews, the foundation of the state itself - were not considered worthy. However, Sand does not seem to understand the irony that it was not the *Hazon Ish* who was vindicated, but Ben-Gurion. It was orthodox Judaism that moved from opposition to Zionism to becoming the most ardent, 'not an inch' nationalists. The financial resources of the 'Jewish' state overcame any liturgical objections.

Sand's inability to understand why Zionism's redefinition of what it means to be Jewish won out is equally applicable to his assertion that there is no secular basis to a Jewish identity outside of a religious definition. When I first read a review of Sand's book in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*,³ I wrote that Sand's book seemed to be little more than a refinement of the same thesis that the anti-Semite, Gilad Atzmon, has peddled.⁴ However, I was clearly wrong.

Atzmon in fact criticises the book precisely because it is *not* anti-Semitic:

"I don't write for anti-Semites, I regard them as totally ignorant or people who suffer from an incurable disease" (p21, Hebrew edition), writes the author, who claims to be humanist, universalist and far removed from Jewish exclusivism. It all sounds very Jewish to me.⁵

As Moshé Machover has pointed out, Sand is an advocate of an Israeli/Hebrew nationalism which is devoid of any Jewishness and to which all citizens are equal members, be they Jewish or non-Jewish. The problem is that the Zionist movement established the Israeli state as a Jewish nation. The whole basis of Zionism is *Jewish* nationalism - as the mobs that shout 'Death to the Arabs' will confirm. Jewish superiority and

privilege is entrenched in the pores of the Israeli state.

Sand does not understand the nature of Zionism and thereby the state of Israel. He declares, without any supporting evidence, that the foundations of the state were "essentially laid by socialists" (p48). This is one of those myths that Sand himself had previously devoted much time to debunking! The founders of the Israeli state, including the social democrats of Poalei Zion (Workers of Zion), were almost uniformly hostile to socialism⁶ - Zionist guru Theodor Herzl believed that Zionism was an "antidote" to it.⁷ However, in order to win over the Jewish masses, Zionism had to use the *language* of socialism and it was in that context that the 'socialist' Poalei Zion was formed. Some on the left were attracted to this 'socialist Zionism'. They believed that socialism and the fight for change in the here and now could be reconciled with Zionism, which actually postponed the fight for socialism until Palestine had been colonised. Some currents, such as Left Poalei Zion in Poland, moved away from Zionism towards socialism, but the founders of socialist Zionism, such as Nachman Syrkin, were always Zionist first and foremost, as was the Palestinian Poalei Zion.

Israel and Jewishness

The major failing of Sand's thesis is his denial that there is any basis to a secular Jewish identity and indeed his angry criticism of Jews who do not live in Israel, but who nonetheless criticise Israel as Jews. He compares the latter to Jews in the diaspora who *support* Israel as Jews. There is a comprehensive failure to come to terms with the meaning of identity - not least Jewish identity - in the modern world. The fact is that many, if not most, Jews *do* define their Jewishness in relation to Israel. Indeed the destruction of Israel would probably destroy the secular basis of modern Jewry: "Israel is the living embodiment of the Jewish religion."⁸

For Sand "there is no Jewish cultural bag that is not religious" (p47). How can you be a secular Jew, he asks, if you are not born to Jewish parents

(p90)? The answer to this conundrum is not, however, as difficult as Sand finds it. It is true that there is no longer any objective, *materialist* basis to Jewish identity or any separate Jewish working class, as there was in the tsarist Pale of Settlement or the slums of London's East End, speaking its own language (Yiddish). However, it is equally clear that Israel and Zionism have provided a new *ideological* basis for Jewish identity.

It is therefore equally possible for many Jews to base their identity on opposition to the mainstream form of Jewish identity and as part of this to recreate a Yiddish culture. Of course, both of these identities are tenuous and fluid, effectively a political, not materialist, identity and for that reason the majority of Jews will assimilate to the surrounding populations and melt away.

But an orthodox Jewish identity is not the only form of Jewish identity, though it is likely to be the longest lasting. It is equally possible for people who have a Jewish partner to take on that identity if they are Reform Judaists (the majority among American Jews) or for the children of mixed partners to identify with the Jewish parent. Identity is a mixed baggage and by its very nature fluid.

So the predominant Jewish diaspora identity today is based on identification with the state of Israel, which defines itself not as a state based upon its own citizens - Jewish or otherwise - but as a state which claims to represent *all* Jews, wherever they live. Unsurprisingly many Jews take umbrage at this and proclaim, 'Not in my name' - protesting that Israel does not speak or act on their behalf. Sand is what Ben-Gurion described as a "Canaanite" - someone who rejects the idea that the Israeli state rests on being Jewish, as opposed to representing all of its citizens.

