

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly worker



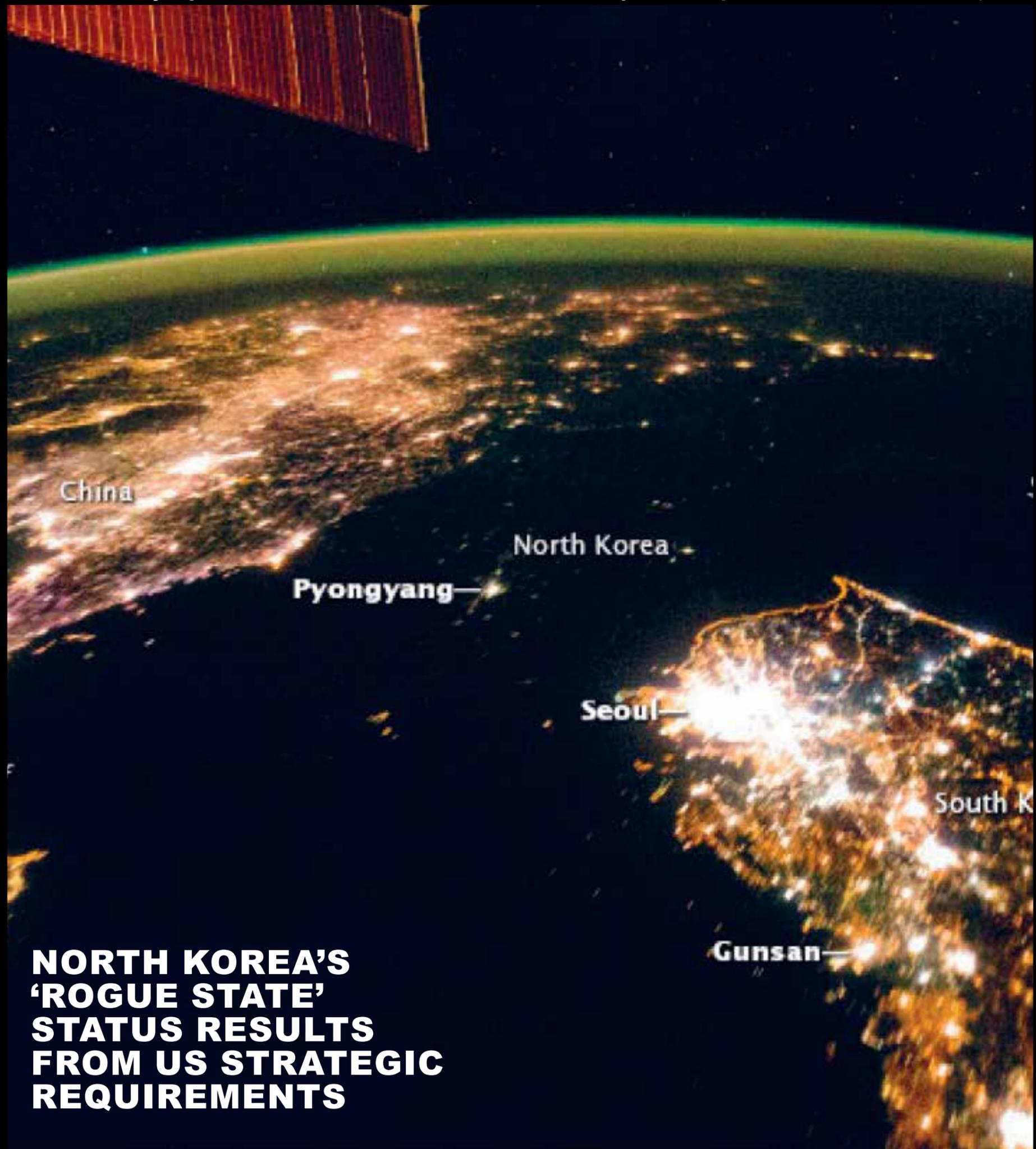
**Terry Bell: after Zuma,
where next for the
ANC and South Africa?**

- Letters and debate
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**NORTH KOREA'S
'ROGUE STATE'
STATUS RESULTS
FROM US STRATEGIC
REQUIREMENTS**

LETTERS



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

Shibboleth

Jack Conrad's reply (September 7) to my letter of the previous week put forward the opinion that the differences between Lenin and Kamenev in April 1917 were "one of shade, even temperament".

I realise that words only have the content we give them, but I am at a loss to understand how Conrad thinks his opinion squares with Lenin's description at the time - that there was a "clamour of protest" from those calling themselves "old Bolsheviks".

And who was the leader of these "old Bolsheviks" Lenin is referring to? Unlike Conrad, I do not see this as a question of presumption, but rather one of simple fact. It was Kamenev who had written a piece published in *Pravda* No27 (responding to Lenin's April theses) that 'Letters on tactics' was a direct response to.

In that *Pravda* article, Kamenev had outlined the significance of the dispute in terms that any normal reading would indicate was much more than "one of shade, even temperament" - "As for comrade Lenin's general scheme, it appears to us unacceptable ..."

But of more importance than speculating about why Conrad chooses to disagree with the view of the main protagonists at the time regarding the degree of seriousness of the dispute caused by the April theses is what Conrad lays out as the supposed basis of that dispute and how he goes on to use that as a justification for the CPGB's current-day opportunism.

Conrad poses the central point of the dispute in terms of a minor tactical issue of timing around when to stop giving critical support to the Provisional Government and start agitating for soviet power. It is clear that this was a part of the dispute, but it was also more than that.

Contrary to Conrad's assertion, I did not deny that Lenin described the soviets that existed in April 1917 as the concretisation of the "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" slogan. Perhaps he can quote from my letter where I did so? Lenin does indeed write: "The Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies - there you have the 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' already accomplished in reality."

But Lenin's point was that the concrete manifestation of this slogan had worked out very differently from what they had previously envisaged. Therefore, to continue using 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' was to effectively give political support to the Provisional Government. That is why anyone continuing to use the slogan should be "consigned to the archive of 'Bolshevik' pre-revolutionary antiques". This is what I argued in my letter and it is just a matter of historical fact.

Now to what extent this represented some kind of "break" in the overall continuity of Bolshevik thought (and perhaps also therefore represents a vindication of Trotsky's alternative understanding of the revolutionary process, which more closely mirrored the perspective outlined in Lenin's April theses) is, I guess, a matter of interpretation. To harp on about this is to miss the point, by taking something of a biblical approach to the text

rather than trying to understand the underlying political method being used (to borrow one of Conrad's regular put-downs of alternative views to his own).

It is not a matter of my imagination that the CPGB used this slogan throughout the discussions at the Communist University to describe the processes occurring in Russia right up to the revolution itself - in direct and explicit contradiction to Lenin's advice to the contrary. Disagreeing with Lenin on any issue is, of course, perfectly fine, but doing so while at the same time claiming they are the (only?) ones standing in continuity with the political method of Lenin is a bit hard to take seriously.

It is also not my imagination that this is directly related to their conflation of the forces that made the 1917 revolution (the proletariat supported by the peasantry) with popular frontist alliances between proletarian and bourgeois parties ever since then. Even if he might be reluctant to say so openly, I am sure Conrad remembers our conversation where he explicitly made that connection.

While he is less direct in his letter, the basic argument remains the same. Conrad argues: "Neither in spirit nor in practice did this Bolshevik-Left SR government have anything to do with the popular fronts advocated by the 'official communists' (and a few years ago by the SWP in its Respect phase)."

This is not any kind of concession to my position, as Conrad also argues that "When it comes to government, it is programme that provides the litmus test." So, for Conrad there is no difference in quality between an alliance of the organisations of the oppressed (proletariat and peasantry) and an alliance of the organisations of the oppressed with organisations of its oppressors (proletariat and bourgeoisie).

Apparently, either one of these could be the vehicle for implementation of the "full minimum programme" of the Marxist party representing the proletariat component in that alliance (for the purposes of this letter, I will accept the CPGB's use of 'full minimum programme' as synonymous with a programme capable of achieving a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, as in October 1917).

As Conrad and the CPGB are so keen on what they understand to be the lessons of 1917, they might like to think what Lenin would have thought of the idea that the problem with the Provisional Government was merely one of its programme being insufficient rather than its inherent cross-class nature (in the sense of being an alliance of the oppressed workers and peasants with their bourgeois oppressors in the form of the Cadets). Instead of 'Down with the 10 capitalist ministers', the CPGB's approach would seem to be much more like 'Convince the 10 capitalist ministers'.

Given that Conrad used the example of the SWP and Respect, it should be noted that the CPGB gave political support to SWP members standing as Respect candidates in the general election at the time. To head off the clamour of outrage by CPGBers reading this letter, I do realise that this was critical political support. But the comrades should take the time to think about why the critical part of that support did not include a call to break with popular frontism in general or even just the bourgeois components of this particular popular front. And they might further consider whether this failure was therefore implicit

political support to popular frontism.

Perhaps they will fall back on the 'programme is the litmus test' argument. But even here the CPGB failed to carry out the perspective they claim motivates them. The CPGB had members and supporters inside Respect who put forward amendments to the programme at the yearly conferences. Were these amendments to implement the CPGB's 'full minimum programme'? No - instead they were limited to more radical versions of some reformist demands.

It is interesting that Conrad feels the need to describe my understanding of these issues as "borderline madness". In my experience, when the leader of a tiny group substitutes substantive political discussion with this kind of apolitical slur it has a clear purpose. That is to stop the members of their group from thinking too seriously about the opposing view being put forward. The implication is clear. If any CPGB member was to show themselves to be open to the perspective I was putting forward, then the central leader of their organisation would have already marked them as slipping into madness.

This is related to the point in my original letter about this debate being taken up openly in 1917. Conrad attempts to brush this aside by asserting that "of course, open debate was the norm amongst the Bolsheviks". But he makes no attempt to explain why, if that really was such a well-known and established norm, Lenin felt it necessary to explicitly explain that "we unanimously concluded that it would be advisable *openly* to discuss our differences" (Lenin's emphasis) and that "Complying with this decision concerning a discussion, I am publishing ..."

So, just to be clear - there was a vote taken on whether to openly debate this issue. Lenin published his pamphlet because he was complying with the result of that vote. It is logical to assume therefore that the vote could have gone the other way, with the discussion being kept internal. I fail to see how the foreword to 'Letters on tactics' can be read any other way. This was an example of the real Bolshevik norm regarding openness of discussions. Decisions on whether or not to debate any issue openly (in the public press) were the result of internal discussion and votes - just as with any other political activity.

Why Conrad feels the need to dispute this is quite strange, given it is so obviously the case from the evidence of Lenin's foreword to 'Letters on tactics'. I suppose if you have turned your particular understanding of the term 'democratic centralism' into a shibboleth, in the way the CPGB have, then ignoring contrary facts is probably the best way to go.

To once again borrow another quote, it would seem that for their own reasons the Jack Conrads of this world want to, or need to, deceive themselves.

Alan Gibson
Co Cork, Ireland

Overboard

Unsurprisingly, former Spartacist League member Jim Creegan goes very overboard in his condemnation of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) founder Michael Harrington ('Leftwing of the permissible', September 7).

Harrington made many errors during his political career, but he was right about one thing: "The vocation of a radical in the last portion of the

20th century is to walk a perilous tightrope. He must be true to the socialist vision of a new society and constantly develop and extend its content; and he must bring that vision into contact with the actual movements fighting not to transform the system, but to gain some little increment of dignity or even just a piece of bread."

He continued: "If the radical becomes totally obsessed with their vision, they will fall off that tightrope into a righteous irrelevance; if they adapt too well to the movement we hope to inspire, they will fall into a pragmatic irrelevance. Our task is to balance vision and practicality, to fight not simply for the next step, but for the next step in a voyage of ten thousand miles."

I admit that Harrington and the organisations he founded wavered to the right of the tightrope too often - turning the Democratic Party into a social democratic labour party, with the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) or DSA as its left edge, was never on the cards - but Creegan fails to even recognise the issue that Harrington was trying to deal with. He does not recognise his own "righteous irrelevance".

And let's get the facts right. Harrington openly and unequivocally demanded that the US get out of Vietnam in 1968; he didn't wait until 1970. (Yes, 1968 was still too late; his 'realignment' strategy led him to compromise too much with the Socialist Party right wing - specifically his mentor, Max Shachtman). In the late 1970s, in the pages of *The Nation*, Harrington admits that he should have helped build an 'Out now!' movement along the lines of what the Socialist Workers Party (US) did in the 60s. In the 1970s and 80s he apologised, repeatedly, for his 'stupid' behaviour regarding Students for a Democratic Society and he condemned the US's "criminal war" in Vietnam in his final book. (Had he not also done so earlier, then there was no way that the new left veterans of the New American Movement would have ever chosen to merge with Harrington's DSOC in 1982.)

Furthermore, whatever its other failings in regard to its relationship to the left wing of the labour officialdom - and they were real - the DSOC explicitly supported the Ed Sadowski insurgency in the United Steelworkers as well as Teamsters for a Democratic Union, and some of its members were involved with the Association for Union Democracy. If Creegan doesn't believe this, he should try to get his hands on 1970s issues of the DSOC's *Democratic Left* newsletter.

Had Harrington been a genuine cold warrior, there is no way that the DSA would have ever critically supported the FSLN (Sandinistas) against the Contras in Nicaragua in the 1980s, as it did. The DSA also sponsored a national speaking tour in 1988 by Rubén Zamora, then vice-president of the El Salvadoran FMLN - another target of US imperialism.

As for "support for Israel", all this has meant for the DSA is support for a two-state settlement along the lines of what Uri Avnery and Gush Shalom, in Israel, have advocated since 1993. Undoubtedly, for Creegan and others who write for the *Weekly Worker*, this is still 'Zionism' (and, admittedly, there were Labour Zionists in both the DSOC and early DSA), but, I promise you, real Zionists - the ones who write apologies for the strangling and bombing of Gaza and worry about Israel's 'demographics' - do not

agree. The DSA also explicitly supported the first intifada.

