

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly
worker



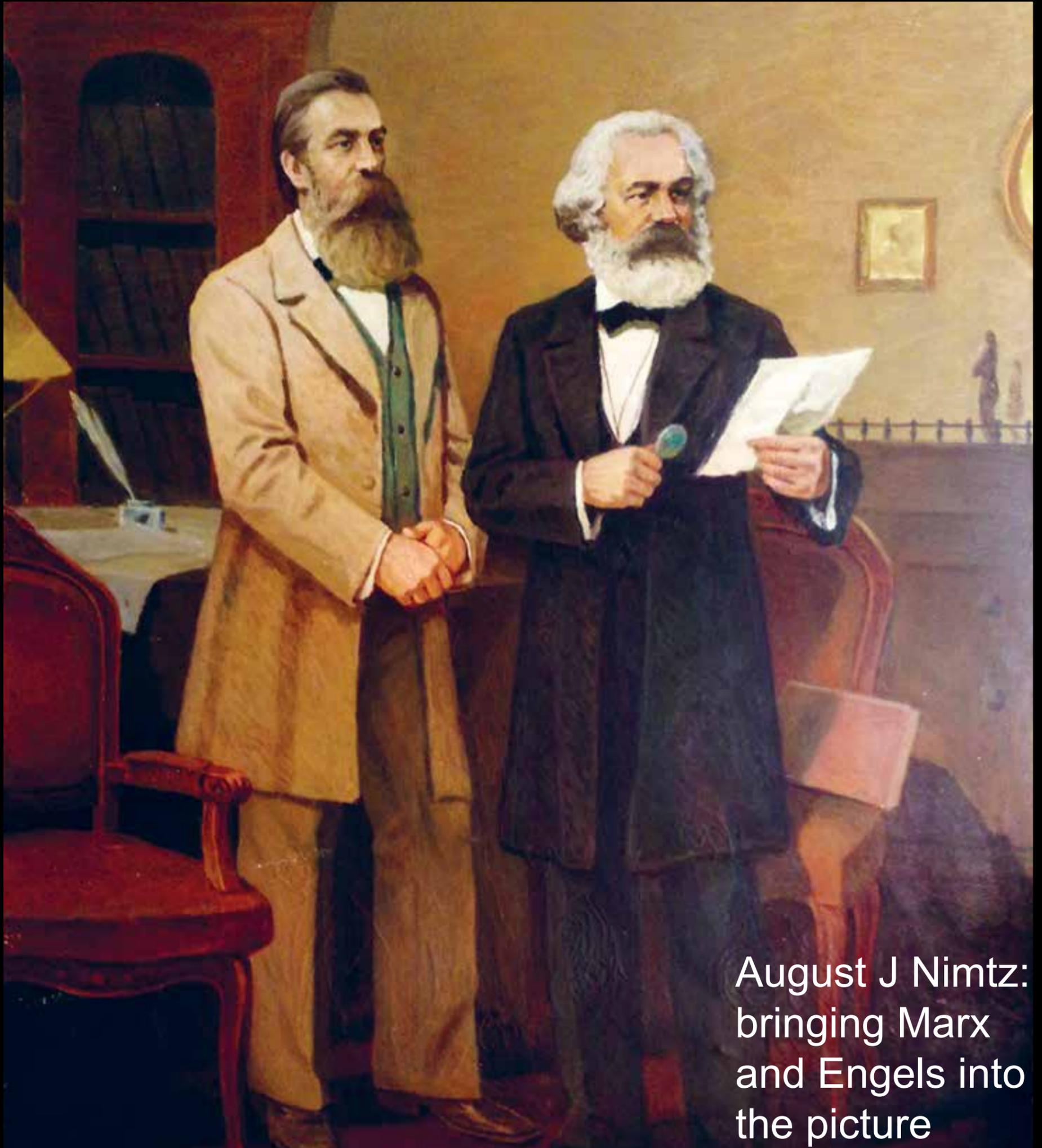
**Tory Brexit crisis and
Boris Johnson: cat in
nest of singing birds**

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

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August J Nimtz:
bringing Marx
and Engels into
the picture

LETTERS



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

Bolshevism

Frankly, I don't know whether or not there was a leadership vote over the holding of an open debate on Lenin's April theses amongst the Bolsheviks. Alan Gibson, on the contrary, thinks it is obvious (Letters September 14). There had to have been a vote.

I presume his certainty on this matter is born not from his study of original documents. No, I think what we have is conviction based on his long membership of the International 'Bolshevik' Tendency - a confessional sect, which many years ago broke away from the Spartacist confessional sect.

Either way, we know that Lenin says he and his comrades *unanimously* agreed to debate things out. The all-Russia conference of the party was just a few weeks off and the elaboration of different positions would undoubtedly "provide material" for motions, etc.

I still don't think comrade Gibson appreciates that open debate was the norm in the Russian Socialist Democratic Party (Bolsheviks). Its members and leaders needed no special permission to write, speak or think. Eg, having been asked, Lenin unproblematically read his April theses to a joint meeting of Bolshevik and Menshevik delegates to the all-Russia Congress of Soviets.

Undaunted, comrade Gibson calls the CPGB's practice of combining unity in action with open debate a "shibboleth". No, comrade, it is *genuine* democratic centralism.