Surprisingly for a book on Jewish identity and what it means to be Jewish in Israel, Sand does not understand how Israel defines Jewishness. This is not a trifling matter, since it goes to the heart of how Zionism and the Israeli state have transformed being Jewish from a religious to a racial identity. It is this quest for the building of a Jewish nation/race which lies at the heart of the debate over the Jewish

State Bill, which has precipitated the forthcoming Israeli general election and which is the ideological basis of racism in Israel today.

Sand writes that, although his "father was considered a Jew, while in the eyes of Israeli law my mother was 'non-Jewish', I would have been registered as an Austrian" on an Israeli identity card and in Israel's population register. But this is not correct. Sand fails to appreciate that there are *two* definitions of being Jewish in Israel. The definition for the purpose of nationality (ie, under the 1950 Law of Return) is different from the definition for personal religious purposes (ie, marriage, birth and death), which is in the hands of the orthodox rabbinate, not the state. Under the Law of Return, every Jew in the world has the right to 'return': ie, emigrate to Israel and claim citizenship. They are in turn classified as a Jewish national (there is no Israeli citizenship, even though Sand refers to it on at least one occasion).

In 1970, the definition of Jewishness was deliberately widened under an amendment to the Law of Return. This was done for practical and demographic reasons (the immigration of Jews from Poland, and later Russia, many of whom were the offspring of mixed parentage). Ironically this new definition was identical to, if not wider than, the definition of who is a Jew under the Nazis' 1935 'Nuremberg Laws':

4A (a): The rights of a Jew under this Law and the rights of an *oleh* [immigrant] under the Nationality Law, 5712-1952, as well as the rights of an *oleh* under any other enactment, are also vested in a child and a grandchild of a Jew, the spouse of a Jew, the spouse of a child of a Jew and the spouse of a grandchild of a Jew, except for a person who has been a Jew and has voluntarily changed his religion.⁹

No other review seems to have picked up on this central anomaly in Sand's argument, despite it being fundamental to Jewish identity in the Israeli state. In Israel, being Jewish is not a matter of culture, but of politics - and in particular the politics of racial privilege. It is in reaction to this that a modern, secular Jewish identity has grown in the diaspora, with all the contradictions inherent in Jews having an interest in opposing racism, yet basing their whole identity on support for racism.

Based as it is on a negative, this identity will begin to disappear when the Jewish state itself disappears. However, the idea that Jewish identity can be reduced to a set of religious rituals and mystical beliefs is totally without basis. Today, unlike in pre-emancipation times, being Jewish and adhering to Jewish rituals are not synonymous ●

Tony Greenstein

Notes

1. Y Lotan (translator), London 2009.
2. A Meyer *Ploughshares into swords* London 2008, p161.
3. 'Shlomo Sand to secular Jews: I'm not Jewish and neither are you' by Anshel Pfeffer, November 16 2014: www.haaretz.com/life/books/.premium-1.626312.
4. <http://azvsas.blogspot.co.uk/2014/11/shlomo-sand-stops-being-that-which-he.html>.
5. www.gilad.co.uk/writings/how-shlomo-sand-ceased-to-be-a-jew-or-did-he-1.html.
6. Z Sternhell *The founding myths of Israel* Princeton 1999.
7. Von Plehve, the tsarist minister of the interior, who organised the pogroms against the Jews, has cited this expressed belief of Herzl. See C Weizmann *Letters and papers* Vol 3, p216, note 195.
8. See T Greenstein, 'Redefining anti-Semitism' *Return* No5, December 1990, where I cite WD Rubinstein *The left, the right and the Jews* London 1982, p129.
9. www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsources/Politics/Other_Law_of_Return.html.

MINERS 1984-85

Left helps screw it up

The miners' Great Strike of 1984-85 tested the political mettle of all trends in the workers' movement, but in particular of those ostensibly on the revolutionary left. To have any sort of historical justification for their existence whatsoever, these groups and trends were meant to embody a challenge to the hegemonic political position of Labourism

in working class politics. As we have repeatedly emphasised in this series of reprints from *The Leninist* - forerunner of the *Weekly Worker* - almost without exception, organisations such as the Socialist Workers Party, Militant (today's Socialist Party in England and Wales) and the mainstream trends in the CPGB of the time all failed miserably.