In any event, the DSA has never treated Harrington's writings as holy writ in the way that, say, orthodox Trotskyists have done with James P Cannon. The DSA has never enforced a 'Harringtonite' orthodoxy. This gives Creegan's condemnation of Harrington a particularly musty air. It's long since time for all American Marxists to move on from heaping anathema on someone who has been dead since 1989 and spend far more time focusing on how to build the "far left of the possible" today.

Jason Schulman
New York

Reminder

Jim Creegan's article is a great reminder of the consistent anti-working class aggression of 'centrist' Democrats. "What happened" indeed, Hillary?

Arthur Birnbaum
email

Our heritage

Supporters of Labour Party Marxists attended the seventh Wigan Diggers Festival on September 2 to distribute leaflets and generally introduce our politics to people attending. The annual festival is a mixture of politics, music and drama celebrating radical politics and working class struggles, with a particular emphasis on the 17th century revolutionaries of the Digger movement, whose leading light, Gerrard Winstanley, came from Wigan.

Despite the atrocious weather conditions (torrential rain and stormy winds that wrought havoc with the LPM stand!), the event was successful, although understandably attendance was somewhat down on previous years. Although the festival has something of a 'family day out' feel to it, several aspects of the event struck me as worthy of comment. The first was the nature of the stalls and the groups represented: these ranged from contingents from left groups such as the Communist Party of Britain/*Morning Star*, through to local campaigns protesting against cuts in the health service and education. Trade unions such as the RMT, Unite and the BFAWU were also represented, along with craft stalls and fundraising activities for local 'good causes'. On the main stage a variety of folk and indie bands performed political and other folk standards, whilst two short plays brought to life the politics of the 17th century Putney Debates and the democratic demands of the Chartists in the 19th.

This 'field of folk' and these political and cultural offerings were a snapshot of the nature of the broad labour and socialist movement as it now exists in many localities throughout Britain: a combination of established 'traditional' labour and trade union organisations, the familiar left groups selling papers and advertising the next big demo and mobilisation (along with the not so familiar in the form of a Zapatista solidarity group, albeit from Manchester, not Chiapas!), and a range of single-issue campaigning groups. This local rootedness and sense of identification with the area's radical past was a clear strength: stalls highlighting Wigan's connection with the Spanish civil war or the struggles within the mining industry bore testament to that - as did, of course, the Digger theme, which brought the whole event together. However, this was not some quaint 'heritage' festival with participants dressed in 17th-century costume to add to the atmosphere of 'Merrie England':

with varying degrees of success the organisers and many of the participants were attempting to link the politics and the struggles of the past with those of today.

On a small scale this festival is to be applauded for seeking to show these links and build a popular tradition that celebrates our revolutionary forebears. In doing so it counters the official heritage narrative widely propagated, both in the media and in so many local festivals. Every locality has a radical tradition of working class struggle that should be commemorated and celebrated in festivals, meetings and publications. Large and small events from the Durham Miners Gala through to the commemorations of the Levellers at Burford, the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester, the deported trade unionists from Tolpuddle and, of course, Winstanley from Wigan show what can be done and, with all their limitations, point to how our movement should start to reclaim its past and build its future.

This relationship between the past and the present in the politics of the working class movement will become increasingly important. Amongst the many setbacks that have occurred since the 1980s has been the way that the knowledge of the history of working class struggle and political challenge to the status quo has been diminished and lost, even amongst many activists.

The radicals of the English Revolution, such as the Levellers and the Diggers, are a case in point. In the late 1960s and 70s historians published a wide range of political manifestoes from the 1640s and 50s and introduced us to a new world turned upside-down during the English Revolution. This was part of a wider flowering of historical work and research covering all aspects of British history from the late Middle Ages, which countered bourgeois narratives of gradual reform and organic evolution, and replaced the cosy tales of 'our island story' with a grand narrative of revolution and struggle.

Celebrations of these struggles, such as the Wigan Diggers Festival, must go hand in hand with a widening and deepening of our knowledge of these revolutionary aspects of our own history. The *Weekly Worker* and the CPGB's Communist University have a key role to play in this process by publishing historical material and organising conferences and meetings to highlight these important historical events and movements as part of the wider process of rebuilding and re-arming a revolutionary movement in Britain.

James Harvey
Liverpool

Pay rise now

The government has announced the end of the public-sector pay cap for police and prison officers. It has also hinted at ending the pay cap altogether by talking about the need for more flexibility in the future.

Whilst welcoming this U-turn by the Tory government, Rugby Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition remains highly critical of government policy on public-sector pay. They should immediately lift the 1% cap for all public-sector workers, including nurses, doctors, teachers and firefighters, who have seen their pay cut by thousands of pounds over the last seven years. We call for coordinated industrial action by public-sector trade unions to force the government to change its position.

Even the 1.7% rise for prison officers, and the 1% one-off bonus for police on top of the 1% cap,

is way below inflation, which has risen to 2.9%. These are pay cuts in real terms. Even more to the point, there will no extra money to fund these small pay increases - they will have to be funded within present departmental budgets. That means other services will be cut back further.

The announcement by the Tories was deliberately divisive, suggesting they value some public services above others. We have always said that all public-sector workers provide vital services for the whole community, and should all be rewarded appropriately.

There is plenty of money in the economy. Britain is the 5th richest country in the world. There is no need for pay restraint. Austerity could be ended tomorrow: a 5% wealth tax on those earning over £100,000 per annum would prevent the need for cuts, as would the collection of taxes worth £120 billion pa that wealthy companies and individuals avoid or evade paying.

As recently as in the queen's speech this June, the Tories refused to end the pay cap. This was supported by local MP Mark Pawsey. It would be interesting to know if he now supports this partial about-turn by his government, and whether he agrees with us that the time has come to end austerity.

Pete McLaren
Rugby Tusc

Kick in the guts

Most likely I'm not alone amongst your readership when feeling kicked in the guts by last week's articles from Peter Manson ('Apologists for mass murder', September 7) and Tony Greenstein ('Don't abandon Palestinian cause'). The beyond-cruel facts and ultra-sordid information contained within them makes it extremely hard not to lose hope for humankind - let alone for the building of socialism.

Who can be anything other than utterly disgusted by the demonic betrayals of South Africa's African National Congress government? Betrayals of truly historic gains, many of them secured as individuals (along with previous others in their party and movement) over rabid racism; most specifically, over 'post-colonialism-compliant' apartheid. Who could fail to be utterly revolted by Israel's demonic justifications of its customised version of that supremacist/sub-fascist system?

If not connected to such abjectly toxic and often deadly matters, it might have been possible to see all such bullshit/smokescreen attempts by the governments of both Israel and South Africa merely as comic pantomime. Of course, none of that is to forget the UK's Stalinist *Morning Star* running in full fancy dress alongside an equally farcical-comedic South African Communist Party. However, these intercontinental events and developments remain both accurately and most usefully described as "festering anti-working class viruses erupting from their pustules of politico-spiritual decadence".

Rather than generating pessimism or any such knee-jerk reactions of despondency or despair, all genuine communists and any real socialists should find a boost to their spirit - as well as re-enforcement to their inner resolve - from the fact that the *Weekly Worker* provides a space for such insights and evaluations as those from comrades Greenstein and Manson. I share that enthusiasm, even if heavily tempered by the fact that a single, operationally consolidated media outlet (and thereby a powerfully amplified voice for our communist ideas, ideals and values) would provide incalculably far greater opportunities for traction and engagement with all working co-citizens.

For my meagre part, I continue with my own underlying 'Bolshevik-styled' good vibes bonded to concretely constructive fury. By which I mean fury directed towards any and all dehumanising formulations or 'demonically disguised' versions of capitalism (not to forget any of its bestially imperialist rampages).

Incidentally, by way of a similar 'kick in the guts', as mentioned at the outset, surely your readers should remain conscious of this. Very regrettably - but accompanied by a virtual cascade of recent indications - precisely that same expression may prove to be applicable to Corbyn's Labour Party (the expression relating to viruses and pustules of 'politico-spiritual decadence', that is). Of course, time alone will bring us an answer. Meanwhile, we should hold on tightly to our aspirations for genuine - aka 'kosher' - leftward growth in Labour, all in the hope we're not merely pipe dreaming!

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

Fighting fund Celebration

"In this centenary year," writes TH, "what better way to celebrate revolution than supporting those who advocate it 100 years later!" And to mark the occasion the comrade sent us cheque worth £1 for each of those intervening years!

A fantastic boost to our September fighting fund, whose target is, as usual, £1,750. But I have to say that, despite TH's £100 cheque, we are still lagging way behind the going rate, with only £644 received and almost half the month gone. Part of the reason lies in the fact that the last seven days just happened to coincide with the part of the month when standing orders are few and far between. There were just four of them: thank you, RK and GD (£25 each), DV (£20) and SM (£10).

Apart from TH, comrade MN also sent us a rather useful cheque - £50 - while YJ added a tenner to her subscription. Thanks also to

PB, for the £50 she handed over at the London Communist Forum. Then there were a couple of PayPal donations - from KC (£20) and DB (£7). But we really could do with a few more of our online readers clicking on that PayPal button - there were 2,873 of them last week, so that's quite a poor return.

And it's not as though we're not appreciated - I know we are. It's just that most of those readers don't actually think about donating. I wish they would, because that monthly target needs to be met in full. Unlike the mass media, we can't rely on paid adverts to rake in the income. No, we need the help of our readers - which is why I'm appealing to you to do your bit. Anyone else want to join in the celebration? ●

Robbie Rix

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

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday September 17, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimtz's *Lenin's electoral strategy from Marx and Engels through the revolution of 1905*. This meeting: chapter 2, 'Revolutionary continuity' (continued).
Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1.
Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk; and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

George Orwell and socialism

Saturday September 16, 1pm to 4pm: Discussion of political history, Red Shed (Wakefield Labour Club), Vicarage Street, Wakefield. Free admission and free light buffet, plus bar with real ale.
Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group: www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html.

No to war

Wednesday September 20, 6.30pm to 8.30pm: Rally, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1.
Organised by North London Stop the War: www.facebook.com/nlondon.stwc.7.

Peace market

Saturday September 23, 10.30am to 4pm: Anti-war event, St Michael and All Angels Church Hall, The Avenue, London W4. Stalls from groups campaigning for peace and social justice.
Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

LRC fringe

Tuesday September 26, 6.30pm: Meeting at Labour conference. *Forward to a Labour government*. Friends Meeting House, Brighton BN1.
Organised by Labour Representation Committee: <http://l-r-c.org.uk>.

Social histories of the Russian Revolution

Thursday September 28, 6.30pm: Discussion meeting, Birkbeck, University of London, 26 Russell Square, London WC1. 'Taking power: remaking the family, levelling wages, planning the economy'.
Speaker: Wendy Goldman.
Organised by Social Histories of the Russian Revolution: <https://socialhistories1917.wordpress.com>.

The brink of war?

Saturday September 30, 4pm: Public meeting, Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester M1. 'Is president Trump taking the world to the brink of war?'
Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Tories out!

Sunday October 1, 12 noon: National demonstration on opening day of Conservative Party conference. Assemble Castlefield Arena, Rice Street, Manchester M3.
Organised by People's Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Making a world without war

Monday October 2, 7.30pm: Talk, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Speaker: Dr Scilla Elworthy.
Organised by Conway Hall Ethical Society: <https://conwayhall.org.uk/ethical-society>.

Capital and historical materialism

Thursday October 5, 7pm: Lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Marx's approach to the analysis of capitalist society. Speaker: Dr Jonathan White (*Theory and Struggle*).
Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.

Balfour and Palestine

Saturday October 7, 10am to 4.30pm: Conference, Mander Hall, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1.
Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

Britain deserves a pay rise

Thursday October 12, 5.30pm: Demonstration. Assemble opposite Downing Street for march via department of health, treasury, department for education and home office to rally outside parliament.
Organised by Unite, Unison, PCS, UCW, GMB, FBU and others.

Norwich is many

Monday October 16, 6.30pm: Screening of *We are many*, University of East Anglia, arts room 2.01, Norwich NR4. Charting the rise of mass global opposition to the 2003 Iraq war.
Organised by Norwich Stop the War: <http://norwichstopwar.org.uk>.

Revolution then and revolution now

Saturday October 21, 10am to 5pm: Conference, room 1, Central Library, William Brown Street, Liverpool L3. Speakers: David Lowes, Anne McShane, Hillel Tickin. Entrance free, but donations welcome.
Organised by Supporters of Critique Journal of Socialist Theory: contactpaulinehadaway@gmail.com.

Imperialism then and now

Tuesday October 24, 7pm: Educational, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. With Simon Renton. The nature of the political and economic crisis which began in 2008.
Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org/index.php.

100 years since the October revolution

Saturday November 4, 10am to 6pm: International conference, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1.
Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.

Red Star over Russia

Wednesday November 8 to Sunday February 18: Exhibition, Tate Modern, Bankside, London SE1. Propaganda posters, prints and photographs from the period of the Russian Revolution.
Organised by Tate Modern: www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/red-star-over-russia.

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.

KOREA

Not enforcing *juche*

In the last analysis North Korea's 'rogue state' status results from US strategic requirements, writes Mike Macnair

On September 11 the United Nations security council adopted a new set of sanctions against North Korea (formally the Democratic People's Republic of Korea), with the aim of forcing an end to its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile development. These are extended from the very extensive, already-existing sanctions, and now ban North Korean textile exports and the sale of natural gas to the country. But they are substantially less than the United States' original proposals, which would have banned all exports of petroleum products to North Korea, imposed a full naval blockade, and authorised the use of force to enforce this blockade.¹ Donald Trump said on September 11 that the new sanctions are "nothing compared to what ultimately will have to happen".²

The US administration's bellicose statements thus do not indicate a *present* willingness to launch World War III for the sake of regime change in North Korea. Rather, they are leverage to force through an increase in what are *very* long-standing sanctions by threatening megadeaths. The result, if the US succeeds in bringing down the North Korean regime, will still probably be megadeaths, in the form of the destruction which has been rained on Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Syria - now imposed on a more densely populated area of east Asia.