That there was a dispute between Lenin, on the one hand, and Kamenev on the other, in April 1917, is, of course, an established historical fact. In my opinion, though, what separated the two comrades was not fundamental. No, it was, to some degree, familiarity with the realities of post-February 1917 conditions. But, crucially, it was political shade, and, yes, temperament. Comrade Gibson sees "much more". He fails, however, to enlighten us with his wisdom.

Well, let us briefly look at Lev Kamenev's record. A member of the Bolshevik faction from the start (though, I believe he was in prison during the historic 1903 2nd Congress of the RSDLP), Kamenev was first elected to the central committee in 1907. By 1908, though, he counted as one of Lenin's main lieutenants (along with Gregory Zinoviev).

However, as a personality, he was inclined towards caution, sought agreement and often urged what amounted to conciliation. Hence, Kamenev, albeit sceptically, went along with moves to "restore party unity" in 1910: ie, orthodox Bolsheviks + Alexander Bogdanov's liquidationist Bolsheviks + Leon Trotsky and his collaborators + various Mensheviks. Lenin *openly* castigated the whole exercise, yet he found himself *temporarily* outvoted on the central committee. Kamenev represented the Bolsheviks on the editorial board of Trotsky's paper. Needless to say, this unity ended in acrimonious *disunity*.

In November 1914, Kamenev - who had been put in charge of the work of the Bolsheviks *duma* faction, distanced himself from Lenin's line of revolutionary defeatism ... from the dock of a tsarist court. Presumably, it was such instances that caused Lenin to write about "those 'old Bolsheviks' who more than once already have played so regrettable a role in the history of our party".

Anyway, liberated from exile in Siberia, Kamenev took over as the revived *Pravda's* chief editor in March

1917. He favoured, as we all know, *attacking* the Provisional government by giving it *critical* support ... thereby undermining its base among the population and creating the conditions necessary for sovereign power to pass to the soviets. He also favoured discussing unity with the Menshevik Internationalists ... on the basis of the Zimmerwald manifesto (author: Trotsky).

Lenin, of course, vigorously objected to both approaches. Lenin advocated *no* support to the Provisional government and counterposed the *centrism* of the Zimmerwald manifesto with his vision of a Third International. These issues were openly debated ... but within a few weeks Lenin was saying his disagreements with Kamenev were "not very great".

Other disagreements followed: eg, Kamenev's (also Zinoviev's) continued commitment to a Bolshevik-Menshevik-Socialist Revolutionary peaceful revolution and, therefore, objections to plans for a Bolshevik uprising. Not long after the successful overthrow of the Provisional government, Kamenev (again plus Zinoviev) urged negotiations with the railworkers' union - it was demanding a socialist coalition government minus Lenin and Trotsky (once again Lenin found himself in a *temporary* minority on the central committee). Nevertheless, Kamenev occupied responsible party and government positions. Eg, he was in charge of the Moscow organisation and served as Lenin's deputy as head of government.

Given all this, how else would comrade Gibson describe Kamenev's differences with Lenin other than those of shade and temperament?

My main bone of contention, however, is, of course, that there was Bolshevik continuity. This does not rely, it should be emphasised, on the work of Lars T Lih. Many years ago I simply read Lenin ... systematically. What Lars has done so well is to considerably enrich our understanding of the continuity. There was no break. There is not, in other words, a pre-April 1917 Lenin and a post-April 1917 Lenin.

This matters, firstly, because we are interested in the truth; secondly, because those of us in the 21st century who want to emulate the Bolsheviks need to appreciate that their success was due to having deep social roots, a healthy internal culture and a sound theory and programme.

Comrade Gibson now says he does not deny that Lenin saw a continuity between the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies of 1917 and the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasants, as outlined, for example, by Lenin in *Two tactics* (1905). I suppose this must count as progress of a kind. After all, his first letter amounted to a stonewalling polemic against any such suggestion (August 31).

But comrade Gibson can't quite make up his mind. He goes on, contradicting himself, to claim that Lenin junked the revolutionary democratic (= majority) dictatorship (= rule) of the proletariat and peasants. Incidentally, this was more than a mere "slogan" (as described by comrade Gibson). It was a strategic formulation that summed up the core programmatic aim of Bolshevism in Russia up to and even beyond 1917. Eg, Lenin, following the Bolsheviks' seizure of power, writes, in a *resolution*, of a "workers' and peasants revolution" and a "new workers' and peasants' government" (VI Lenin *CW* Vol 26, Moscow 1977, p241).

Comrade Gibson is determined, for his own strange reasons, to paint the CPGB in the colours of the popular front, not least as advocated by the 'official communists' from the mid-

1930s onwards. Bizarre. We have our *Draft programme*. As repeatedly explained, only if we can realistically envisage carrying out the *entire* minimum programme - eg, abolition of the monarchy, standing army, the police, an armed population, election of judges, going towards production based on need, etc - would we enter or form a government.

Comrade Gibson is determined to set up and strike down straw men. What would, he asks, Lenin make of the idea that the problem with the Provisional government was not "one of programme", but its class composition? This, in fact, shows, once again, that comrade Gibson fails to grasp the principles of Marxism.

The "problem" with the Provisional government was, yes, exactly its programme. True, at first, it was headed by prince Lvov, a Romano-reformist, but then, with the second and third coalitions, came the 'socialist', Alexander Kerensky. The *fundamental* problem with all his cabinets was not simply the presence of Cadet ministers (though 'Down with the 10 capitalist ministers' served as an excellent Bolshevik agitational slogan in terms of exposure - as advocated by Kamenev).