This Alec Long article from the January 1985 edition of *The Leninist* chronicles the failure of the first Mineworkers Defence Committee conference in December 1984 and characterises the comrades who organised the screw-up not as class traitors, but as "petty bourgeois dilettantes". The strategic battle of the

miners was viewed by these camp followers of the workers' movement as an opportunity to advance their own group's particular political project - whether that was transforming the Labour Party, boosting the credentials of some left luminary or building this or that sect. In other words, they did *precisely* what Marx said

communists should *not* do - ie, "set up ... sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement", instead of "always and everywhere [representing] the interests of the movement as a whole."¹ The consequences for the miners' battle were to prove dire ●

Mark Fischer

A missed opportunity

Many people who contributed to the debate at the December 2 Mineworkers Defence Committee conference in London (attended by well over 1,500 delegates) complained about the fact that it had taken nine months to organise such a gathering. This is a worthwhile criticism. *The Leninist* has agitated for some time for a national conference of miners support committees in order to develop a national movement capable of breaking the support groups' rather narrow, parochial outlook and develop a movement truly able to give "total physical support" to the miners.

Paul Whetton, the Notts rank-and-file strike leader, expressed at the beginning of the day the hope of many militants in the audience, when he said that the conference should be a "working conference, not a talking shop ..."² Unfortunately, the organisers of the conference had other ideas. The bulk of the time allocated to debate was taken up by platform speeches or heavily edited report-backs from the 'workshops'. A resolution submitted to the conference beforehand from Keresley miners and the Coventry and Reading miners support committees was blocked by the conference organisers, and despite vociferous protests from the Coventry delegates on the conference floor, the resolution was effectively censored.

Readers may be interested in knowing some of the political shenanigans behind the scenes of the Mineworkers Defence Committee and the organising meetings which led up to the December 2 conference.

The Mineworkers Defence Committee was originally set up at the last Labour Party conference, the actual initiative coming from the *Labour Briefing* fringe meeting. Its nucleus consisted of John Bloxam (a supporter of Socialist Organiser³), Valerie Coultas (Socialist Action⁴), Jane Stockton (the *Chartist* tendency in the Labour Party), Chris Knight (*Chartist*) and its titular head, Ken Livingstone. As the December 2 conference approached, this group began to advertise its meetings to draw other forces into preparations for this conference and to draw up a statement on behalf of the committee. As the meetings progressed, the political positions of the various groups that had turned up began to emerge.

On the extreme right there was the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) blocking with Socialist Action, both of whom, despite their very different attitudes to the strike, essentially ended up with the same passive, do-nothing position. Both opposed the inclusion of any mention of anything as radical (or, in Valerie Coultas's own words, "ultra-leftist") as working towards a general strike or for any perspective of mobilising the working class as a whole to win the strike through a transformed miners support movement.

From Socialist Action's point of view, the miners can win quite



Could never win by themselves

comfortably alone. One of their supporters, in moving an amendment to the draft resolution at the November 27 organisation meeting, blandly stated that the miners "did not need" a general strike. In other words, Socialist Action is perfectly prepared to see the miners battle on alone through the winter with enormous suffering to the miners' families and communities and the strong possibility that even more miners will be murdered on picket lines. Socialist Action's complacency is quite criminal. Valerie Coultas wrote an article in *Socialist Action* of November 30 on the Mineworkers Defence Committee conference that was so rightwing it could easily have been penned by one of a number of our very own Eurocommunists in the Communist Party. (It really is only the prejudice of their historical origins that keeps Trot groups like Socialist Action and the Euros out of each other's arms.) Coultas ended her profound thoughts on the "ultra-leftism" of the SWP (we kid you not) and the way forward for the miners support movement with three bleating little demands:

1. a "massive Xmas appeal";
2. "increasing the campaign around power stations to ensure the IOU's promised at the TUC ... are delivered" (Coultas does not go into sticky problems like 'how?' of course);
3. a "massive labour movement demonstration in the new year".

And that's it! Socialist Action wanted to use the December conference as a 'rah! rah!' rally both to put pressure on the Parliamentary Labour Party by parasitising the strike to divert some of its miners' militancy and dynamism into the dull labyrinth of County Hall Labour committee rooms, and to launch a call for a national demonstration under the glare of the television lights.