The US has backed down in the face of clear indications from China and Russia that they would veto the original proposals. Alongside the diplomacy have gone naked threats of war from Trump and other senior figures in the administration. These, in turn, have been matched by Russian and Chinese troop build-ups on the border with North Korea in the spring,³ and in the Russian case by a display of airforce capability over the Korean peninsula in early September.⁴ The threatened veto is grounded on the fear that the full sanctions package the US proposed last week would either be a short prelude to war or result in a rapid, disorderly melt-down of the North Korean regime into state failure.

The political ideology of North Korea is the *juche* or 'self-reliance' doctrine. It is a curious blend of an extreme version of 'socialism in a single country' with pre-colonisation Korean Confucianism, which was similarly isolationist to try to keep a degree of distance from its big Chinese neighbour. The Stalinist 'cult of personality' of Kim Il Sung, Korean Workers Party leader from 1949 to 1994, had morphed by his death into something closer to the idea that the mandate of heaven had settled on the Kim family as a dynasty, with deification of the founder. The tag 'Hermit Kingdom' was applied to Korea before the Japanese colonisation of the country from 1910; since the 1990s, the western media has begun to apply it to North Korea.⁵

The Russian and Chinese fear (and perhaps US hope) that extreme sanctions will bring down the regime illustrates precisely that *juche* is, as 'socialism in a single country' was, an untruth: North Korea's economy and state have *never* been fully autarkic, and are nothing like autarkic at present. The regime was a product of geopolitical manoeuvres in the late 1940s. It has been preserved since then by its strategic situation, and survives today for the same reason: as a buffer state between China and far-eastern Russia, on the one hand, and the US and its dependent allies, on the other hand.

The other side of this coin is the *very* long-term core aim of the US state of 'regime change' in North Korea, which has persisted since the origin of the state



Kim Jong-un: venerated

with varying degrees of intensity. This persistent aim is apparently irrational - like the US's recent regime-change operations in the Middle East - but has the same underlying 'pseudo-rationality' - of 'making America great again' or 'defending the American way of life' - as those operations.

Founding and war

The USSR declared war on Japan on August 8 1945, and rapidly overran Manchuria before the Japanese surrender on August 15. As a result, the USSR became entitled to a significant level of territorial gains and influence in east Asia under the Yalta agreement, and the US agreed to split the post-war occupation of Korea with the USSR at the 38th parallel. The Japanese colonial regime had developed industry more in the north, while old-style landlordism remained dominant in the south. Manoeuvres ended in two governments - the landlord-clerical southern Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Stalinist northern DPRK - being created in 1948. The UN, under US dominance, did not recognise the DPRK.

In 1950 war broke out between the DPRK and ROK,⁶ and the ROK forces initially collapsed; a large US army, under UN flags and with UN backing,⁷ threw the northern army back, and entered the northern zone. The Chinese now intervened (as well as the USSR providing air support); and eventually the front stabilised at the present border between North and South Korea. No peace treaty has ever been agreed and the US still does not recognise North Korea.

This is, in fact, the origin of US economic sanctions against North Korea. They were initially imposed on June 28 1950, and added to in 1955, 1961, 1975 and 1978 under various pretexts before the current round of US and UN sanctions created by the 'nuclear issue' since the 1990s.⁸

After 1953, in spite of sanctions, North Korea was relatively successful economically. Starting with a stronger industrial base inherited from Japanese development (though savaged by the war itself), it had prolonged success in the 1950s-70s through Chinese and Soviet support; down to the early 1970s, it was a *more* developed country than South Korea.

In the 1960s, however, US subsidies to South Korea, together with US permission to South Korea to maintain a mercantilist, protectionist system and still export to the US, had facilitated a South Korean economic take-off. Meanwhile, the normal process of Stalinist 'planning'

methods, together with the very heavy military budget, had led North Korea's economic development to slow down.

In the 1980s, first China under Deng Xiaoping and then Russia under Gorbachev and Yeltsin refused to roll over development loans which had previously been made to North Korea and demanded repayment. The 1991 fall of the USSR in particular triggered a deep-going regression of the North Korean economy, involving episodes of mass starvation.⁹

These developments confirm the point already made. *Juche* was an illusion. North Korea under Kim Il Sung was deeply embedded in trade and financial relations with the 'Soviet bloc' and China. The disruption of these relationships had devastating economic consequences (as, it must be said, 1990s 'shock therapy' also had for the former Soviet Union and all its components).

Nuclear arms

After the fall of the USSR the North Korean regime in the first place attempted to develop its own nuclear weapons as a substitute for the Soviet nuclear umbrella, which had been held up for it previously.¹⁰ At the same time, it was clear that the regime was willing to 'trade off' this development against security guarantees and the relaxation of sanctions by the US; and such a deal was, in fact, reached in 1994.

The Clinton administration was, however, unable to deliver on its side of the deal due to Republican control of Congress. Then Bush in 2001 announced that North Korea was not compliant with it, and in 2002 listed North Korea as part of the 'axis of evil' together with Iran and Iraq (John R Bolton in 2002 added Cuba, Libya and Syria to this list).

The North Korean regime has understandably responded to these developments by pushing ahead with the nuclear and missile programmes as fast as it can. Even the ability to hit *one* US city with a warhead of the same yield as those of 1945 would be a serious tradable asset and deterrent against operations like those conducted against Iraq and Libya. How far it has got is open to question: both sides have an interest in exaggerating progress.¹¹

US dominance

This story is not about nuclear proliferation. Israel has had the bomb, with US tacit approval, since the 1960s. India has been a 'declared nuclear weapon power' since 1998, and Pakistan announced its capability in the same year. Neither

attracted more than grumbling and token sanctions, later lifted.

Nor is it about the North Korean regime being a personal dictatorship run by a mad individual. In spite of its undoubted Stalinist-monarchical character and the idea of the dynastic 'mandate of heaven',¹² the actual decisions of the regime are perfectly rational. It should be remembered that the US has been committed to its overthrow since 1950, contemplated using nuclear weapons against it (and China) in 1950-51, and stationed battlefield and intermediate-range nuclear weapons in South Korea between the 1950s and 1991. The purpose of US economic sanctions against North Korea has always been regime change, and the US has never been willing to negotiate in good faith a normalisation of relations.¹³

The irrationality - or rather rational-irrationality - is on the other side; as we can see from the fate of other members of the 'axis of evil'. What is at issue is the defence of the status of the US as the world's top-dog power; and how to do so under conditions where there is no longer a Soviet enemy to force 'the west' to cohere, and where, at the same time, the US is in *relative* decline as an *industrial* producer, though still absolutely dominant in financial and military affairs and in military technology.

Under these conditions, the US can no longer proceed to summarily 'send in the Marines' as it did to Latin American countries between 1905 and 1965. The US succeeded in imposing order in South Korea at a very heavy cost, and at the price of tolerating North Korea. It failed miserably in South Vietnam.

Afterwards, under the Carter administration, it ceased to attempt to impose order. But the US is still necessarily committed to punishing those who have in the past defied it in any way, and their descendants to the nth generation. If it fails to do so, like any protection racketeer (which US foreign policy increasingly resembles) it will lose 'turf' and be 'disseed' more and more. Instead of attempting to impose order, which is beyond its capabilities, it merely punishes those who defy it with chaos, US-sponsored terrorists, destruction and state failure. Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen are merely the most recent examples of a litany which began with 1970s interventions against Mozambique, Angola, Cambodia, Afghanistan ...

North Korea is *undergoing* the punishment in the form of siege warfare, euphemistically described as

'sanctions'.¹⁴ But the US is not satisfied with the results: they have not yet produced regime change and the state failure and chaos which will follow. It wants more (and it initially proposed, but did not get, a form which would allow UN-backed military action).

China and Russia have rightly resisted this proposal; but, remaining within the framework of 'international law', and the United Nations, they necessarily allow the US to tighten the screws towards the death and destruction which will result from the attainment of its aims.

This is not a matter of Donald Trump's supposed narcissism, any more than the 'axis of evil' was a matter of George W Bush's supposed stupidity. Preserving the 'American way of life' *actually* requires preserving America's global top-dog status. That is also the coded meaning of 'making America great again' and the open meaning of the 'new American century'. Restoring American *industrial* dominance is no more possible than restoring Venetian or Genoese shipping dominance was in the 17th century or Dutch in the 18th, or British industrial dominance in the early 20th. What remains possible is to preserve US financial dominance through military dominance, by spreading destruction across the world.

Just as *juche* was illusory, so are all forms of nationalist separatism in response to this global threat. The struggle posed is one for the *overthrow of capitalist rule as such*, in the US as much as everywhere else ●

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Notes

1. *New York Times* September 11.
2. *The Independent* September 12.
3. *Daily Mail* April 20.
4. CNN, September 3; <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/09/01/asia/russia-north-korea-analysis/index.html>.
5. It appears to be seriously misleading; see, for example, a couple of accounts by foreigners more or less friendly to the regime: F Abt, *A capitalist in North Korea* Tuttle 2014; A Lankov *Daily life in North Korea* NK News 2015. Both no doubt in a sense see 'Potemkin villages', rather than the worst aspects of the regime; but they also see that behind the facade there has actually been substantial movement towards Chinese-style 'economic reform' and access of the North Korean middle classes to external information sources.
6. Standard sources characterise the beginning of the war as a North Korean invasion, reflecting the US-UN point of view. Bruce Cumings (*The Korean war: a history* New York 2011) and other authors have argued that what was involved was in fact a civil war which was already underway.
7. Front-line troops were contributed by Australia, Belgium, Britain, Canada, Colombia, Ethiopia, France, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand and Turkey.
8. S Chang, 'A chronology of US sanctions against North Korea', S Chang and SH Kim (eds) *Economic sanctions against a nuclear North Korea* Jefferson 2007, chapter 2.
9. TF Cargill and E Parker, 'Economic reform and alternatives for North Korea', SH Kim, T Roehrig and B Seliger *The survival of North Korea* Jefferson 2011, chapter 6.
10. The prior developments listed in Wikipedia, etc are pretty clearly research projects in nuclear *power* production rather than in nuclear *weapons* production.
11. See, for example, from some time ago, B Cumings, 'Wrong again' *London Review of Books* December 4 2003; the point is not that Cumings was necessarily right then, but the fact that North Korean capabilities are likely to be exaggerated by various interests and mechanisms.
12. Eddie Ford commented in this paper, on the occasion of the funeral of Kim Jong-Il, on the similarities between this cult and the British cult of the royal family: 'Of kings and Kims' *Weekly Worker* January 12 2012.
13. Indeed, the episode of 1994-99 illustrates the point, visible elsewhere (recently in Trump's denunciation of the Paris climate agreements), that the US political system makes it constitutionally *unable* to negotiate international agreements in good faith.
14. There is a useful discussion in R Frank, 'The political economy of sanctions against North Korea' *Asian Perspective* Vol 30, No3, 2006, pp5-36.

KURDISTAN



Masoud Barzani: narrow vision

Nationalism and imperial power

The Kurdish independence referendum is not a welcome development, writes **Yassamine Mather**

The Kurdish regional government (KRG) in Iraq will be holding a referendum on the issue of independence on September 25. There have been appeals for it to be delayed and the date has changed a number of times, but at the moment it looks like the vote will go ahead.

In 2014, at the time when Islamic State was gaining ground in northern Kurdistan, Kurds accused the Iraqi army of abandoning the territory lost to the jihadists. Ironically it is the 'liberation' of Erbil, Mosul and other northern cities that has precipitated the referendum. Last week in an interview with BBC Persian, Masoud Barzani, the president of the KRG, indicated that it will draw up the borders of a future Kurdish state if Baghdad does not accept a vote in favour of independence. However, what was significant in the BBC interview was Barzani's insistence that the vote will also take place in "areas of Kurdistan outside the region's administration", including Kirkuk, Makhmour, Khanaqin and Sinjar. The oil-rich Kirkuk has large Arab and Turkmen populations, which prompted Barzani to add:

We don't say that Kirkuk only belongs to Kurds. Kirkuk should be a symbol of coexistence for all ethnicities. If the people of Kirkuk vote 'no' in this referendum we will respect their vote, but we don't accept that anyone can prevent us from holding a referendum there. If any group wants to change the reality of Kirkuk using force, they should expect that every single Kurd will be ready to fight over it.

It is not difficult to envisage a future where Barzani's threats would lead to yet another bloody civil war in Iraq.

Of course, Kurdish leaders claim the vote will not necessarily lead to independence - their aim is to strengthen

their hand in future negotiations with Baghdad. But the Iraqi government response came on September 12, when parliament voted to reject the referendum as "unconstitutional" and authorised the prime minister to "take all measures" to preserve Iraq's unity.

The official US and UK position is a recommendation that the vote for Kurdish independence should be delayed in view of the 'dangerous situation' so soon after the defeat of IS. The US secretary of state Rex Tillerson made that point on a visit to the KRG in August, but more hard-line neoconservatives in the US and their allies in Israel believe that any referendum would be the first step in a much wider scheme: one that would go beyond Iraq and encompass all Kurdish areas in Syria, Iran and Turkey.

As far the Zionist regime and sections of the Trump administration are concerned, an independent Kurdish state would accelerate the disintegration of Iraq, paving the way for more independence movements: Sunnis in Iraq and Syria; Arabs, Baluchis and maybe Azeris in Iran. They hope this would result in a complete neo-imperial remapping of the region, replacing the borders drawn up in the early part of the 20th century.