No, comrade Gibson, the problem with the Provisional government, which under Kerensky, contained Mensheviks and SR ministers, was exactly its (bourgeois) programme of continuing with the war and the alliance with Anglo-French imperialism, defence of capitalist interests, landlordism, etc.

And, of course, the Provisional government was not just the Provisional government. It relied, from the beginning, on the support of the soviets (crucially the Petrograd Soviet and its Menshevik and SR majority). Both acted, according to *the logic* of their programmes, on behalf of Anglo-French imperialism and the Russian bourgeoisie and landlords.

But, whereas the Provisional government was self-appointed, the soviets were a democratic form of government. The Bolsheviks, if they were patient, if they were determined, could win a majority. In August-September-October, they did just that (including in the peasants' soviets with their alliance with the Left SRs).

Comrade Gibson's claim that the CPGB would have advocated a policy to "convince" the 10 capitalist ministers about the virtues of our *Draft programme* is just plain silly. No, our perspective is to win, to convince, the working class.

Finally, I should add that Lars T Lih tells me he will be replying to his critics ... when he completes his series of articles. To do so before that would be premature.

Jack Conrad
London

Airbrushed

Jason Schulman ('Letters', September 14) finds my less-than-laudatory appraisal of Michael Harrington's politics ('The left wing of the permissible', September 7) unsurprising, because I was a member of the Spartacist League in the 1980s.

In point of fact, my antipathy goes back even further - to the 1960s. Then, as a member of Students for a Democratic Society, I joined with many others of my generation in doing what I could modestly do to support the people of Vietnam, as they hurled defiance in the face of the world's mightiest imperial colossus, and wrote the most heroic chapter of mass struggle in the history of the later 20th century. It could hardly escape our notice at the time that a couple of Michael Harrington's prominent Socialist Party comrades - Max Shachtman and Norman Thomas - supported in various ways the government's sanguinary

effort to crush the Vietnamese.

The fact that Harrington cheered a little less heartily for the war than Shachtman, or eventually turned against it, does not alter the fact that his belated opposition was voiced from the standpoint of a loyal critic of US imperialism, attempting to correct what he saw as no more than a policy mistake. In contrast, those of us in SDS who were anti-Stalinist did not allow that belief to stand in the way of proclaiming ourselves to be unambiguously on the other side.

Schulman cites a passage from Harrington's writings consisting of generalities about the need to walk a "perilous tightrope" between "socialist vision" and "actual movements". The problem with applying this prescription to the Vietnam era is that the "actual movement" - or at least the most vital part of it, formed by the new left to which I belonged - was moving in the direction of anti-imperialist and revolutionary socialist politics of one kind or another. This was an "actual movement" that Harrington wanted no part of, and spared no effort to stigmatise. Only in less radical times can social democrats plausibly invoke the immobility of the masses as an excuse for their own role as the established order's faithful left gatekeepers.

Schulman disputes only one of my factual assertions. He writes that Harrington came out for complete withdrawal from Vietnam in 1968 - not in 1970, as I wrote. I admit that I did no deep archival research for my article. For this particular claim I relied on *The other American*, Maurice Isserman's biography of Harrington. It states that he was "becoming bolder in his criticisms of the war. In the fall of 1969, for the first time, he actually gave a speech at an anti-war rally. By the following January [1970 - JC] he decided that the anti-war movement had been right to emphasise the demand for US withdrawal from Vietnam, rather than simply negotiations" (p288). If Schulman can provide an earlier citation in which Harrington "openly and unequivocally demanded" complete American withdrawal, I will be happy to acknowledge my - and Isserman's - mistake. But whether enunciated in 1968 or 1970, Harrington's anti-war stand was, in the words of an old American expression, 'a day late and a dollar short'.

For the rest, Schulman argues that, in the 1970s and 80s, when the dividing line between radicals and liberals became far less distinct, the Democratic Socialists of America veered once or twice to the radical side. They backed a campaign for rank-and-file democracy and against concession bargaining among steelworkers; they adopted a non-hostile attitude to the Sandinistas and the Salvadoran guerrillas of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front. Schulman adds that Harrington himself had certain critical afterthoughts about his previous red baiting of the 1960s anti-war movement. I have no doubt these things are true. And, while I suppose the DSA deserves credit for not being completely consistent in its overall orientation toward Democrats and bureaucrats, it is the main trajectory, not occasional departures and regrets, that define the politics of an organisation.

Will today's enlarged DSA start to define itself differently? The most important question now facing this group is where it intends to go with the thousands of new members it has acquired as a result of the Sanders campaign. Unlike the current-day Spartacist League and its offshoots, I do not take toward the growing ferment in the left wing of the Democratic Party the attitude that Marx enjoined against: "Cease your struggles! They are foolish! Here is the truth! Go down

on your knees before it!" I believe socialists must seek a way to engage left-moving Democrats.

But the question remains: if, as Schulman agrees, the project of 'realigning' the party to the left is a proven *cul-de-sac*, what is the DSA's strategy for leading rebellious voters toward the exits and into a third party of the left (which I assume to be the alternative to realignment)? As far as I can tell, DSA has no strategy. It continues to include unreconstructed Democratic loyalists in its leading bodies; it speaks vaguely of an "inside/outside" approach - ie, supporting 'progressive' candidates who run either as Democrats or independents. But, on the question of what to do when 'progressive' Democrats throw their support behind mainstream ones after losing in the primaries (as most do), the DSA remains silent. Although leftist DSAers like Schulman may have given up on Democratic realignment, their inside/outside approach, in the absence of any plan for moving from the inside to the outside, effectively remains one of continuing to work within the party.