But why would the SWP, with its worship of rank-and-fileism and workers' self-activity end up with the same narrow, bureaucratic outlook? Well, paradoxically, it is because the SWP has a diametrically opposed view of the prospects for the strike to Socialist Action. Because (apparently) we are now in a "downturn" in the class struggle (according to the SWP)

the miners are not going to win. Although the SWP does not state this openly, it is implied in its pessimistic view of the character of the present period and also by its actions. Tony Cliff, the theoretical guru of the SWP, has written grotesquely that "the miners' strike is an extreme example of what we in the Socialist Workers Party have called the 'downturn' in the movement".⁵ The task at present, Cliff has assured his party's activists, is not to recruit hundreds, but to pick up "ones and twos".

Thus, in the lead-up to the December 2 conference, the SWP opposed any inclusion in the conference statement of the call for a general strike or to develop a genuine and elected delegate-based national committee. Its conservatism was an inevitable product of its cynicism and treacherous defeatism. In its heart of hearts, the SWP does not believe that the miners can win - so its only real perspective for the strike seems to be to get as much out of it as it can *for the SWP*. If miners support committees became properly constituted, delegate-based organisations, this would limit the SWP's access to them. Under these circumstances it would have less freedom to pursue what has practically become the SWP's major preoccupation during the course of the strike: twinning.

The SWP has been very busy twinning pits with local factories and workplaces in a very haphazard and thus very divisive and negative way. This has not really been done to build links between militants, as it has claimed, but to establish links between the *SWP* and militants. Tony Cliff's sect evidently feels that if the end of the strike cannot see a miners' victory, at least it can see the SWP with lists and lists of NUM militants' names and addresses.

Consequently, the SWP, for all its economic rank-and-fileism, actually opposed an amendment at the November 27 organisation meeting to constitute the Mineworkers Defence Committee as an organisation based on recallable delegates from area and regional conferences of miners support groups. Instead, its representatives proposed and managed to win an amendment that stuck the NUM and the South East Region TUC atop the movement of solidarity with the NUM! Why? In the hope, of course, that a committee composed of such forces would do nothing, would establish no real form of control over or unitary national organisation of local miners support committees and would thus allow the SWP freedom to continue its divisive little game of feeding off the miners' struggle.

The Mineworkers Defence Committee produced a series of different draft statements in the run-up to the conference, as the balance at the organisation's meetings swung back and forth between different groups and as the original committee members plotted behind the heavy, wood-

panelled doors of County Hall. The factional battles on the committee culminated in London Labour Briefing (ie, the Chartists) walking out of the November 30 meeting, which had been stacked with the rightist bloc of *Socialist Action* and *Socialist Worker*. Eventually, however, everybody kissed and made up, and a final 'Frankenstein' statement, which attempted to compromise between the left and right positions, was presented to delegates on the day of the conference.

Of course, it was all rather academic anyway, as the conference was not allowed to debate the resolution. The majority of the organisers, for their different sectarian reasons, wanted a *rally*, not a *working conference*, and were determined to have a rally come what may. Thus:

- The Keresley miners/Coventry miners support committee resolution was blocked from being discussed, despite promises all day from the chair.
- Amendments to the final resolution were not allowed.

- At the very end of conference, as delegates were scrambling around for their coats, Livingstone from the chair sang out: "Do we all agree with the statement?" There was a rumble of 'yesses' plus a few very annoyed 'noes'.

- The few people called to speak in the extremely limited time for debate were chosen to simply speak about their personal experiences, not to raise wider political issues.

- The workshops were used to bury dissenting voices by editing the 'report-backs'. For example, in the workshop on 'Mass picketing', around half the audience came out for workers defence corps. The organisers, to extricate themselves from this rather tricky situation, simply permitted *no report-back* from that workshop! This is class political dishonesty.

The pressing task of establishing a nationally elected, delegate-based Miners Support Committee still remains. The fact that this December 2 conference was so massively over-subscribed that an overflow meeting had to be hastily arranged (and which turned out to be actually larger than the main conference) confirms our view that there was both an objective need for such a conference and an overwhelming demand. As it turned out, the 'conference' was a rally and a talking shop - and a *disorganised* rally and a *disorganised* talking shop at that. Formally the Mineworkers Defence Committee is committed through the resolution adopted at the conference to convening in January "a delegate-based committee", although exactly how this is to be arranged is not made clear. For us, it would have to be through a national delegate conference of miners support committees, which will elect the national committee. The December 2 statement, as it stands, is an inadequate document. In essence it should be amended along three lines:

- First - the question of the general strike. The conference resolution talks

about "the winning of industrial action in support of the miners", but does not specify the scale of these solidarity actions. A vital component of the fight to extend strike action is the need to link it to smashing the Tory anti-trade union laws.