So why would anyone want to destroy current states and in the process create further devastation and chaos? Because the new imperial order is interested not only in 'regime change from above', but would actually prefer chaos and anarchy to 'rogue states' capable of challenging US hegemony in areas where the majority of the population (ironically with the exception of Iran) are no longer the superexploited masses of the global 'market' economy.

Of course, we all know that since the US invasion, Iraq is a much weaker power in the region. But the proposed referendum will pave the way for the kind of civil wars that will

make the current situation in Libya or Afghanistan look like a tea party. For Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu and his advisors such a plan would enable Israel to become a regional superpower - no wonder the KRG is 'benefiting' from Israel's continuous advice.

No-one in their right mind can imagine that the 'greater Kurdistan' promised by Kurdish nationalists will happen peacefully - the existing brutal regimes will fight to the bitter end to stop it and prevent their own demise. And in reality the creation of such a state would produce further inter-Kurdish battles.

Narrow-minded

A long time ago, in very difficult circumstances in Iranian Kurdistan, I was witness to a bitter conflict between supporters of northern Kurdistan and of southern Kurdistan. On a snowy night, at a time when I had been given temporary responsibility as political leader in the camp where we were staying, I was woken up by a comrade asking me to return to the base (as the only female member of the peshmergeh group, I was staying outside the base in a peasant's house - part of our organisation's attempt to respect Kurdish sensitivities regarding gender segregation).

Two groups - both 'Marxist' Kurdish peshmergeh - had got into a bitter argument over whether northern Kurdistan (capital: Mahabad) was more radical and revolutionary than southern Kurdistan (capital: Sanandaj) and the two groups seemed ready to open fire on each other. The old comrade who came to wake me up, Kak Omar, was a wise old man who could see where all this could lead. I put on my uniform, went to the base and attempted to fulfil my duty as a political leader by giving a talk on 'internal contradictions', based on a booklet issued by a small group called the Union des Communistes de France Marxiste-Léniniste, written by

a then much less famous Alain Badiou, whose *Théorie de la contradiction* was an attempt to understand and come to terms with the many "linear", "circular", "antagonistic" and "non-antagonistic" contradictions.

I think I managed to bore the comrades sufficiently and by the time I had finished very few felt like entering into a midnight shooting match. Yet the incident demonstrated to me how narrow-minded nationalism can be, how easily it can turn to regionalism. And, once you go down that route, there is no end to the divisions that can be exploited by the enemies of the working class. After all, the civil wars of the Middle East have not harmed US or Israeli interests in the region and no doubt the destruction of the current state of Iran would also serve them well. Anything that can pave the way for such a scenario is a bonus for them.

Even if we imagine the establishment of a unified Kurdish state, how would its economy work? As KRG leaders know, without Kirkuk such a state would not be viable, but even with Kirkuk it is difficult to foresee a prosperous future in the current world capitalist order for a country composed of the least developed regions of four underdeveloped countries ... and with no access to the sea. Of course, the blame for such underdevelopment lies squarely with the current and past rulers of the respective countries and no doubt it is this, combined with the constant suppression of national rights in Kurdish areas, that has led to the current wave of nationalism. Both the right and the left should take note of the dangers such a new state would face.

Let me add a few comments about the current Kurdish regional government in Iraq. Those of us who are familiar with its current leaders find it difficult to take them seriously. There was nothing positive in their foreign policy - from when Mustafa Barzani (the father of the current

president) became an ally of the shah of Iran, to their support for the Islamic Republic (all because Iran was opposed to Iraq's Ba'athist regime), to their current mesmerisation by US and Israeli 'advisors'. This is a government based on tribalist politics. For all its claims about 'women's rights', the organisations leading the KRG, as well as their allies in Iran, are mainly corrupt, misogynist forces, whose power and wealth often relies on extortion and corruption.

If you are in the west, at a time when fundamentalists still force women to wear the burqa or hijab, it is easy to be impressed by female peshmergeh filmed in Kurdish areas, brandishing guns. However, you will forgive me for being cynical about such images. All too often both in Kurdistan and abroad I have had to deal with women peshmergeh whose bruises and battered bodies tell the story of domestic abuse.

The proposed Kurdish referendum has initiated a number of debates amongst the Iranian left about the implications of the right to self-determination at a time of aggressive, destructive imperialist policy in the region. No-one can deny the fact that the Kurds have been victims of discrimination, repression and military aggression in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. In this respect the call for independence is very attractive.

However, the question is, 'After independence what next?' We know how the current regional powers will react, and how the already weakened working class movement will further be divided along nationalist lines.

Some time ago, Robert Fisk wrote a book on Lebanon entitled *Pity the nation*. Unfortunately in the current situation this is the phrase that keeps coming to mind when I think of Kurdistan ●

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SOUTH AFRICA

Where next for the ANC?

Are there hopeful signs amidst the poverty and corruption? South African socialist, author and journalist Terry Bell addressed a London Communist Forum on September 10

I wish I could answer the question, 'Where next for the ANC?' Five years ago I would have given some sort of confident forecast about the way things would develop. But right now things are in such chaos.

For example, on September 9, Gwede Mantashe, the secretary-general of the African National Congress (who also sits on the central committee of the South African Communist Party, of which he is the former chair), came out guns blazing, saying it was "sick" that eight people have now been nominated to succeed Jacob Zuma as president of the ANC. This is not the way we do things, he said: the deputy president should automatically succeed the president.

But, of course, the current deputy president (of both the ANC and the republic), Cyril Ramaphosa, is not only one of the wealthiest businessmen in South Africa, who very quickly became a billionaire. He also happened to be a non-executive director of Lonmin, the company which employed the 34 mineworkers shot by police at the time of the Marikana massacre in August 2012. It was Ramaphosa who sent emails stating to ministers that this was not a normal strike: the fact that they had occupied a piece of common land on a hill was a "dastardly criminal" act, which meant that "concomitant action" must be taken.

We know what happened then. In the initial shooting 17 miners were shot dead and many others wounded, some of them crippled for life, and then 17 others were hunted down when they were running away - many of them were shot in the back. Eighteen other mineworkers, including one who was crippled by the police, were charged with murder.

Most of the original strikers had been members of the National Union of Mineworkers, whose local

officials had effectively become line managers for the company. Then NUM president, Senzeni Zokwana, was also an employee of the mining company - paid R1 million (£59,000) a year. NUM shop stewards were given credit cards, cars, etc and they kept the miners in order.

When disgruntled workers came out on strike, they marched on their union office. What happened next is a classic example of how things can get out of hand so easily. As they marched on the office, there was some gunfire - the NUM shop stewards had armed themselves and opened fire. As a journalist I got a phone call and was told that two workers had been killed. I asked, "Were you there?" My informant was not, so I asked him to check whether it was true.

As it turned out, only one worker was injured, but the miners believed that their comrades had been shot at and killed - that was the way the rumour spread. As a result another group marched on management, but when two security guards told them to stop they were killed. All hell broke loose. Ten people died before the actual police slaughter. As a result, many people found it convenient to claim that both sides were equally to blame - just like Donald Trump did over Charlottesville. The 18 Marikana strikers were charged with murder under the so-called 'common purpose' legislation.

In another previous incident, tear gas had been fired at the strikers and in the scuffle that followed a policeman was killed and two miners were shot dead. A photograph of the dead policeman was circulated to every single police station in South Africa and the strikers were called

"cop-killers".

It was in this situation of utmost tension that Cyril Ramaphosa wrote those emails. So you can say that within the rank and file of the workers' movement there is not much support for his presidential candidacy. However, the executive of the Congress of South African Trade Unions - still probably the largest union federation, led by members of the SACP - has come out publicly in support of Ramaphosa. As I have said, he is not only implicated in Marikana, but is one of the wealthiest capitalists - who, incidentally, owns the McDonald's franchise in South Africa.

Anyone but Zuma

The second complication is the fact that Jacob Zuma still faces 783 charges of money-laundering, fraud, etc, but, of course, as long as he is president he remains immune from prosecution. He has touted his ex-wife, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, to replace him as president (he has four current wives - three are still living with him, but the fourth has been pushed out because he says she tried to poison him). He has managed to get the ANC Youth League and Women's League to support Dlamini-Zuma's nomination.

So she and Ramaphosa are the two front runners to become president of the party at the ANC congress in December - and whoever becomes president of the ANC almost automatically becomes president of the country. The Communist Party declares that it "does not intervene" in internal matters of ANC politics - that is the official position. But the SACP is known to back Ramaphosa and both the YCL and Cosatu have come out openly in his support.

The party's position has been called ABZ - anyone but Zuma. If Dlamini-Zuma is elected, probably her first act would be to amnesty her ex-husband (she still lives in the same compound as him) and he will continue to pull the strings. Traditionally the deputy president has always succeeded the

incumbent, added to which the ABZ position means that there is no way the SACP will support Nkosazana.

Another candidate, current ANC treasurer Zweli Mkhize, as a Zulu has a strong following in KwaZulu-Natal - one has to take into account here the ethnic element. He is in Zuma's own territory. There is also Baleka Mbete, the (extraordinarily biased) speaker of parliament and the chair of the ANC, who has been accused of improperly receiving a driver's licence and of chartering a jet at state expense to attend the inauguration of Liberia's president in 2006.

All of the candidates are very wealthy - many of them seem to go along with the saying, 'We did not join the struggle to be poor'! Their wealth has not necessarily been accumulated through corruption. In 1948, when the Afrikaner nationalists won the election, Anglo-American hived off a company called General Mining. Shares were distributed to Afrikaner nationalists, who were able to pay for them out of their dividends. In other words, they were a gift. It was the same with Ramaphosa and other ANC figures - people were released from Robben Island with all their belongings in an apple box, but five years later they were in parliament, in business and within a few years were multi-millionaires. That does not happen without handouts. And these are the people who have their hats in the ring.

At the same time, within parliament the Economic Freedom Fighters are making the biggest running. But unfortunately most of the very fragmented left, led often by the Socialist Workers Party franchise, Keep Left, supports Julius Malema and his EFF, which they regard as 'leftwing'. The EFF talks socialist, it talks about seizing the land without compensation, but it is *national* socialist.

While after the fall of apartheid a deal was being sorted out between the ANC elite and the Afrikaner elite, some really good old liberals and radicals wrote a bill of rights and constitution. Section 25 of the constitution states that *any property* may

be confiscated, provided this would be in the public interest and there is "just and equitable" compensation, taking account of the history of the property, including subsidies, etc. In other words, the possibility of land nationalisation is in the constitution. Yet Malema's main point is the seizure of land.

The interesting thing about him as an individual is that he is the "commander-in-chief" of the EFF, whose structure is totally militaristic. Malema was expelled from the ANC Youth League, of which he was the leader, but how does someone who in that capacity earned R20,000 a month end up with a tax bill of R16 million? What I am trying to say is that he does not exactly have a good, clear, honest background. But the EFF is the main, so-called left opposition in parliament.

Then there is the leader of the United Democratic Movement, Bantu Holomisa - also expelled from the ANC - who as a military leader overthrew the Bantustan regime in the Transkei. He is a good guy - not corrupt - but he is a soldier. He thinks like a soldier - it is all tactics and no real policies.

He was expelled for revealing the fact that Nelson Mandela had taken a gift of R2 million - not for himself, but for the ANC - from a casino millionaire, Sol Kerzner, and in return charges against Kerzner, who was said to have "bought his freedom", were dropped. It was Holomisa himself who had laid charges against Kerzner for bribery and corruption. His UDM is very popular - but only in a small part of the Eastern Cape.

So there is a great deal of animosity, which has been played on by politicians of all sides - that is the legacy of apartheid that we have to live with.

The biggest opposition party, of course, is the Democratic Alliance - the equivalent of the Tories without the kicking boots. Traditionally the

DA has always had

Jacob Zuma with three of his wives



wealthy, white liberal support, although now its leader, Mmusi Maimane, is getting a degree of mass support on the ground among black people, who are just hacked off with the ANC.

What of the ANC itself? All the presidential candidates are pitching for support and they all have their own ANC constituencies - except Ramaphosa, who has a business constituency outside the party machine. But it is the party machines which really make the decisions in South Africa. If you control the national executive committee of the ANC and its working committee, you are in charge - and that is what Zuma has very shrewdly done.

In South Africa we pay our parliamentarians more than most other MPs anywhere else. And we have the largest cabinet in the world - 63 members, all of whom owe their position to the president. While he has become just a bit too embarrassing even for some of those people, he still has, I think, a marginal majority in the areas that really matter.

When or if?

So where do we go from here? People say, 'When Zuma goes ...' Well, there are a number of likely possibilities and a couple that are a bit more remote. One of those remote possibilities is ... 'If he goes ...' He may not go. Because of the situation on the ground and the fact that in real terms there is probably around 50% unemployment, with very little by way of a social net, we have a large number of what the police like to call "unrest incidents". These are anything from a march without police permission to the burning down of a public building.

The point is, they happen without any coherence or political consistency. It could be that a promised school has not been built, a road has not been repaired or there is inadequate water supply. But these "unrest incidents" are occurring all the time and it would be very easy to use those as an excuse for a state of emergency. A while ago I thought this was quite a high probability, although perhaps now Zuma does not have quite enough clout.

What he does have is large backing within the police and prison service, where the main union, Popcru, is run by Zuma supporters. Then there is the MK Military Veterans Association, run by a man called Kebby Maphatsoe, who happens to be the deputy minister of defence and has a very chequered past. In fact he is a former MK cook and deserter. Most MK veterans tend to be in their 60s or 70s. Even those who joined Umkhonto we Sizwe, the ANC's military wing, late in the day are not exactly youngsters any more. But among Maphatsoe's people - who wear military uniform, march in the streets and provide protection for ANC bigwigs - some are 30 years old. They must have joined the military at the age of two ...