Finally, Schulman assures us that, although Harrington wasn't nearly as bad as I make him out to be, today's DSA is not dogmatically committed to his legacy anyway, and arguing about it therefore has a "musty air". But, if this is so, perhaps Schulman can explain why he didn't see fit to reply to an article of mine in this paper ('Different plot twists, same ending', August 25 2016) that was partly devoted to taking issue with his far more timely assertions about the Democrats and electoral politics, and was only moved to pound the keyboard in reply to my recent treatment of the dusty political history of the DSA's long-deceased and not-dogmatically-followed founder. Or why he continues to employ Harrington's "left of the possible" slogan, thinking that substituting 'far left' for simply 'left' somehow changes things. Or why, for that matter, we are compelled to conduct this exchange exclusively in a British publication.

One reason is that the flagship periodical of the DSA left, the 'radical slick' *Jacobin* magazine, while acknowledging that my Harrington piece was "very well done", rejected it as not being the "right fit" for its website. Could it be that the facts I cited about the collaboration of Harrington and Norman Thomas in the cold war (which I sometimes think *Jacobin* would also like to expunge from history) are what didn't fit the airbrushed, founding-father portraits of these figures that *Jacobin* and DSA wish to mount on their walls?

The presence on the Facebook page of the magazine's editor-in-chief, Bhaskar Sunkara, of a (somewhat tongue-in-cheek) Mount Rushmore-like collage of himself, together with Eugene Debs, Norman Thomas and Michael Harrington, together with a video of Harrington's 1989 memorial service, lead me to suspect that the answer is yes.

Jim Creegan
New York

Legalise them

I would like to comment on an article headlined 'Heartbroken partner calls for legalisation of drugs', which recently featured in my local paper.

Sharon Carter - the partner of Neil Waters, who died after unknowingly injecting himself with heroin cut with a deadly elephant tranquiliser - is calling for drugs to be made legal. I support Sharon's call for the legalisation and regulation of all drugs by the state.

Legalisation and regulation does not mean a free-for-all, where drugs are available on supermarket shelves. Cannabis would be made available through licensed shops, as happens in Colorado, Washington state, Oregon,

Alaska, California, and next year in Canada. Cannabis would also be available in licensed 'coffee shops', as happens in the Netherlands, and in licensed cannabis social clubs, as in Spain.

Legalisation and regulation of all drugs by the state would put most drug dealers and organised criminal drug networks out of business. At least £500 million a year would be saved from the current costs of the police, the prison service, the probation service and the criminal justice system. Taxes on the £5-billion-a-year UK cannabis market would bring in at least £1 billion a year, some of which could be used in a public education campaign aimed at minors.

Heroin would only be made available to registered heroin addicts on prescription by their GPs, as happens very successfully in Switzerland. Heroin on prescription in Switzerland has led to a dramatic fall in the number of new heroin addicts in that country, as the illegal supply of heroin has dried up. If heroin was legalised and regulated by the state, the death of Neil Waters could have been avoided.

It is time to legalise and regulate all drugs.

John Smith
Cambridgeshire

Insightful

Last week's article from comrade Yassamine Mather was really unusual in two ways ('Nationalism and imperial power', September 14). Firstly, in its references to her past life at a quite intimate level. Secondly, even if only by 'extension' of her lines of thought, it shone light upon an element of capitalist duplicity that's under-examined. I'm referring to the profuse amount of time, cascades of energy and intensity of bullshit that capitalism deploys towards such matters as feminism, so-called equal rights, versions or choices of sexuality, etc.

Just to take one aspect of things, has anyone noticed that its mantra about 'equal' rights and thereby equal 'opportunities' for women has provided capitalism with a scenario whereby females - rather than just males - are now fronting up its farrago and circus? Females such as Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May, with Hillary Clinton trying her damndest, to provide that same 'liberated' service.

Self-evidently, it is not someone's gender but their core politics and social attitudes that are of any significance or consequence whatsoever. Of course, precisely the same applies to ethnicity or colour of skin. Put in the baldest of terms, who gives a shit whether it's a gay black man or a hetero white woman - or, indeed, a possessor of some other blend of human characteristics - that is busily snatching back gains achieved by the working class since World War II? It's the calculated snatching, their premeditated and carefully targeted theft, deliberately and ruthlessly revamped oppression that counts.

Similarly with the slimy little worm known as patriotism, or even the venomous snake of nationalism. It's of absolutely no importance which particular 'sovereign' country purports to provide its citizens with their so-called precious or special 'way of life': it's whether that state is systemically socialist or intrinsically exploitative that counts.

Comrade Mather expressed all of this far more impressively, to a certain extent via her harsh personal experiences in life. "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."

What a perfect example of insightful, communistic thinking for us all to absorb. What invaluable class weaponry provided by comrade Mather - not to mention the fact that it is beautifully holistic. What a crying shame our current era and circumstances here in 'confused and duped' Limboland don't provide us with equivalent opportunities for equally courageous, fast-tempo revolutionary activity. Activity such as that described by the comrade - or, indeed, as experienced by my own father in the years following World War I in Germany and Austria, and then during his involvement in the Spanish civil war.

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

They earned it

I hope that Yassamine Mather is wrong - no people so greatly deserves to have an independent nation of their own as the Kurds.