- Second - the composition of the national committee. It must be based on *elected, recallable* delegates from area and regional conferences of miners support committees. This demand is intimately linked to what exactly the support movement should expend its energies doing - fighting for miners' victory, or wasting its time pressuring the Parliamentary Labour Party.

- Third - on workers' self-defence. The conference statement pledges to "participate in, help coordinate and strengthen such defence". Yet why not say "organise"? That is the key task, as far as miners' violence is concerned. Simply bewailing police violence is worse than useless, especially when the resolution is encouraging people to build picket lines. The question is - how do we *protect* picket lines? And how do we make them *effective*? This can only be achieved by creating workers' defence corps and organising our defence of picket lines and miners' communities.

The organisers of the December 2 1984 Mineworkers Defence Committee conference had a historic opportunity to render a huge service to the working class movement and they screwed it up - not because of class treachery, but because they are petty bourgeois dilettantes. The task they began, however, still desperately needs to be completed. We call on comrades to press for a national delegate conference in January, where amendments and resolutions can be discussed and which will elect a national recallable committee. This is the way to give the miners "total physical support"; this is the way to victory ●

Notes

1. K. Marx, F. Engels *Communist manifesto* chapter 2: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm.

2. Paul Whetton died on March 3 2006. For our obituary of the comrade and a selection of quotes from interviews he did with *The Leninist*, see *Weekly Worker* March 5 2006 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/619/intransigently-brave).

3. Now the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, of course.

4. Socialist Action is one of the fragments of the International Marxist Group, as is the Left Unity-orientated Socialist Resistance. Mike Macnair notes in the *Weekly Worker* February 28 2013: "The IMG [was] all at the end of the day 'children of 68' ... for organisation independent of the class-collaborators, they defined themselves as 'revolutionary' by commitment to *events like May 68*." This was a flawed political strategy, however, as "By the end of the 1970s, this concept of 'revolution' was plainly useless to concrete political perspectives. What it left behind was 'initiatives to draw masses into action'."

But such initiatives, if to be taken by small groups, *logically implied* political capitulation to the class-collaborators." Comrade Macnair's conclusion was that "The IMG collapsed because the capitulators won." The differences that fractured the IMG were essentially over which non-revolutionary political force or individual to capitulate to. Scargill (as in this example from 1984), Ken Livingstone, Tony Benn and George Galloway have, amongst others, all filled the role at various points.

5. T. Cliff *Socialist Review* April 1984.

SWP

Charlie Kimber's dream world

Peter Manson looks back at the SWP conference

According to *Socialist Worker*, "Revolutionaries debated the political situation and how to shape it at the 2014 Socialist Workers Party conference" (December 15 2014).

This opening sentence in the paper's report of the SWP's 2014 annual conference, which was held over the weekend of December 12-14, is typical of the whole article. It implies, first of all, that only its own comrades are "revolutionaries" and, secondly, that the SWP itself can actually "shape" the whole "political situation". Following the crisis that has enveloped the organisation over the last couple of years, its leadership seems to be living in a dream world. Despite its talk of support for "united fronts" and "broad" movements, it is more insular than ever. The leadership under Charlie Kimber and Alex Callinicos, in a desperate attempt to end the hemorrhaging of its membership, steps up the pretence - for the benefit of those fresh, raw recruits - that the SWP will be central to the coming mass struggles.

The report is headlined: "The main parties' crisis brings opportunities for the left", which certainly ought to be the case. But is the left in a position to take advantage of such opportunities? Mark Thomas from the central committee told conference that "the old political order is beginning to crack" - he mentioned the success of the "racist party", Ukip, and the "collective heart attack in the establishment" that was the Scottish independence referendum, which "nearly broke apart the British state". The decline of the "mainstream parties", plus further "big cuts", creates "the possibility of huge social explosions".

Leaving aside the hyperbole, will "the left" be able to mount a serious fightback? The SWP constantly tells us that it "must get its act together" (*Party Notes* December 15 2014), but, when it comes down to specifics, the 'unity' it proposes is limited entirely to elections. While, according to comrade Kimber, the organisation's national secretary, elections are "not the main form of struggle", he warned of the "great danger" of abstaining. But, again in the words of *Party Notes*, the



Charlie Kimber: desperate

SWP's contribution on May 7 will be restricted to "around 15 parliamentary constituencies and council seats", where it will stand candidates as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

The *Socialist Worker* report talks vaguely about two conference amendments, which received respectively 13 and 14 votes. These amendments "reflected debates on whether the SWP is strong enough to stand candidates in some areas", which implies that it should be standing fewer candidates. Yet "Delegates agreed overwhelmingly about the need to stand candidates in the elections", which

implies that some comrades thought the SWP should be contesting nowhere.