So there is a division now between the MK veterans and the Zumaphiles, on the one hand, and, on the other, those in the ANC who are saying that our glorious movement has been betrayed and we need a completely new leadership to take us back onto the right track. But these 'real MK' are not going to break away - at least that is what they say. On the other hand, Maphatsoe and co are saying, 'Zuma is our man', he will always be our man.

That is the worrying thing. Maphatsoe claims he has 80,000 men and women under arms. I do not think there are anywhere near that many. Nevertheless all this represents a danger and one possibility at this stage.

After December

What emerges from the December congress depends on how the delegates are gerrymandered. Traditionally our delegations have always been gerrymandered - the SACP organises that rather well in Cosatu! A classic example



Julius Malema: national socialist

occurred in my neighbourhood, where a very good friend of mine organised the local ANC branch, which had about 40 members. They had gathered at a meeting to elect their delegates to congress, when in marched 60 'new members'. They kicked out the existing branch executive and replaced them with Zuma supporters.

Because the ANC is now so split, and there are so many people pulling so many strings, I cannot predict the outcome in December. It is a very volatile situation and there could actually be violent incidents. It has been said that there is a danger in South Africa of accepting the current outright corruption as 'normal'. In fact *political assassinations* are becoming normal.

A lot of such incidents have taken place in KwaZulu-Natal in particular, where it seems to be a matter of economics. With the degree of unemployment and poverty, one way out is to become a (very well paid) municipal councillor or - better still - an MP. Not only will you be able to look after your family if you are a councillor: you will also be able to organise tenders - for building roads, schools, toilets, etc - for other members of your circle. This has become extremely lucrative and has triggered these political assassinations - it is pure economics.

While I do not expect such extreme violence at the December congress, there is likely to be a run-off between Dlamini-Zuma and Ramaphosa. The split will remain. And the one thing the ANC, along with the SACP, has always stressed is that unity is the priority, no matter what. It was the same when we were in exile - which is why our organisation was so corrupt. While we had wonderful policies on paper, the actual practice deviated completely.

It could be that at congress it will be so clear that under neither Dlamini-Zuma nor Ramaphosa will there be 'unity' that there could be a space for another candidate, Lindiwe Sisulu. She is not corrupt as far as I know, but she is as hard as nails and quite ruthless as well as opportunistic. Throughout the recent controversies surrounding Zuma, she

kept completely quiet - she only made her play before the recent parliamentary 'no confidence' vote when he was seen as being completely undermined.

ANC chair Baleka Mbete is trying to hitch herself to Dlamini-Zuma - 'If she makes it I will be deputy president and we will be the first country with a female occupying both of the top two jobs.' And, as I have said, Zweli Mkhize is also making a play - that would raise the spectre of 'another Zulu taking over'. Before Zuma it was always Xhosas who were running the show, including Mandela, Oliver Tambo and Thabo Mbeki. In this situation people like Mathews Phosa are saying, 'I am the one', because he is from a minority group that is neither Xhosa nor Zulu.

However, I really do not think the ANC can be held together - I am sure we will see some sort of break. Unfortunately there does not seem to be even a social democratic break on the horizon - everything is about personalities.

On the fringes there is now emerging a whole array of 'civil groups' coming out against Zuma, some of which the DA tried to take over. And then there are those who are saying, 'We need a new politics' - that is where I think the left should be concentrating. But too many on the left see a short cut by supporting Malema, who already has 25 MPs in parliament. The SWP's Keep Left, for example, think they can influence Malema - he is 'someone who listens to us'.

Well, the 'commander-in-chief' will listen as long as he finds it convenient - and then crack down on those with a different view, I can guarantee it. I wrote a piece when the EFF first emerged. Three of us wrote about it and we said that we are seeing the emergence of our first, native-grown, modern fascism; we were castigated, mainly from the left. However, our line was taken up by the Communist Party!

What I am trying to say is that at the moment things do not look very good. The South African economy is unbelievably shaky. The government (and the Guptas) have pillaged so much that they have effectively bankrupted the country - the only means of

enriching themselves was through the state. So, when it comes to public enterprises like Eskom, the electricity utility, put your own people in there, put out the tenders, work the fiddles, sell at inflated prices - all that sort of thing has been going on. And we are now in extreme national debt.

At the same time, of course, the capitalist world has now downed South African bonds to junk status, which means that interest rates have risen and eventually we are going to have more austerity, because, of course, they have taken advice from none other than the British government (one of the first people to steer this course was Peter Mandelson, who came to South Africa regularly to give advice, along with Peter Hain).

And now they are talking about the need to tighten our belts and pull together - the usual thing. I do not think it is going to hold, but my fear is that there will not be a coherent alternative emerging in time and it will be very messy. That alternative *will* emerge at some time, I am sure, but right now it could be a very rough period for most of us.

Workers' party

In 2013 the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) split from the ANC and SACP and was subsequently expelled from Cosatu. Numsa's general secretary, Irvin Jim, is an old Communist Party member who is dyed in Stalinist aspic. I get on very well with him, but he is the boss man. He rides in the latest model Mercedes with his chauffeur and bodyguard, and Numsa has its own investment company, which makes a lot of money. This means that its last conference, for example, was held at the most expensive venue in the country and the union handed out expensive trundle bags and different golf shirts for each day to the 3,000 delegates.

But Numsa and Jim are the ones who have been pushing for a new workers' party. I said to Jim a couple of years ago, "You're a trade union. You're not a political party. Your aim should be to *facilitate* a workers' party and act as a *catalyst*." He agreed and now uses

the word, but still wants to get directly involved, confusing union and party.

Numsa has now set up a rival to Cosatu, the South African Federation of Trade Unions (Saftu), headed by Zwelinzima Vavi, the former general secretary of Cosatu, who was dismissed. There is an old saying in South Africa - 'You can't have two bulls in a kraal [paddock]', because they will fight. Vavi and Jim are definitely two bulls. Vavi, who runs the new federation, is by a long shot the most popular trade unionist in the country. Jim, however, has tight control over Numsa, the biggest union in the country and the mainstay of Saftu, which organises in key areas of the economy. Vavi has been touting round the country recruiting many smaller unions.

Vavi also says we need a workers' party, but he is not sure how it should be formed and on what basis. But Jim argues that the Communist Party went off the rails by becoming the tail trying to wag the ANC dog and they should have been concentrating on socialism (in one country - the same old stuff again). So what we need to do is set up a new party, which will be a *real* SACP-type Communist Party.

What will emerge out of that I do not know. I previously looked at it with some optimism, as it would hopefully encourage workers to get involved in independent organisation - a very good thing. But such a party must not be manipulated from the top - that is a big danger when jobs are precarious and there is such a huge number of unemployed. The good thing about Vavi is that he publishes his own salary. He states that everyone should disclose exactly what they earn, that no general secretary should earn more than the highest paid worker in the union, etc. But Jim has not gone along with that.

Nevertheless, the possibility of a new workers' party is one of the hopeful signs, along with what is emerging among so-called civil society groups - the shack-dwellers and so on. They are all over the show at the moment, but among them are some small groups arguing for good, solid Marxist politics ●

MEDIA**Richard Desmond: selling out**

Dirty Des bows out

As Trinity Mirror prepares to buy the *Express* and *Star* titles, William Kane looks at the state of the press

One almost pities the *Daily Express*, *Daily Star* and their Sunday sisters for the sheer lack of notoriety they enjoy in society at large.

The *Star* is a perfectly vile tabloid. Its diatribes against 'benefit scroungers', asylum-seekers and so on are so virulent that its own journalists have been known to resign in protest. And yet it is not, somehow, *The Sun*; it is boycotted nowhere in our fair isle. The *Express* is Brexit-mad to the point of barely restrained violence, and certainly well beyond basic honesty. Yet it is not, somehow, the *Daily Mail* - never allowed to forget its fascist past and vehemently pilloried by liberal opinion. The *Express* is a poor cousin; it tries too hard.

The mooted sale of all four titles to Trinity Mirror is, of course, an eye-opener. The latter organisation shares its name with its flagship title, the Labour-supporting *Daily Mirror*, although it is an increasingly vast and anonymous empire with many local papers in its portfolio. The swivel-eyed rightism of the *Express* and *Star* will make for odd stablemates - which raises the question of what exactly will become of them under the new owners, if the deal goes through.

The deal will also see the end of Richard Desmond's colourful career as a publishing mogul. Britain's press barons are a weird old crew - from *The Daily Telegraph's* Barclay brothers, who own their own Channel Island, to the oligarch and tireless self-promoter, Evgeny Lebedev of the *Evening Standard* and the online-only *The Independent*, to the big man, Rupert Murdoch himself, who should need no introduction to readers of a communist weekly. Desmond stands out as the slimiest of the slimeballs, a narcissist

and a pornographer, and - on the account of seemingly everyone who has ever worked for him - a vicious bully to boot. (He denies that he ever locked people in cupboards, but ex-employees keep claiming otherwise - on the record.)

He made his entry into the newspaper trade in 2000, and found himself immediately a cause of scandal simply on the question of whether a man of his particular character was 'fit and proper' to run a national newspaper. (For some reason, the British establishment, decades after selling *The Times* to Rupert Murdoch, still claims to have standards on this point.) Desmond's response was to go, like the mountain, to Muhammad - in this connection, Tony Blair - and offer to take the *Express* papers in a Labour-supporting direction. Thus the publisher of *Asian Babes* and *Spunk Loving Sluts* began to launder his business interests, although he would not drop the last of his porn interests for some time thereafter.

More eye-catching even than *Asian Babes* is Desmond's bizarre run-in with the New York mafia. In 1992, he met with Norman Chanes and Ricky Martino of the Gambino organisation, after which the mobsters agreed to purchase adverts for their phone sex lines in Desmond's skin-mags. Desmond denies to this day that he knew of their connections, but found out soon enough, when it transpired that the circulation figures advertised to Chanes and Martino were grossly exaggerated, and the return on their investment was diddly-squat. In revenge, the Mafiosi beat seven hells out of Desmond's then *consigliere*, Philip Bailey. They eventually succeeded in extorting £2 million out of Desmond, who had to hire bodyguards; the money was

delivered in crisp £20 notes to Gambino representatives at a Soho restaurant.¹

Parasitism

As a proprietor, Desmond's tenure has been characterised by extreme parasitism. All individual newspaper proprietors sit on a spectrum between the pure profit motive and the desire to increase their influence and prestige; Desmond is one of the furthest positioned towards the former. His employees have only recently escaped an eight-year pay freeze. The editorial floor has lost 40% of its net headcount over his tenure. Meanwhile - even before the sale is finalised - Desmond has made £150 million out of it. One is reminded of Philip Green and BHS - the fashion tycoon managed to bleed over £500 million in dividends out of the ailing retailer, before selling it on to a serial bankrupt on the eve of the collapse of its pension fund. In Desmond's case, he seems never to have very much believed that the newspapers he runs have much of a future; profit is guaranteed by naked editorial pandering and by running as lean a ship as possible.

Desmond has simultaneously enjoyed his public image as the hard man of Fleet Street and robustly defended his reputation - with litigation, when things got too out-of-hand. Tom Bower, the muckraking biographer, completed his account of Desmond's rise in 2006; it was even printed, but never published. So far as politics is concerned, he is a little harder to parse. The dealings with Blair have a very transactional smell to them, possibly more on account of Blair's involvement than his, although it is not clear what exactly he got in return. Less so his substantial donations to the UK Independence Party, which rather reek of a man, in the American phrase, who has drunk a little too much of his own Kool-Aid.

We expect he will get more than a Philip Green-style £1 for his papers from Trinity Mirror; so what does the latter get in return? The *Star* is declining rapidly enough, and is a direct competitor to the *Mirror* itself; it is surely destined for the dumpster. With the *Express*, however, Trinity Mirror is buying itself into a fresh segment of the newspaper market - the so-called 'mid-market papers', which includes only the *Express* titles and their larger rivals, the *Daily Mail* and *Mail On Sunday*.

Their audience is predominantly petty bourgeois and greying, and both stables have come to ruthlessly pander to - and reinforce - the most popular prejudices among their target demographic. Paul Dacre of the *Mail* has built a career on his supposedly instinctive understanding of the fears of his readership; Desmond imposed a similar regime at the *Express* title, focus-grouping editorial policy and, if anything, skirting even closer to outright slander than its notorious rivals (it was the *Express*, for example, that continued to run with conspiracy theories about Princess Diana and Madeleine McCann long after their sell-by dates).

The question then arises as to whether Trinity Mirror could take the two papers to the left; and, on one level, of course they could. It would hardly be possible to take them to the right, after all; and papers can flip their political alignments if need be (as indeed happened with *The Sun*, which was originally a labour-movement paper, the *Daily Herald*). The other option would be to leave the *Express* more or less as it is - maybe toning down the most Dunkirkian of the Brexiteer rants - shut down the *Star* and move the *Mirror* to the right. There is no reason at all why the *Mirror* should always support Labour - after all, in the 1930s,

it was even more enthusiastic than the *Mail* about Mosley's Blackshirts (both at the time were owned by Harold Harmsworth).

This, in the end, is a calculation, made in a context of declining circulation and revenue of print newspapers (a decline all too often mistaken for imminent death). Indeed, we have been harsh on Dirty Desmond, but we should not pretend that he is uniquely a devil in an industry otherwise represented by angels. In truth, Desmond is not an aberration, but rather a sort of supererogatory, pure Platonic essence of the newspaper proprietor. He is known for his tangles with organised crime, but crime does not get much better organised than the phone-hacking at the Murdoch papers (and, lest we forget, the *Mirror*). He is known as a pornographer, but the *Mail* has the smuttier website, thanks to the notorious 'side-bar of shame' (by such means does *Mail Online* maintain its crown as the most visited news website in the world). He is a bully, in an industry built by swaggering macho barons. He is cynical and ruthlessly exploitative in his pursuit of profits; and so is the more 'corporate' outfit about to take his print interests off his hands.