As an American who appreciates the Kurdish people's accomplishments, I feel a closer kinship to the Kurds than any other nation in the Middle East. They are not perfect and the probability of their attaining their goal looks slim, but my heart and head are with them. As Sir Winston Churchill said long ago, Iraq is three nations and will not survive as a single nation.

Who in their right mind could imagine that a completely separate culture, living on what effectively is their nation, could have much of anything in common with a Shi'ite Iraq? The Kurds have long since earned their freedom and independence in my opinion. I think that Americans and Brits should support Kurdish independence, just as we would want if we were in their shoes.

Ed Scott
New Mexico, USA

Iran injustice

Three prominent activists are on hunger strike in an Iranian prison. They are protesting against unjust sentences handed down to them by the Islamic courts. The comrades are in urgent need of solidarity, especially from trade unionists and democrats internationally.

The three are: Reza Shahbi - a member of the coordinating committee of the syndicate of the Vahed Bus Company (Tehran); Abbas Abdi - a member of the executive committee of teachers' guild; Mahmoud Beheshti Langaroudi - former spokesperson of the teachers' guild.

Shahabi, Abdi and Langaroudi have had these sentences imposed as a result of their activities in defence of their fellow workers. Worryingly, the hunger strike is starting to have a serious effect on their health and is now endangering their lives. Reza Shahabi, for example, has refused food for more than six weeks.

We call on labour activists and defenders of the working class worldwide to do everything they can to save the lives of these leading activists and to build solidarity with them. We also express our grave concern for the lives of these labour activists and urge them to consider ending their hunger strike. The essential work they undertake in defence of thousands of workers in Iran is vital.

To add your name to the signatories of this letter, please email Hands Off the People of Iran at office@hopoi.info.
Yassamine Mather
Hopi

AKP persecution

Turkish journalist and photographer Kemal Özer Evrensel has been arrested and is being held in custody. The detention warrant was reportedly issued by the Tunceli public prosecutor's office. Özer was detained by police in Dersim as part of an anti-terrorism probe on September 4. After his detention, police

and gendarmerie personnel searched Özer's home and seized his cameras and digital material.

In the past, Kemal Özer was threatened for his investigative journalism, especially because he revealed the illegal hunting that took place in the region.

Once again we are calling on for the release of Kemal Özer and all 180 imprisoned journalists who have been arrested and persecuted by the AKP government in Turkey. In the meantime, we would be grateful if your readers could send us messages of support and solidarity in the next few days, which we can share with Kemal Özer and use in the *Evrensel* daily newspaper.

Freedom for all. Journalism is not a crime.

Solidarity with the People of Turkey (SPOT)
spot@daymer.org

Orwellian

Forty-one people packed into the meeting room at the Red Shed in Wakefield on September 16 to discuss 'George Orwell and socialism', an event organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group.

The first speaker, Brian Bamford, secretary of Tameside TUC, made a spirited defence of Orwell against the criticism of Paul Preston. Brian insisted that *Homage to Catalonia* showed the "true nature of war as a participant".

Robin Stocks, author of *Hidden heroes of Easter week*, focused in particular on the Barcelona May Days. He noted that Orwell had been barricaded in the Hotel Falcon with the Workers Party of Marxist Unification (POUM) leadership. He added that POUM was an anti-Stalinist party that wanted the revolution to be "continued, not watered down". It had links with the Independent Labour Party in Britain and Orwell had joined the POUM militia after being given a letter of introduction by Fenner Brockway.

Granville Williams, former editor of *Free Press*, argued that Orwell had been committed to a classless, egalitarian society to the very end. His attachment to socialism was undiminished. But he was appropriated by the right during the cold war. They used Orwell to bolster their argument that socialism inevitably led to totalitarianism.

Les Hurst from the Orwell Society noted that, despite attacks from the Communist Party, even in the 1930s many people wanted to read Orwell. There was "so much reality in what he wrote".

The final speaker, Quentin Kopp, spoke movingly about his father, Georges Kopp, who was Orwell's POUM commander in Spain. Georges Kopp went to Spain to fight fascism and did so bravely. However, he was then imprisoned for 18 months by the NKVD in appalling conditions.

The next Wakefield Socialist History Group event, on 'The Yorkshire miners', will be held on Saturday October 14 at 1pm in the Red Shed, 18 Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1.

Alan Stewart
Wakefield Socialist History Group

Remembering 1917

London Communist Forum
Sunday October 8, 5pm,
Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn
Road, London WC1.

Speaker: Mike Macnair

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

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday September 24, 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).

Sunday October 8, 5pm: 'Remembering 1917'. Speaker: Mike Macnair.

Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1.

Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk;

and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday September 26, 6.45pm: Series of talks on human origins, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. This meeting: 'The revolution that made us human'. Speaker: Chris Knight.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group:

<http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

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.

Venezuela Solidarity Campaign

Saturday October 7, 10am to 4pm: Annual general meeting, Discus Room, Unite House, 128 Theobalds Road, London, WC1.

Organised by Venezuela Solidarity Campaign:

www.venezuelasolidarity.co.uk.

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>.

Britain deserves a pay rise

Thursday October 17, 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.

Organised by TUC:

www.tuc.org.uk/events/britain-still-needs-pay-rise-rally-fair-pay-public-servants.

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 Ticktin. Entrance free, but donations welcome.

Organised by Supporters of Critique Journal of Socialist Theory:

contactpaulinehadaway@gmail.com.