The report ends even more vaguely: "A motion on improving party structures that had grown out of last year's conference and a number of debates on the national committee was discussed and passed. An amendment from Central London branch was accepted by the conference."

Why does the leadership not inform *Socialist Worker* readers in what way "party structures" are to be 'improved' or give any hint as to the content of the successful amendment? Presumably it only mentions this because it wants to show how "SWP democracy" is flourishing, but the absence of any detail leads to the opposite conclusion: SWP supporters, like the membership, are treated like children, who will be bored or confused if they are told about contending viewpoints.

The same applies to the SWP's own crisis. For instance, Amy Leather for the central committee told conference: "There has been some hostility towards [the Socialist Worker Student Society] from a small minority at some universities, following a dispute inside the SWP." A "dispute inside the SWP"? Now, what could that be referring to? Similarly, "Jan from south London" said "her branch had lost some members due to a recent faction fight in the party". It is as if *Socialist Worker* readers know nothing of the "recent faction fight" and it is none of their business anyway.

The rest of the report is full of SWP 'official optimism'. Everything is taking off. While "millions are desperate for an alternative to the mainstream parties" at elections, in the workplace "There is deep frustration among layers of activists about how the movement is being led. There's an anger among workers that's absolutely palpable, and there's a willingness to take political initiatives." So says industrial organiser Michael Bradley.

And the SWP's own "united fronts" are well placed to swing things. Unite the Resistance has helped workers "join the dots" between different struggles,

according to one delegate. Meanwhile, according to another CC member, Weyman Bennett, the Unite Against Fascism conference in February will be "important in stopping the fascists from regrouping".

The SWP will be mobilising for the Stand Up to Racism demonstrations in March - they will be a "scream of rage" from thousands, said our Weyman. And the SWP will also be protesting at the UK Independence Party's spring conference in February. However, "Two comrades spoke of problems getting unions to back opposition to Ukip, as some activists are unsure about calling it racist." I wonder why that is?

Everything, says Charlie Kimber, points to "the necessity of revolutionary organisation" - ie, build the SWP. And, as usual, things are looking up in that respect (when aren't they in the SWP?): "Charlie reported a good level of recruitment nationally", although he did say it was "too uneven". But the only indication that the SWP is still losing members more quickly than it is recruiting them came in the contribution from "Sue C" (one of three central committee members whose surnames are not disclosed): she said the SWP "would be launching a re-registration and subs drive in the new year". In other words, just like in 2014, it will be trying to transform its hundreds of paper 'members' into the real thing.

Party Notes pretends that "The SWP conference ... set out a clear plan for the crucial period up to the May 7 elections and beyond".

This "clear plan" consists of:

- Continuing to argue for a united left to offer a more powerful challenge to the mainstream parties ...
- Launching a serious election challenge as part of Tusc ...
- Building Stand up to Ukip, the February 21 UAF conference and the March 21 anti-racist demonstrations in London, Glasgow and Cardiff.
- Continuing to fight for increased resistance in the workplaces, using Unite the Resistance's "Ten demands for the election" ...
- Continuing to support the fightback against the attacks on benefits and on disabled people, for decent and genuinely affordable housing, and in defence of the NHS and welfare.
- Continuing our work in the universities and colleges, holding regular SWSS meetings wherever possible and being part of fightbacks on the campuses.
- Building the March 7 Time to Act climate change demo.
- Continuing to build the SWP by campaigning alongside broad ranges of people, while arguing for revolutionary politics and organisation ...
- Ensuring that we are at the heart of Stop the War in our areas and tuned in to work around solidarity with Palestine.
- Developing our members through activity and education, including the day schools and special national events.
- Building a big Marxism 2015 - July 9-13.

Why bother with a "plan" when, give or take the odd detail, it's the same every year? So long as we persuade the members they must be active, active, active, some may stay on board. That is the SWP method for you. It reminds you of the final days of the Workers Revolutionary Party, before it imploded in 1985. Characterised by dishonesty, false optimism and downright lying ●

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What we fight for

- Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.
- There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.
- Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.
- Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.
- Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.
- The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.
- Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.
- Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.
- The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.
- We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
- Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
- Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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Fighting fund

Here's hoping

I hope all comrades had a good break and an enjoyable new year.