None of Desmond's vices are remotely unique to him: he merely embodies them in archetype, and fails to conceal his viciousness even to the minimal degree of his rivals. Desmond's short career as a newspaper publisher will probably not be remembered too keenly - his was not one of the great historic media empires, even at its peak. Yet you could almost learn more from it than any of the others. Richard Desmond is Rupert Murdoch's true face ●

Notes

1. See *Private Eye's* review of Desmond's autobiography, *The real deal*, June 26 2015.

POLEMIC

Rearming the April theses

With the help of some new insights, Rex Dunn argues that Lars T Lih's continuity theory does not stand up, despite the new evidence he has uncovered

I disagree with Lars T Lih's *new* narrative of the October revolution, in his series of articles entitled 'All power to the soviets'.¹ Challenged to do some 'serious thinking', as opposed to relying on the *old* rearming narrative - viz Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* (which comrade Jack Conrad might describe as "myth-making") - I realised that I had to go through Lih's evidence-based series with a fine-tooth comb. But this is not enough; Even Lih comes armed with a theory: that there is a continuity between old Bolshevism and Lenin's April theses. Therefore I decided to look at Lih's work through the theoretical prism of Lenin's theses themselves (including his explanatory 'Letters to the party', which followed.)²

Apropos Trotsky's *History*, I discovered that there are two versions. The first one was written in 1918 and covers the period of the revolution up to Brest-Litovsk. It is shorter and more objective: ie, less factional towards his opponents within the party. Instead he directs his criticism outwards - towards the opposition parties - whereas in his second *History*, written at the end of the 1920s, he does the opposite.

Why? By that time the party had been virtually destroyed by the impact of the imperialist-led counterrevolution; concretely, the terrible cost of the civil war, which led to a counterrevolution from within. Democratic centralism had given way to top-down rule by a handful of individuals. Initially this led to much factional infighting, which ended with the ban on factions in 1921. As long as the October revolution remained isolated, it was inevitable that the centralised party would become increasingly bureaucratic as well.

In 1926-27, by means of the 'triumvirate' of himself, Kamenev and Zinoviev, Stalin was able to impose his own personal rule, based on the cult of personality. The principle of top-down rule was institutionalised, whilst the supremo went on to use the repressive apparatus of the state as his power base. In ideological terms, this marked a return to the very tendencies which Lenin had attacked in his theses: namely opportunism and social-chauvinism. But now these tendencies acquired a new form. In a period of defeat for the world revolution, it was easy to sell the idea of building 'socialism in one country' to the war-weary and downtrodden Russian masses. Without the benefit of hindsight, they were oblivious to the fact that, in reality, this was impossible. Millions had to be brutally sacrificed along the way, whilst the socialist dream disappeared from view.

Against this poisonous background the outcast, Leon Trotsky, writes his second *History of the Russian Revolution*. Understandably, given the machinations of the triumvirate in ousting him, he exaggerates the crisis which arose out of the April theses. According to Trotsky, prior to Lenin's return, in one of his 'Letters from afar' (March 17), Lenin attacks Kamenev and Stalin, because they appeared to be giving critical support to the Provisional government; yet the latter was "deceiving the workers, giving out the imperialist war as a war of defence". He quotes Lenin as saying: "Our party would disgrace itself forever, kill itself politically, if it took part in such a deceit ... I would choose an immediate split ... rather than surrender to social patriotism."³ But when Lenin tries to rearm the party via his theses, Kamenev writes in *Pravda* (April 8) that they are "unacceptable". Hence we have what Trotsky calls the "April crisis". On



Dismantling tsarism - but what followed was dual power

the other hand, it is equally true that the leadership agreed to discuss their differences openly in the run-up to the party conference. Ten years later this would not have been possible.

As for Lenin's April theses, when I reread them I thought I understood them - until I read his explanatory letters. Only then did I understand where Lenin is coming from. The key to this is to recognise his mastery of the Marxist method: As Marxists, we have to begin with a concrete analysis of every question; in this case, the unfolding revolution in Russia, which constitutes a "new living reality". Exile or no, he realised that there had been an enormous shift in the masses during two and a half years of war, whereas old Bolshevism failed to see this. In addition,

Lenin's new insight was enhanced by his reading of the latest literature on imperialism. As a result, he wrote his pamphlet, *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism* (1916): the 'Parasitism and decay of capitalism' (chapter 8) is propped up by two components - one objective, the other subjective:

1. Imperialism is extracting 'superprofits' from overseas investments, which leads to rivalry and world war.
2. At the same time, we have the Second International, whose leaders base themselves on the 'labour aristocracy'; the latter, in turn, are the chief "prop of the bourgeoisie, the real agents of the bourgeoisie in the working class movement".

Therefore Kautsky, Plekhanov and co "take the side of the bourgeoisie, the 'Versailles' against the 'Communards'."⁴

As a result, Lenin begins to understand the real significance of the betrayal of the international revolution in 1914.

Despite his meticulous academic research into the party archives, Lih fails to appreciate these insights; therefore he does not understand Lenin's April theses either. Like the old Bolsheviks, he seeks to exonerate, he relies on an *a priori* theory of continuity: ie, between old Bolshevism and the theses. But it is my job to show that the opposite is the case - by going back to the 'horse's mouth'.

April theses

Lih glosses over these, so it is up to me to reproduce them, followed by an analysis of what they mean:

1. "Not the slightest concession to

'revolutionary defencism'.⁵ The latter can only be justified once power has passed into the hands of the proletariat and the "poorest sections of the peasants", who have become their allies. More important than exposing the government before the masses is the need to patiently explain this connection to them, "to prove that without overthrowing capital it is impossible to end the war ..."

2. The country is "passing from the first stage of the revolution" - which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie - to its second stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants.

3. "No support for the Provisional government; the utter falsity of its promises should be made clear ... Exposure in place of impermissible, illusion-breeding 'demand' [eg] that this government is a government of capitalists, should cease to be an imperialist government" (!)

4. The Bolsheviks are in a minority in the soviets, "as against a bloc of all the petty bourgeois, opportunist elements [Socialist Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, etc], who have yielded to the influence of the bourgeoisie and spread its influence among the proletariat". The way to reverse this situation is as follows: "The masses must be made to see that the soviets ... are the only possible form of revolutionary government"; hence the need to patiently explain this to them, etc.

5. "Not a parliamentary republic [eg, via the Constituent Assembly] - to return to [such a body] from the soviets ... would be a retrograde step - but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies throughout the country."

At this point Lenin introduces the idea of the need for a "commune state" in Russia: abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy. The salaries of all [elected officials, who are replaceable at any time] not to exceed [the average wage].

6. The agrarian programme to be "shifted to the Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies. Confiscation of all landed estates. Nationalisation of all lands in the country, the land to be disposed by the Soviets of Agricultural Labourers and Peasants Deputies."

7. "Nationalisation of all the banks in the country into a single bank" under the control of the soviets.

8. "It is not our immediate task to 'introduce socialism', but only to bring social production and distribution" under the control of the soviets, as a first step.

9. Party tasks: (a) "Immediate convocation of a party congress; (b) alteration of the party programme, mainly (i) on the question of imperialism, and the imperialist war; (ii) on our attitude towards the state and our demand for a 'commune state'; (iii) amendment of the out-of-date minimum programme; (iv) change the party's name [to the Communist Party]."

10. A new International" to replace the moribund Second International.

"I am opposed to the speedy convocation of the Constituent Assembly."⁶

Analysis

Contrary to Lih's theory of continuity, Lenin's April theses are based on his theory of imperialism (cited above), which marks a new phase in the revolutionary struggle, combined with his revival of Marx's theory of the "commune state". In other words, he picks up on Marx's point that the commune was an expression of "unconscious tendencies", which must now be made conscious, both within the party and the proletariat.

POLEMIC

Why? Because the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia had ceased to be “the stimulus for a socialist revolution in Europe”, which would then drag Russia in behind it. In his theses Lenin adopts a “new position”: the “prospect of an immediate transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat”, albeit allied to the *poor* peasants.

Lenin next argues that the bourgeois-democratic revolution is already completed through the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasants, which is manifested in the soviets. But more work has to be done before the soviets can exercise *vsya vlast sovetam* (all power to the soviets) in reality. The party must fight to turn the soviets into the basis of a commune state. Concretely the Bolshevik activists have to split “the anti-defencists, internationalist, ‘communist’ elements” among the proletariat (and their poor peasant allies) from “the petty bourgeois elements”: ie, the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, etc, who, in practice “are in favour of ‘supporting’ the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois government”.⁶

A commune state in Russia will lay the foundation for a socialist revolution. But, given the betrayal by German social democracy and the Second International in 1914, “our” revolution now becomes the stimulus for the socialist revolution in the west, not the other way round.

Compare old Bolshevism’s view of *vsya vlast sovetam* - as the basis for completing the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia, which must then await the victory of the socialist revolution in the west. But this does not take sufficient account of reality after three years of imperialist war. The birth of the German Communist Party is over a year away. Meanwhile a new international has to be created to help this into being, etc.

Now that I have my prism, I am sufficiently armed to examine Lars T Lih’s work in detail.

‘Biography of a slogan’

In his first article, ‘All power to the soviets: biography of a slogan’ (*Weekly Worker* April 20), Lih starts with his discussion of the *hegemony* strategy, which is conveniently vague. “All power to the soviets!” is based firmly on the application of old Bolshevism to the prevailing circumstances in Russia after the February revolution.” To back this up, he quotes from Zinoviev’s reply to the theses in *Pravda* (NB: in the same issue - April 8 - that Kamenev publishes his rejection of them). This is intended to show that there were no real differences between Lenin and the other leading comrades: “There can only be a single *vlast* [which] should be the Soviets of Worker and Soldier deputies.” But what were the soviets to do with this *vlast* once they had undisputed power? Hand it back to the Constituent Assembly, since no-one opposed its convocation (whereas Lenin says that this should be delayed as long as possible)? Lih backs up Zinoviev’s position with a quote from party historian Vladimir Nevsky’s book (published in 1926): “Lenin’s position [in the April theses] was the natural development of the doctrine that he had worked out long ago in the previous periods of the history of our party.” Not so, as I shall point out in due course.

I agree with Lih that the April theses do not call for “an immediate implementation of socialism”; and, moving on to the question of making demands on the Provisional government, Lih is correct when he says that Lenin was opposed to making demands which “in his eyes ... only spread illusions about the possibility of reform” (thesis 3). But for Lih it is an ‘either-or’ question (“What! ... do you mean we should forego exposure campaigns that make demands such as ‘publish the secret treaties’?”) Rather Lenin means that it is no use making such demands unless the party activists take this message to the masses by means of “a systematic and patient explanation of the errors of their tactics,



Peasants vital for Russian Revolution: Kazimir Malevich, ‘Head of peasant’ (1928-29)

an explanation especially adapted to the practical needs of the masses” (thesis 4). Therefore Kamenev is right when he says, “The policy of making demands that I am making is an agitational device for the development of the masses ... of showing the masses that if they really want to create a revolutionary policy on the international level, then the *vlast* must be transferred into the hands of the soviet.” Correct, as long as Kamenev takes Lenin’s point seriously: the masses must be patiently *educated* about the character of the Provisional government.

As for the reception of the theses, Lih refers to a “category” of Bolsheviks who labelled them as “Lenin’s enthusiasms”: ie, those parts which are outside the “core consensus”, but not antithetical to it. “Under this category falls bank syndicalisation, renaming the party and the soviets as a higher form of democracy (in contrast to the soviets as a vehicle for the worker/peasant *vlast*). These proposals were not shocking or controversial as such, but nevertheless people wondered how relevant ... they were to the task of crafting a dynamic party message in the ongoing revolution.”

Once again Lih misses the point. Firstly, apropos the “nationalisation of the banks into a single national bank [under the control of] the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies” (thesis 7), here Lenin is referring to Marx, *après* his initial “glorification” of the Commune. (NB: He later says: “The financial measures of the Commune [were] remarkable for their sagacity and moderation.” etc.)⁷ Compare Marx’s first draft of his pamphlet on *The civil war in France* (1871), wherein he raises the ‘unconscious tendencies’ of the Communards to the level of theory (eg, “The people had only to organise [their] militia on a national scale, to do away with the standing army”, etc.)⁸

On this basis, Lenin understands that Marx’s theoretical conceptions about the Commune must now be put into practice by the Bolsheviks. But for that to happen they have to be grasped by everyone, including party activists; otherwise there can be no revolution. In short, Marx’s theorising about the lessons of the Commune becomes the basis for his theory of the post-capitalist state: ie, a new political form for the dictatorship of the proletariat, which will permit the transition to a classless society. This is why Lenin raises the demand for a “commune state” in his theses (thesis 9).

Finally, in support of his theory of continuity, Lih ends his first article by moving forward to May 7 1917, when the slogan, ‘All power to the soviets’, makes its first public appearance - on the front page of *Pravda* in the “draft of a mandate for use in electing delegates to the Soviet of Worker and Soldier Deputies”. Linked to the usual *vlast* demand, “The mandate calls for state control of production and distribution ...” The only question is who will have the *vlast*, who will have the final say about actual policies? Thus the flipside of ‘All power to the soviets’

is condemnation of any agreement with the capitalists: “... leaving the capitalist gentlemen with the *vlast* prolongs the war and worsens the situation within the country”. So far, so good.

Lih continues:

“The theme of socialism is conspicuous by its absence. Also absent are any of Lenin’s personal enthusiasms: soviets as a higher form of democracy ... Otherwise the policies advocated by the mandate came from the same social democratic ‘minimum programme’ and the common democratic platform of the socialist parties: a just peace, land to the peasants, eight-hour day, a universal militia. The campaign against the secret treaties is not forgotten ... To sum up, the mandate is a concrete application of the long-standing Bolshevik consensus: a *vlast* based on workers and peasants committed to carrying the revolution to the end by enacting a broad, ‘democratic’ transformation of Russian society.