Stand Up To Racism

Saturday October 21, 9.30am to 4pm: National conference, Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London NW1. Register at www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/confronting-the-rise-in-racism-2017-tickets-35900328850.

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

CPGB wills

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

LABOUR

Keep up the pressure

Labour's NEC has opened the door for much-needed change - now the left needs to take advantage of that opening, says **Carla Roberts**

Meeting on September 19, Jeremy Corbyn and his allies on the Labour Party national executive committee made good use of their wafer-thin left majority, which is down to the resignation of Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale and her temporary replacement by leftwing deputy leader Alex Rowley.

The NEC agreed to put to this year's conference a 'reform package' that sees a compromise on the so-called McDonnell amendment (see below) and, crucially, an increase in the number of NEC delegates from Constituency Labour Parties from six to nine, to be elected by the whole membership within the next three months. The unions will get one additional seat and, despite the fact that this seat will go to the 'moderate'-led Usdaw union (which will take up the seat in three months' time) it is looking good for the left. Even if (and that's a big if) Labour Party members in Scotland vote for a rightwinger to replace Dugdale on the NEC, this leaves the left in a majority on the NEC, albeit a very slim one.

But the NEC is also proposing to conduct a review of party rules, to be led by Corbyn's political secretary, Katy Clark. The "terms of reference" of the "Party Democracy Review", which "will aim to produce a first report within 12 months", include a review of the method on how to elect the party leader ("including the role of registered supporters and the issue of nominating thresholds") and the "composition of the NEC".² In other words, much of the compromise agreed at the September 19 NEC meeting is temporary. The battle is not yet won.

This is, however, a watershed moment for the future of the party. The left must make sure that it uses this review to full advantage, pushing for the kind of changes needed to transform it into a real party of the working class. The review could easily become a pseudo-democratic exercise, where thousands of people send in their blue-sky thoughts and we end up with another compromise between the left and the right. This is, of course, the way the national policy forum (to which Tony Blair outsourced policy-making in the party) currently works. The NPF report produced in time for this year's conference is truly atrocious - full of blurb about the wonderful "process" employed in compiling it, but devoid of any concrete policies.³

But, judging from Jeremy Corbyn's conduct so far, we are not hopeful that he is prepared to fight - for example, to abolish the NPF and bring policy-making back to conference, which must become the truly sovereign body of the party. We are not convinced that he is prepared to abolish the compliance unit and invite in the thousands who have been barred, expelled or suspended for the 'crime' of having once supported another organisation such as Left Unity or being a member of Socialist Appeal. We are far from hopeful that he will change his mind and start to support the mandatory selection of all MPs. Corbyn's method of operation is still characterised by the ill-conceived attempt to appease the right in order to achieve some kind of 'party unity'. But the right, with the aid of the assembled bourgeois media, will not rest until they get rid of him (and the



Can be transformed

entire left). It is high time he came out fighting - and the left will have to push him along in this.

Why the compromise?

Currently any candidate for leader or deputy leader of the party requires the nominations of 15% of the Parliamentary Labour Party and European parliament combined. The 'McDonnell amendment' wanted to reduce this to 5%, but the NEC settled on 10%. In our view, it should actually be 0% - MPs and MEPs should not have the right to obstruct the will of the membership. (Incidentally, 21 CLPs have voted through an amendment that would change the current requirement for nominations dramatically: any candidate for the position of leader would require the support of 15% of either the MP/MEPs, or the affiliated sections or the CLPs. Presumably, this very good motion will now not be heard at the 2018 conference, but instead be superseded by the report from the 'Corbyn review'.)

Maybe Corbyn and his allies on the NEC were forced to agree to the 10% compromise in order to get the increase of CLP reps onto the NEC through. But the compromise might also point to their fear that conference might not actually go the (left) way that Luke Akehurst and the mainstream media had been suggesting. According to *The Guardian*, Momentum has conducted its own 'survey', which apparently shows that, of the 1,155 delegates chosen by CLPs, 844 "back reforms proposed by Momentum, while 236 are opposed and the views of 75 are unknown".⁴

But Corbyn is probably right not to rely on the scientific basis of this 'survey': Delegates received a text message that read: "Hi XY, this is Morgan, and I'm a volunteer from Momentum. Congratulations on being elected as a delegate to the 2017 Labour conference in Brighton. Do you intend to vote for a rule change that will make it easier for leftwing candidates to get on the ballot in future leadership elections?"

Firstly, Momentum does not hold mobile phone numbers or email addresses for all delegates. It has contact details for lefties - so it probably multiplied however many returns it got by the number of actual delegates. We also know of quite a few leftwingers who did not reply. Some thought the unsolicited text message seemed a bit "fishy", others have gone right off Momentum and some did not reply because it seemed such a stupid and obvious question to ask of a Momentum supporter.

While Momentum is playing a rather silly game of potentially inflating numbers, Luke Akehurst, on the other

hand, might be playing a game of 'reducing expectations' in order to come back with a 'surprise victory' for the right, which is fighting to keep its hold over the party bureaucracy and middle layers. Yes, many CLPs have chosen pro-Corbyn supporters as representatives and have filled their whole quota of delegates with leftwingers. But there are reports of many more CLPs, where the right has succeeded once again in stressing the 'financial burden' of sending more than one delegate to conference and, hey, what's wrong with sending our experienced comrade XY, who has represented us so admirably in previous years?

The main problem is that, even if there is a clear left majority of pro-Corbyn delegates, nobody is doing much with it.