For a while I thought I would be celebrating the holiday by marking the success of our final fighting fund of 2014, but in the end we just fell short of our £1,750 target. Not by much, mind. On the stroke of midnight on December 31, while everyone else was singing 'Auld lang syne', I was totting up the donations. They came to £1,716 - just £34 short!

My expectations were building up in the days before, as I saw all those contributions landing in our bank and PayPal accounts. Then, in the final two posts of 2014, we received cheques to the value of £185! Thank you, LY, BF, VC, DR and FF. The PayPal donations included two for £50 from TT and SO, both added to their normal £5-a-month subs. Then there was £407 in standing orders, plus a £50 bank transfer from DS. Finally I was handed £10 by editor Peter Manson, who brought back a donation from South Africa from

a *Weekly Worker* fan, and then was given stamps valuing £10 from BG. They all count!

All that added £812 to our December total in the final two weeks, but, I'm afraid to say, the £34 shortfall, when added to the £65 from November, leaves us £99 shy since we increased our target to pay for colour printing. At least it didn't reach three figures last year!

But in 2015 we need to be hitting the target regularly. And January has got off to a reasonable start, with £278 coming in via standing orders, PayPal donations from PL (£25), NW (£20) and JS (£5), and cheques from HG (£25) and WT (£20), taking the running total to £373.

Did anyone make a new year resolution concerning our fighting fund? Let's hope so ●

Robbie Rix

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

weekly worker

**Plea-bargaining
denied them
justice**

An abuse of power

Whatever the truth of allegations against Andrew Windsor, the Jeffrey Epstein case paints a grim picture of the top of society, reckons **Paul Demarty**

A group of anarchists published, for a time, an intermittently amusing parody Trotskyist paper, called *The Fucking Left Rag*. A short item from the 11th issue was probably its high point:

Channel 4 has announced it will continue an adaptation of David Peace's acclaimed novel *GB12* for another series. The show, which has been described as "horrific" and "irredeemable" for its plotlines involving corrupt police, media paedophiles and racism, will return in 2013 ... and cause sane people to cry out 'What the f**k!' at their televisions.'

Your correspondent is also a fan of *Peace*, whose high-modernist historical crime fiction seemed almost campily over-stuffed with horror and violence at first glance, but has - if anything - been *outdone* in absurdity by the actual course of events. What was once an exaggeration for effect has become rather tame. Yes, dear reader: they *really did* give Jimmy Savile the keys to Broadmoor (the now-infamous sexual psychopath seems to have been almost in charge of the country at times, such as his access to establishment circles).

Since the exposure of Savile's crimes, accusations have multiplied against rich and/or powerful men, of a more or less similar nature. There have even been allegations of sexually motivated ritual murder levied at former MPs unknown.

This is *part of* the context in which the fallout from Jeffrey Epstein's token conviction must be viewed. For, although Epstein, an extremely wealthy financier, first faced accusations of soliciting underage sex in 2005, and was convicted in 2008, it must be said that the public has been primed for some of the more - shall we say - striking subsequent allegations by the irrefutable facts of the Savile and related cases.

Epstein was described widely as a Jay Gatsby character - the eponymous figure of F Scott Fitzgerald's *The great Gatsby* was a penniless ex-soldier who remade himself as an apparently fabulously wealthy linchpin of New York high society; and so Epstein - a scion of a Brooklyn Jewish family, in that borough's rougher days - rose to financial aristocracy, revelling in the Bacchanalian lifestyle his wealth made possible. In 2005, the darker side of his indulgences first came to light, when the mother of a Floridian 14-year-old reported to police the apparent use of her daughter for sexual favours. Further such allegations piled up.

In the event, Epstein's lawyers - who included the celebrity criminal defender and Zionist ideologue, Alan Dershowitz, and ironically Kenneth Starr, who prosecuted Bill Clinton over the Monica Lewinsky affair - managed to negotiate a plea bargain that put him away for 18 months on one charge of solicitation, of which he served



Andrew Windsor: did he use his influence?

13. On release, he was registered as a sex offender, which he denied was the same as being a predator: "It's the difference between a murderer and a person who steals a bagel."

This was not good enough for many victims, who opened civil proceedings against Epstein - many settled, other claims were dismissed. A different tack is being taken by the plaintiffs in the lawsuit that has caused all this most recent fuss: they are suing the United States under the Crime Victims' Rights act, alleging that by accepting such a weak-tea plea bargain, the US effectively denied these women access to justice.

Two women - Jane Doe 1 and Jane Doe 2 - began the proceedings, and the allegations of sexual abuse against both Dershowitz and Andrew Windsor - or the Duke of York, as the media prefer to call him - come from a court document asking for two further women, Jane Doe 3 and 4, to

be included in the action.