But he fails to mention that by May 7 Lenin had won a majority for his theses at the all-party conference, which was held at the end of April. This called for a “republic of Soviets of Workers’, Agricultural Labourers’ and Peasants’ Deputies ...” (thesis 5), as well as his new strategy: “our demand for a commune state” (thesis 9).

The reality is that before this there was a gulf between the Lenin of the April theses and the supporters of old Bolshevism, which erupts into a crisis, capable of splitting the party. This is because:

1. Lenin’s theses were attacked publicly by Kamenev and Zinoviev in *Pravda*.
2. The Petrograd and Moscow parties voted to reject them.
3. In an attempt to save the party from a split, it was agreed that Lenin should provide further clarification via his ‘Letters to the party’ (which Lih ignores).

The first of these is called ‘Assessment of the present situation’. Here Lenin criticises those who “take after those ‘old Bolsheviks’ who more than once already have played so regrettable a role in the history of our party” by “reiterating formulas senselessly learned by rote instead of studying the specific features of the new and living reality”.⁹ Another section is devoted to a specific attack against Kamenev, because he does not see the danger of an alliance with the Mensheviks in the soviets; yet they are petty bourgeois elements, who have turned towards “chauvinism (= defencism)”.¹⁰ The second letter is called ‘The tasks of the proletariat in our revolution’, which I shall refer to later.

To return to the situation of May 7, following the debate around Lenin’s Letters, which leads to their acceptance by the all-Russia conference, presumably the party is now united behind the theses. It is therefore ready to pursue the tasks which are laid out in them:

1. Power must be passed to the communist elements among the proletariat (and their poor peasant allies) in the soviets.
2. There has to be a complete break with capitalist interests.
3. Only then can the annexations be renounced “in deed”.

Yet this unity among the leadership was only skin-deep. On the one hand, as Trotsky points out, for the next few months, Stalin kept a low profile, whereas Kamenev voted against the insurrection, come October 1917.

‘The logic of Bolshevik “hegemony”’

In the interests of his continuity theory, which somehow encompasses Lenin’s theses, Lih tells us in ‘The logic of Bolshevik “hegemony”’ (*Weekly Worker* May 4) that this includes Kautsky as well: the hegemony strategy is derived from an article written by Kautsky in 1906. Despite the fact that this is Weberian or schematic in method, prior to 1914 Kautsky was recognised as the leading theoretician of the Second International.

Lih reminds us that this strategy was supported by Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin. But he fails to point out that this was before the betrayal of German social democracy in 1914, which Kautsky effectively goes along with. Therefore, post-1914 his “merciless rejection of Menshevism” (Trotsky’s words) were not worth the paper they were written on. 1914 changed everything - certainly for Lenin and Trotsky! In this regard, Lih’s methodology is *ahistorical* - compare Marxism.

Lih informs us that Kautsky’s pamphlet (which came about as a tactical disagreement with Plekhanov) was “seized on by the left wing of the Russian party as a crushing vindication of their own strategy”. At least he gets to the nub of the question, when he says that

Kautsky’s overall argument can be presented as ... a major premise about class allies in general, a minor premise about the specific situation in Russia and a logical conclusion about how to describe the current Russian Revolution ... it is not possible for social democracy to achieve victory without the help of another class.

What Kautsky is saying here is that both the German and Russian revolutions share a common strategy *vis-à-vis* the question of a class alliance, despite the enormous difference between the size and economic power of the proletariat in Germany, compared to its Russian counterpart. Therefore it is crucial that the former asserts its *independence* in the struggle for socialism, in particular, by breaking with parliamentarism and creating its own organs of dual power: viz workers’ councils; not by forming alliances with other progressive petty bourgeois

parties in the Reichstag. (Therefore the question of whether social democracy is the dominant or “junior partner in a governmental coalition” is irrelevant.)

It was only later that Lenin woke up to Kautsky’s adherence to reformism: in other words, all along social democracy had been acting as a block to the socialist revolution in Germany; yet Germany was an advanced capitalist nation, and its working class was the largest and best organised of any in the world! Whereas in a backward country like Russia, on the one hand, the proletariat had acquired revolutionary consciousness, but, on the other, it was tiny minority of the population; therefore it was necessary to form an alliance with another *oppressed* class under its leadership. Compare Lenin’s pre-1917 position: “A bourgeois revolution, brought about by the proletariat and the peasantry despite the instability of the bourgeoisie.”

But, come 1917, he realised that this had to be an alliance with the *poor* peasantry or agricultural labourers - the majority of peasants, who were being exploited by a minority: ie, other peasant landlords (thesis 5). Thus Kautsky’s strategy for the German and Russian revolutions amounts to what would later be called popular frontism: ie, a recipe for the defeat of the socialist revolution.

Kautsky also points out that “the revolution in Russia cannot be called a socialist one either”, on the grounds that the bourgeois revolution in Russia had hardly started. Whilst this is true, it should be noted that, according to Marx, the socialist revolution can only succeed, even in the most advanced capitalist countries, if it occurs on an international scale. This requires that the subjective factor is adequate to the task, both ideologically and organisationally (cf the Second International under Kautsky’s leadership). On the other hand, Kautsky acknowledges that the “present revolution in Russia is already pointing toward the introduction of a socialist mode of production”, even though “No social democrat (including Trotsky) ... would have disagreed that Russia’s peasant majority blocked socialist transformation in Russia taken by itself.” But “Writing a decade later, immediately after the February revolution, Kautsky opens up the possibility that the peasant will follow the proletariat.” (However he fails to distinguish between the quasi-proletarian ‘peasant labourers’ and their petty bourgeois counterparts: cf Lenin in his April theses.)

At the same time, in a staggering display of political myopia, Kautsky omits to mention the enormous setback to the world revolution of social democracy’s betrayal in 1914. With hindsight, this would prove to be insurmountable. (Surely, if the German proletariat had been led by a revolutionary party which was committed to the independent struggle of the working class - ie, which had followed a revolutionary strategy, as demonstrated by the Russian proletariat in 1905 - it would have been in a position to seize power in 1914 instead of capitulating to social chauvinism and its imperialist masters. Then it would not have been necessary for the Bolsheviks to take a “gamble” with history in October 1917, in the hope that their revolution would stimulate the revolution in Germany.) Kautsky has the temerity to say: “We ... do not know what influence it [the Russian proletariat] will exert on western Europe and how it will stimulate the proletarian movement there.”

Post-1917, in historical terms, the Russian Revolution - and the desperate struggle to defend it against the bourgeois counterrevolution - led to a *negative dialectic*. Once again, Kautsky plays a significant role: despite the suffering of the German army at the front and starvation at home (as a result of the British naval blockade), given the ideological hold which social democracy had over the working class, it was still able to split the masses from the revolutionary vanguard, come the German revolution of 1919-21. This was aided and abetted by Kautsky’s

What we fight for

pamphlets on democracy (which does not eschew the parliamentary road) and the red terror in Russia. Meanwhile the Russian Revolution became more isolated and its “iron dictatorship” became more entrenched.

I will end this section with a few comments about Lih’s description of Stalin’s position in March 1917, courtesy of Kautsky (Stalin had just become co-editor of *Pravda*, along with Kamenev). Lih writes that at this time Stalin “offered passive or even active support to a Provisional government dominated by liberals”. We are further told that “this unrevolutionary behaviour was the direct consequence of the inadequacies of old Bolshevism and its inability to respond to the post-February situation”. Hence Stalin is contradicting the “hegemony scenario”, which everyone accepted.

But Lih comes to Stalin’s defence, arguing that he had not abandoned this scenario at all, because he says that the hegemony of the proletariat is a “living fact”; he even talks about an alliance between the proletariat and the ‘poorest peasantry’, as part of a “worker-peasant *vlast*”.

Finally, is it permissible for social democrats to participate in a “revolutionary worker-peasant government”? Of course Stalin does not say that (then)! But the point here is that, when Stalin refers to the “government”, he is not thinking in terms of “All power to the soviets” in the real sense of the term; because, as Lenin pointed out in his Letters, at that time, the old Bolsheviks were not trying to split “the anti-defencist, internationalist ‘communist’ elements from the small proprietor, petty bourgeois elements”, who were “in favour of supporting the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois government” (see Lenin’s ‘Assessment’ above).

‘Thirteen to two?’

In order to support his continuity theory, Lih has to demolish the old ‘rearming’ narrative once and for all. Once again, his argument is unconvincing, despite a plethora of evidence. Firstly, in ‘Thirteen to two?’ (*Weekly Worker* July 27) he rejects the idea that the theses exploded “like a bomb among the Bolshevik activists”. Rather, initially “The ... committee voted *unanimous approval* of the theses as a whole; the recorded 13-2 vote [against] was on a motion by Zalezhsy”, who “proposed that the theses be accepted without any reservations or criticisms”. So the vote came about as a result of a discussion, following the intervention by another comrade, called Bagdatev, who expressed four “misgivings”.

The first of these asks whether Lenin wants to ban the use of “demands” in agitation campaigns. I have already answered this question by referring to the theses, which call for the party to patiently explain to the masses, especially their representatives in the soviets. In his letter on ‘Tasks ...’, under a section called ‘The peculiar nature of the tactics which follow’, Lenin further amplifies this:

... our work must be one of criticism, of explaining the mistakes of the petty bourgeois Socialist Revolutionary and Social Democratic parties, of preparing and welding the elements of a *consciously proletarian*, communist party, and of *curing* the proletariat of the ‘general’ petty bourgeois intoxication ...

The “prevailing *orgy of revolutionary phrase-mongering*” in *Pravda* will not do.¹¹

Bagdatev’s second “misgiving” asks whether Lenin believes that the “bourgeois-democratic revolution is over” and therefore “we no longer need peasants allies”. Once again, this shows the gulf in understanding that existed between Lenin and this worker-activist comrade. Since comrades like him are key to the success of the party’s strategy, it also points up the real nature of the crisis within the party, which Lih seeks to deny.

To reiterate:
1. The theses argue that the bourgeois-democratic revolution is already completed,

via the democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants, manifested in the soviets; but now the soviets have to be transformed into higher form of democracy, the basis of a commune type of state, etc. 2. To this end, Lenin insists on the struggle for “*a republic of agricultural Labourers’ and Peasants’ Deputies throughout the country*” (my emphasis); not just the an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry. Otherwise the “worker-peasant *vlast*” is based on an insoluble contradiction: ie, it is meaningless.

Bagdatev’s third “misgiving” asks whether Lenin really wants to give up the slogan, ‘Convene the Constituent Assembly!’ Bagdatev concedes that, as

Com Lenin says, ... to go from the soviets back to parliamentarism would be to go backwards ... that the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies can replace local self-government [and even replace] the Constituent Assembly ... [But] the best method is to force the Provisional government to leave, to demand the promptest possible calling of the CA, after it has turned into a demand for a majority. In Lenin’s theses, there is nothing about the CA.

In answer to the first point, this amounts to a strategy of reformism: ie, giving back power to the bourgeois state in the name of (bourgeois) democracy, as opposed to proletarian democracy (dictatorship of the proletariat). Secondly, as I have already pointed out, Lenin does not oppose calling the CA. But, when he says he is not in a hurry to do so, he is anticipating the outcome, which is that it will produce a majority for the petty bourgeois parties; on the other hand, hitherto the old Bolsheviks had not been pursuing a strategy to split the communist elements from the rest in the soviets, who are in favour of handing power back to the bourgeoisie. If the Bolsheviks did not win control of the soviets, on this basis, it would be a disaster for the revolution.

Lih continues by stating that during the CC debate, Iurenev, leader of the Left Menshevik faction (which Trotsky first joined when he returned to Russia in May 1917, and which later merged with the Bolshevik Party), argues that Lenin “should be talking about the soviet of worker and *soldier* deputies”, not “the agricultural wage worker”, at this point in time, because splitting them away from the officer caste is crucial. He may have been right to place the emphasis on the soldiers, but why counterpose this to the agricultural labourers, who are the majority of the army anyway?

Lih should have deferred to Lenin’s letters at this point. In his ‘Assessment of the present situation’, he is much closer to the present reality - and what is required - than anyone else:

... the question as to what are the soviets, whether they are a higher type than a parliamentary republic, more convenient for the struggle, for combatting ... the grain shortage, etc - from this real, urgent, vital issue, attention is diverted to the empty, would-be scientific, but actually hollow ... dead question of ‘building an immediate transformation’. An idle question falsely presented. I ‘build’ only on this, exclusively on this - that the workers, soldiers and peasants will deal better than the officials ... and the police, with the difficult, practical problems of producing more grain, distributing it better and keeping the soldiers better supplied, etc.¹²

Bagdatev’s fourth “misgiving” asks whether Lenin is right to call for the party to change its name to the Communist Party. Lih is correct to point out that this is not just a semantic question: it is a political one. It starts with thesis 9, ‘Party tasks: ... alteration of the party programme’, to deal properly with the question of imperialism and imperialist war: “On our attitude towards the state and our demand for a ‘commune state’. Amendment of our out-of-date minimum programme; change the party’s name; a new International.” Lenin wants to distinguish the Bolshevik

Party from social democratic reformism, as practised by the Second International: “We must take the initiative in creating a revolutionary international, an International against the social chauvinists and against the ‘centre’” (thesis 10): ie, Kautsky in Germany; MacDonald in Britain, etc. Bagdatev says that “Lenin is wrong there.” We should not do this for fear of cutting off those workers who support the centre! “Now is not the time to divide the masses just because they don’t fully understand. *The [whole] point on party tasks is superfluous* [!] (my emphasis). This equals opportunism.

Only Zalezhsy stood behind Lenin: “... on changing the name, this is not a very important issue, but I don’t agree with Bagdatev’s rationale: namely fear of cutting off the centre.” The main thing is that Lenin wants to “divide us from those chauvinists in general, those who now name themselves social democrats”.