Rule changes to oppose

In line with one of the many undemocratic clauses in the Labour Party rule book,⁵ a number of rule changes that were submitted by CLPs before conference in 2016 were 'parked' for almost 14 months, before they are finally discussed by delegates this year. Incidentally, a motion from Filton and Bradley, Stoke and Newport West proposes to do away with this anti-democratic rule. We could not agree more.

Not all of the motions, which were published in the *Addendum to the 2016 delegate's report*,⁶ will make it to conference floor. Some have already been implemented by the NEC, while others were ruled out of order by the conference arrangements committee and/or the NEC meeting on September 19. The final, detailed agenda, together with all accepted motions, is only published a few short days before conference. As we go to press, there is no final list of motions available. The NEC will no doubt ask the movers of some of these to remit them to be part of the review in the party. If a mover disagrees, their motion will then fall when the NEC reform package inevitably gets a majority at conference.

It is actually remarkable how few progressive, leftwing motions have been submitted - and how tame they are. Yes, there is the 14-month delay, but the motions are no doubt a reflection of the fact that the left is still trying to catch up with the situation of suddenly having a leftwing leader. Clearly, we are still woefully unprepared and unorganised. Momentum played a very useful role in the general election, but its leader, Jon Lansman - and Jeremy Corbyn, for that matter - clearly have no coherent plan when it comes to transforming the Labour Party.

It is to Momentum's credit that it published guides and various information on the 2017 conference.⁷ But it has to be said that the most useful bits have been copied from NEC member Pete Willsman's excellent overview, which he published last year and which is still available on the website of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy.⁸ The rest is mostly hot air - and, unfortunately, complicit silence when it comes to the witch-hunt against the left in the party: namely the 'anti-Semitism' scandal. The compromise formulation agreed by the NEC is not as bad as the original one proposed by the Jewish Labour Movement, but it clearly is another compromise with the right.

The Momentum *2017 Rule change guide*⁹ (which will also be updated in time for conference) lists six motions that delegates are asked to support - and

only two that should be opposed. Both of those deal with the anti-Corbyn attempt to remove the categories of 'registered supporters' (who paid £3 and £25 respectively to vote in the two recent leadership elections) and 'affiliated supporters' (members of affiliated unions and societies). Of course, LPM also opposes these two motions (there are actually three: the Momentum office seems to have forgotten about motion No1 from Kingswood). You can bet your bottom dollar that the movers of these motions are not at all concerned about the "power of the fully paid up Labour Party member" - this is all about reducing the influence of the unions and of Jeremy Corbyn, and the possibility that he could be replaced by a fellow leftwinger.

But there are far worse motions among the 23 submitted - composed in exactly the same anti-Corbyn spirit. Motions 3, 4 and 6 were all clearly motivated by the entirely fabricated 'anti-Semitism' scandal in the party. All of them will now presumably be remitted. Motion 4 from Finchley and Golders Green is the worst of the lot. It proposes a life-long membership ban on anybody who is deemed to have engaged in "conduct which is motivated by hostility or prejudice based on gender; sexual identity; ethnicity or faith; age or disability; or other personal characteristic". Such a person "shall automatically be ineligible to be or remain a party member" (our emphasis). And how can you possibly disprove that you were "motivated by hostility or prejudice"? This proposed rule change is incredibly open to abuse.

Ditto motion 3, which defines a "hate incident" as "something where the victim or anyone else think it was motivated by hostility or prejudice based on disability, race, religion, transgender identity, or sexual orientation" (our emphasis). This formulation basically does away with the need for any evidence. Somebody thinks you were motivated by something nasty - bingo, that's your expulsion letter in the post.

Motion 6 has been submitted by, among others, the Jewish Labour Movement. It uses the same formulations as the two motions above - ie, the mere word of the "victim or anyone else" is enough to damn somebody as 'anti-Semitic', etc. Hard evidence is not needed - feelings will suffice and the person charged is guilty until they can prove their innocence. In addition though, the JLM proposal would read: "The NCC shall not have regard to the mere holding or expression of beliefs and opinions, except in instances involving anti-Semitism, Islamophobia or racism" (we emphasise the JLM's proposed amendment). Coupled with the proposal to remove any need for evidence, this is a truly anti-democratic motion and a bureaucrat's wet dream.

Why is Momentum saying nothing on these truly atrocious motions? Unfortunately, Jon Lansman - who since his coup of January 2017¹⁰ rules Momentum's national office like an absolute monarch - has effectively been aiding the witch-hunters of the right in the party, in the mistaken belief that by not 'attacking' them, they might eventually be persuaded to rally behind Jeremy Corbyn.

Lansman, ironically, is politically rather close to the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, when it comes to the definition of anti-Semitism: basically it includes anybody who criticises the actions of the state of Israel. Lansman famously threw Jackie Walker to the wolves

when he had her removed as vice-chair of Momentum¹¹ and then drew up a constitution which bars from Momentum membership all those barred from the Labour Party.

And, just like the CLPD, Momentum has, at least for the time being, given up its fight for mandatory reselection of MPs. And that despite the fact that the CLPD (with Jon Lansman playing a leading role at the time) had fought for this rule change for many decades - and eventually with success: from 1980 until the early 90s, a form of mandatory reselection of MPs was enshrined in the rule book. Noticeably, no constitutional motion on this subject has been submitted, despite all the debates on this subject in the last few years. Also, at least a couple of motions on mandatory reselection have been submitted (in time for the 2018 conference).¹² This shows how far we still have to go: the left is a long way away from the power it wielded even in the 1980s.