It is, of course, those allegations that have garnered the most column inches. British princes are celebrities in this day and age, at home and abroad; thus this peculiar tale of life at the top has had an extra frisson of sensation that could not be provided by the misdeeds of a financier alone. Jane Doe 3, who alleges sexual abuse at the hands of Andrew, has been named by the *Daily Mail* as Virginia Roberts; indeed, faced with such a blend of royalty, celebrity and 'paedophilia', we suspect that titillated *Mail* columnists barely know where to look.

We put 'paedophilia' in scare quotes because there is a reason for the official medical definition - sexual attraction to *pre-pubescents*. Nothing like that is alleged against Epstein or his friends. Sex between adults and teenagers has been taboo only relatively recently - in this country, the age of consent was 13 until 1885. (We find it faintly amusing

that when an adolescent reads *The hunger games*, she is a 'young adult'; when she has sex, she is a 'child'.)

What is at issue here is rather the commodification of female sexuality - allegations against Epstein, proven and unproven, return repeatedly to his insistence that his 'conquests' be *paid*; and the present accusations against prince Andrew hinge on Epstein's effective assertion of *ownership* over the women.

The significance of this distinction lies in the fact that the problem is not the violation of a hypostatized image of 'the child', in a definition that includes the first stages of sexual maturity, but the sources of power, and the effects of power inequality on human individuals at both ends of the scale. Epstein's *aperçu* on his sex offender status is apposite - to him, these women were basically bagels, inanimate wedges of organic matter with holes in them, fit to be bought, sold and consumed. (In this, he aligns with the wider history of sexual relationships between adult men and adolescent women, in that it typically represents in class society a *property* relationship between fathers and daughters.)

In the *Communist manifesto*, Marx and Engels ridicule the "virtuous indignation" of the bourgeoisie when they contemplate the "community of women" demanded by the communists - community of women has "existed almost from time immemorial", and besides, it reaches an absurd form in capitalist society, where the "bourgeois[ie], not content with having wives and daughters of their proletarians at their disposal, not to speak of common prostitutes, take the greatest pleasure in seducing each other's wives".

Marx's and Engels' point is that, while property in women is an important feature of pre-capitalist societies, the unique contribution of capitalism to the matter is to render this a thoroughly ordinary affair - women are not privileged objects of exchange, as they were between feudal aristocratic families, but "mere instruments of production". Hence the sheer vulgarity of the picture painted by the four Jane Does - a dissolute Wall Street man accumulating a harem of young women, and passing them around at lavish parties like grams of cocaine.

That is not the only thing thoroughly commodified by capitalism - also

pertinent in this affair is the fungibility of justice. If, in Epstein's world, money could buy the sexuality of young women, it could buy favourable legal outcomes even more so. Try to imagine a poor black man fighting allegations of the same nature in Florida getting off with 18 months on a plea bargain. You will have to try hard.

Money buys lawyers: lawyers of the calibre of Dershowitz, provided he can be distracted from enthusiastically advocating torture long enough to show up for a day in court. Empirical studies find - surprise, surprise - that the hourly rate of your lawyers correlates roughly with the likelihood of a favourable outcome in court. Put money in; and, within reason, get justice out.

It also attracts powerful friends. All papers have faithfully reproduced Buckingham Palace's "categorical denials" on the matter of Andrew's alleged sexual contact with Virginia Roberts. The more insidious allegation is that he lobbied on behalf of Epstein, urging leniency. We know well enough that even after his conviction and release, the prince did not ditch his old friend - then *News of the World* journalist Mazher Mahmood caught the two together, leading to Andrew's 'dismissal' from his pseudo-job as UK trade envoy. Dershowitz, a friend as well as advocate of Epstein, is also accused of such lobbying. There are suggestions from the women's lawyers that terms of the plea bargain guaranteed confidentiality as to the entreaties of Epstein's many influential friends.

Dershowitz's rage about all this is thus not just about sexual accusations against him. He is potentially on the hook for this: he was party to a plea bargain that could be found to be illegal by US statute - all in a most noble cause: to protect the right of his super-rich fund manager friend to exploit young women, or even coerce them into sex. Andrew Windsor is the same gormless twerp he has always been - but let the abiding image of this case be a spluttering, enraged Alan Dershowitz. For that is the very image of the bourgeois legal system: for all the hypocritical pretence at propriety, laughably easily seduced by those with a bit of money ●

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Notes

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