Yet Lih concludes this article by reaffirming his position: the April theses do not represent “a radical break with earlier Bolshevism”, compared with the “rearming” argument. Rather we find the opposite is the case: ie, “a great stress on Bolshevik positions in the past”. How big a political, strategic and tactical divide does Lih want before he considers that this might constitute a crisis in the party?

‘Lenin glosses the April theses’

Lih starts this article (*Weekly Worker* August 3) by devoting nearly a page to another renegade: ie, Plekhanov, “the father of Russian Marxism”. We will not dwell on his canards, such as his absurd claim that Lenin blamed Russian imperialism for the war and “portrays Germany as an innocent victim”. Rather let us go straight to Plekhanov’s “killer blow” against Lenin. Here he echoes Marx in schematic mode:

If capitalism has not yet attained in any given country its highest point, [at which] it becomes an obstacle for the further development of the productive forces - then it is absurd to summon the workers, both urban and rural, and the poorest part of the peasants to overthrow it.

Thus “Lenin’s call for a seizure of political power by the toiling masses is not justifiable, but rather ‘an insane and extremely harmful attempt to sow anarchistic confusion and division within the Russian land’”. Lih answers Plekhanov by saying that Lenin had two choices: first, he could have rejected the former’s “assertion about the absence of the objective conditions for socialism in Russia in 1917”; and, secondly, he could have denied that

socialism had to wait until objective conditions are present [in Russia]. In both ... cases, Lenin would indeed be rearming the party with a vengeance. At the cost of rejecting the basic tenets of so-called ‘Second International Marxism’ in general and old Bolshevism in particular, he would then be able to proclaim the socialist character of the revolution.

My answer to Lih is that he ignores Lenin’s 1916 pamphlet on imperialism. Once again, this states that, in the epoch of capitalist decline and imperialist rivalry, parliamentarism and social chauvinism, mediated by social democracy, which has now become the means to prop up capitalism, in both the objective and subjective sense. At the same time, imperialist war places the revolution on the agenda - in the first instance, this led to the infamous betrayal of 1914. Therefore, as far as Russia is concerned, history has taken “an abrupt turn”, which must be addressed by the Bolshevik Party; otherwise:

(a) A weak Russian bourgeoisie might bypass the Provisional government by forming an alliance with rightwing officers in the army, in order to set up a military dictatorship on behalf of the old regime; which would be more repressive than tsarism (cf the Kornilov threat in

August 1917).

(b) The front would collapse, which would allow the Austro-German army to annex Russia’s bread basket, etc. (NB: in the absence of a revolution in Germany in 1918, this led to Brest-Litovsk, whereby large sections of the Ukraine were annexed by the central powers, at least temporarily.)

(c) The workers and peasants might try to seize power without the leadership of a revolutionary party (the Bolsheviks), which would be disastrous.

(d) There could be a combination of all three. Thus in his *Lessons of October*, Trotsky writes: “... we can lay down as almost an unalterable law that a party crisis is inevitable in the transition from the preparatory revolutionary activity to the immediate struggle for power”, because “A tactical turn implies a greater or lesser break in these habits and methods”. Herein lies the direct and most immediate root of internal party friction and crises, wrote Lenin in July 1917:

... when history makes an abrupt turn, even the most advanced parties are unable for a longer or shorter period of time to adapt themselves to new conditions. They keep repeating the slogans of yesterday - slogans which were correct yesterday, but which have lost all their meaning today, becoming devoid of meaning ‘suddenly’, with the self-same ‘suddenness’ that history makes its abrupt turn.¹³

Ditto the downturn in the world revolution by 1921, leading on to Lenin’s final illness. But this time the results could not have been more different.

Conclusion

Like Kamenev and co, Lih misunderstands Lenin’s theses: viz his insistence that Marxism requires a concrete analysis of every situation. The unfolding revolution in Russia was an expression of a “new living reality”. But, whilst “history makes an abrupt turn”, the party is left lagging behind. Therefore it was no good “reiterating old formulas”, such as the “hegemony” scenario.

That is why Lenin writes his April theses: to rearm the party. The leadership had to understand his analysis of the situation - and the theorising behind this - so that the party could make a ‘sharp change in political line’ and tactics; otherwise the revolution would be lost.

Lih’s “continuity” theory is based on a methodology that is antithetical to Marxism (cf Lenin and Trotsky). Therefore all the new evidence he has gathered from the archives is wasted. Wittingly or not, his series on ‘All power to the Soviets’ not only misses the wood for the trees: it amounts to an academic historian’s apologia for reformism. Given social democracy’s primary responsibility for the slaughter of millions of workers and peasants in World War I, and not forgetting the defeat of the German revolution (and all that this entails), there is a lesson to be learnt here.

Unfortunately we do not get this from Lars T Lih ●

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Notes

1. LT Lih, ‘All power to the soviets’ - a series published by the *Weekly Worker*.
2. Given that I have focused on Lenin’s theses, I have left out Lih’s third article, which is devoted to Lenin’s ‘Letter from afar’.
3. L Trotsky *History of the Russian Revolution* London 1967, p278.
4. VI Lenin *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism* Peking 1969, pp 9,10.
5. VI Lenin *April theses* Moscow 1970, pp5-9.
6. VI Lenin, ‘Letters on tactics: assessment of the present situation’ *April theses* Moscow 1970, p14.
7. K Marx, ‘The civil war in France’, in T Carver (ed) *Marx, later political writings* Cambridge 1996, p192.
8. K Marx, ‘The civil war in France’, first draft, in E Kamenka (ed) *Portable Karl Marx* London 1983, p528.
9. VI Lenin, ‘Letters on tactics: assessment of the present situation’ *April theses* Moscow 1970, p13.
10. *Ibid* pp18-19.
11. VI Lenin, ‘Letters on tactics: tasks of the proletariat in our revolution’ *April theses* Moscow 1970, p30.
12. *Ibid* p22.
13. L Trotsky, ‘The lessons of October’ *The essential Trotsky* London 1963, pp118-19.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly Worker

Interests of party, not capital, being put first

Strange battle lines

David Sherrief says that the Tories are acting against the interests of big capital. Expect compromises and gruelling late-night sittings

Theresa May is, predictably, winning the initial battles over Brexit. On September 12 she got the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill through its second reading in the Commons. The final vote was 326-290. There was a lone Tory rebel - Ken Clarke deliberately abstained. But there were more rebels on the Labour side. Dennis Skinner, Kate Hoey, Graham Stringer, Ronnie Campbell, Kelvin Hopkins, Frank Field and John Mann voted with the Tories, while Caroline Flint, Ian Austin, John Spellar, Yvonne Fovargue, Kevin Barron, Helen Jones and Kevan Jones abstained. A rotten Europhobic bloc uniting Labour leftwingers Dennis Skinner and Kelvin Hopkins with Labour's far right.



Theresa May: can't get backing of monopoly capital

However, the war is far from over. Tory MPs - not least Nicky Morgan, Dominic Grieve and Anna Soubry - have tabled amendments aimed at shooting holes into May's Brexit plans: eg, they want to include the EU's charter of fundamental rights. There will also be challenges to the use of so-called Henry VIII powers and demands for a vote on the final terms. This brings the distinct possibility of a government defeat. Of course, that would not trigger a general election. For the moment at least May is secure. She would win a vote of confidence. Nonetheless, the government is vulnerable and we should expect compromises, gruelling late-night sittings, MPs being brought in from sick beds and desperately fought by-elections.

But, surely, the government's main problem is that a hard Brexit runs counter to the interests of the dominant sectors of big capital in Britain. For example, the recent Downing Street approach to large private companies and selected FT-100 firms, in the attempt to obtain endorsement for the government's post-Brexit plans for a "global Britain", was greeted with derision. Technology, aerospace, pharmaceutical, energy, manufacturing, banking and financial services firms have all warned that the drifting Brexit negotiations in Brussels could lead them to transferring some operations from Britain. Toyota is already openly questioning the future of its Burnaston plant in Derbyshire.

Many capitalists fear that they will face tariffs and other damaging barriers after March 2019 ... if there is no deal. Nor do they have any liking for the government's leaked proposals to limit immigration post-Brexit. The markets confirm what the personifications of capital state. Since the June 2016 referendum the pound sterling has fallen by around 20% compared with other major currencies. Reports that outward investment has doubled in the last quarter shows the thinking of collective capital. Despite having to pay what is in effect a 20% premium, the bet is that Britain is heading for difficult times. In other words, Brexit is bad for making a profit.

prompting, there has been less talk of a "clean break" from the EU. The shift towards negotiating a transition period has been cautiously welcomed by many of the CEOs and boardrooms of blue-chip companies. But the lack of detail causes uncertainty, frustration, even anguish.

A recent survey of 1,000 UK businesses reported that more than two-thirds of them needed to "know the details of any transition arrangement after Brexit by June 2018 - just nine months from now - in order to plan properly". If investment and recruitment decisions that have been put "on hold" are to be "unblocked", 40% of the businesses say the government must set out what the transition will involve, when it comes to vital areas, such as the movement of goods, capital and people, as well as legal arrangements.¹

Far from May and her cabinet providing Britain with 'strong and stable' leadership, big capital worries that party interests are being put first. Hence addressing widespread concerns amongst voters about 'unrestricted' immigration is being prioritised over guaranteeing access to the single market. Private meetings and frantic lobbying have had little effect on David Davies and his department for exiting the EU. The government says it has its mandate and appears intent on brushing aside the interests of big capital. All in all, therefore "big business is in a difficult position", says John Colly of

the Warwick Business School.²

Maybe the loss of direct and indirect influence over the Conservative Party, the inability to exercise control, reflects the increasingly cosmopolitan nature of modern capitalism. For instance, foreign investment in Britain stood at around £950 billion in 2015.³ A few big businesses, such as JCB, Westfields and Bloomberg Europe, have donated considerable sums to the Tories.⁴ But most of the money going to Tory HQ nowadays comes from very wealthy - often very quirky - individuals (many of them after access to government, dinners with ministers, knighthoods, membership of the House of Lords, etc).⁵ Over the years the number of companies making donations has declined.⁶ Yet with the bulk of Tory finances coming from the rich and the super-rich, with hundreds of Tory parliamentarians holding directorships, with Tory MPs coming from business and going back to business, with the visceral hostility to trade unions, it is clear that the standard Marxist description of the Conservative Party as the party of big business remains correct, albeit it with qualifications.

Tension

Nevertheless, the tension that exists between the interests of big capital and the direction being taken by May's party and government is unmistakable.

The origins of this divergence lies squarely in electoral calculation. Having outmanoeuvred her rivals and

taken over from the hapless David Cameron - following his June 2016 referendum humiliation - Theresa May clearly thought that she could inflict a massive general election defeat on the Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour Party ... if she seized hold of the political programme of the UK Independence Party. Of course, her gamble did not pay off. May's presidential campaign proved to be a disaster, while Jeremy Corbyn's *For the many, not the few* campaign was, by contrast, a brilliant success.

Now, irreversibly committed to a hard Brexit, the Tories resemble the Loony Tune's cartoon character, Wile E Coyote. Fixated on chasing the Road Runner, his nemesis, Wile E Coyote, suddenly finds himself in mid-air over a precipitous canyon. His legs still move. So does he. For a brief moment it appears nothing is wrong, that the momentum can be maintained. But, inevitably, Wile E Coyote realises that he is suspended in mid-air ... then comes the long plunge to the ground.

Since the 48.11% - 51.89% referendum result, Britain has not suffered the economic disaster George Osborn, Mark Carney, Peter Mandelson and co, predicted. No yanking recession. No flight of capital. This has allowed little UK Europhobes right and left - from the *Daily Mail* to the *Morning Star* - to claim vindication. But a Brexit referendum result hardly amounts to Brexit. True, statisticians

report that the British economy has been growing slower than the euro zone. It is, though, a case of anaemic growth compared with anaemic growth. Projected long-term, that heralds Britain's continued relative decline.

Nonetheless, a negotiated hard Brexit deal - let alone a hard Brexit non-deal - could quite possibly result in absolute decline. Such a prospect deeply worries big capital. Unless control over the Conservative Party can be reasserted, the choices it faces are all unpalatable: tariffs on goods going to the EU, reduced supplies of cheap labour, running down investment in Britain, decamping abroad, sponsorship of a national government, etc.

Meanwhile, Keir Starmer has succeeded in getting the shadow cabinet to come out in favour of staying in the single market. Hence the striking paradox. On Europe Labour is articulating the interests of big capital. Not that big capital will reciprocate and back the Labour Party. It is, after all, led by Jeremy Corbyn: pro-trade union, pacifistic and a friend of all manner of unacceptable leftists.

For the sake of appearances, Starmer pays lip service to the 2016 referendum result. There is no wish to alienate the *minority* of Labour voters who backed 'leave'. More through luck than judgement, ambiguity served the party well during the general election campaign. The contradiction between Corbyn's historical hostility towards the EU - now represented in the Commons by the Skinner-Hopkins rump - and the mass of Labour's pro-'remain' members and voters resulted in a fudge.

Political realities changed with June 8. Today Jeremy Corbyn is no longer considered an electoral liability, to be subjected to a sustained campaign of sabotage, leaking, mockery and coordinated resignations. Now he can - if he is willing - be repackaged as a responsible prime minister in waiting ●

Notes

1. *Financial Times* September 12 20017.
2. <https://uk.finance.yahoo.com/news/business-government-lobbying-brexit-isnt-working-heres-143415309.html>.
3. House of Commons Library *Debate pack* Number CDP 2017/0159, September 8 2017.
4. *The Guardian* April 1 2015.
5. www.cityam.com/264987/party-donors-biggest-names-bank-rolling-conservative.
6. B Jones (ed) *Political issues in Britain today* Manchester 1999, p313.

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