Motions to support

The 'McDonnell amendment' (No 14) will not be tabled, but conference will instead get to vote on the NEC compromise. We urge delegates to vote in favour of it (and then help shape the review). We also support motion 9 from Blackley and Broughton Exeter, which wants to do away with the restriction that CLPs can submit either a contemporary motion or a procedural motion, but not both.

Motion 11 also wants to give more powers to the CLPs: it proposes that motions submitted are not automatically ruled out of order because they touch on a subject that is mentioned in the long documents produced by the national policy forum. We also recommend a vote for motions 7 and 23, which seek to increase the money from membership fees allocated to CLPs (at the moment, they scrape by with an allocation of a measly £1.50 per member - per year!). There are a couple of other motions that deserve support.

We will, of course, produce a final voting guide when the agenda and all motions have been finalised. They will be covered by our daily issue of *Red Pages* that we will be handing out every day at conference, as well as uploading to our website. We are keen to hear from delegates and observers - send your impressions, thoughts and short articles to office@labourpartymarxists.org.uk for possible inclusion in *Red Pages* ●

Notes

1. Scottish leftwing members are taking a motion to the Scottish executive committee to make Scotland's NEC representative elected by 'one member, one vote'. "This motion is expected to pass," the usually well-informed Skwawkbbox writes.
2. <https://skwawkbbox.org/2017/09/19/exclusive-terms-of-reference-for-corbbyn-review-of-labour-democracy>.
3. www.leftfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/NPF2017.pdf.
4. *The Guardian* September 18.
5. <http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/labour-party-rulebook-2017>.
6. https://gallery.mailchimp.com/68940bcd5c39b15b9b5d1b426/files/94f3edfe-98d0-447a-929d-71884fd9f3ba/Addendum_Delegates_Report_2016_FINAL_1_.pdf.
7. www.peoplesmomentum.com/labour_party_conference_2017.
8. www.clpd.org.uk.
9. www.peoplesmomentum.com/labour_party_conference_2017.
10. <http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/momentum-reduced-to-a-corpse>.
11. <http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/momentum-supporters-in-support-of-jackie-walker>.
12. <http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/mandatory-selection-on-the-agenda-at-2018-conference>.

Humpty Dumpty and 'anti-Semitism'

The Jewish Labour Movement claims its rule change has been adopted by the Labour Party NEC, Kat Gugino, of Labour Party Marxists, begs to differ

On September 18, *The Guardian* claimed that Corbyn would be "backing" a rule change to this year's Labour Party conference, moved by the Jewish Labour Movement.¹ Lo and behold, on September 19, the *Jewish Chronicle* joyfully reported that the Labour Party's national executive committee, meeting earlier in the day, "unanimously" passed the JLM's proposal.² Leftwing NEC member Darren Williams, however, writes on social media that "we approved an NEC rule change on dealing with prejudiced views and behaviour that avoided the more draconian approach favoured by the Jewish Labour Movement". So who is telling the truth?

Well, that depends on who you ask and what question you ask. Clearly, the JLM's fingerprints are all over the NEC compromise formulation. The *Jewish Chronicle* quotes in its article "a spokesman from Jeremy Corbyn" as saying: "Jeremy thanks all those involved with drafting this motion, including the Jewish Labour Movement and Shami Chakrabarti."

It is true, however, that the original JLM motion was not accepted. Tony Greenstein, a frequent writer in the *Weekly Worker*, believes the new formulation might simply represent a "pyrrhic victory" for the JLM. And he is right that one of the key aspects of the original motion was rejected: the JLM wanted a "hate incident" to be "defined as something where the victim or anyone else think it was motivated by hostility or prejudice based on disability, race, religion, transgender identity, or sexual orientation" (our emphasis).

This was a rather clumsy attempt by the JLM to misuse the recommendations of the MacPherson report, established after the killing of Stephen Lawrence, which found the police to be "institutionally racist". MacPherson recommended that when a victim or someone else perceives an attack or hate incident as racially motivated, then the police must record it as such.

In that sense, the JLM has failed in its outrageous attempt to enshrine in the party's rules that the Labour Party is institutionally anti-Semitic! The NEC formulation enshrines the need for at least some kind of evidence: "any incident which in their view might reasonably be seen to demonstrate hostility or prejudice". The JLM also failed in their attempt to explicitly enshrine the disciplining of members for comments or actions made in "private".

If successful, the motion would have handed Iain McNicol and the compliance unit a devastatingly effective witch-hunting app: members could have been explicitly punished on the basis of what others perceive to be their motivation for specific comments or actions, not what is was actually done or stated.

JLM threats

Take the following threat from the JLM that we have received via a bourgeois journalist. Lucy Fisher, senior political correspondent of *The Times*, wrote to us on September 18:

"I was hoping to talk to someone at Labour Party Marxists about your conference voting guide,³ which we propose to report on tomorrow. The Jewish Labour Movement has expressed concern about lines in the document such as:

"This is supported by the Jewish Labour Movement, which already tells you that you should oppose without even having to read it."

"The motion starts from the premise that the party has an "anti-Semitism problem", which is palpably untrue."

"This motion puts anti-Semitism (and cleverly, Islamophobia and racism) above the right to express opinions."

"The chairman of the Jewish Labour Movement [presumably Jeremy Newmark] has said the document provides 'an indication of the scale of the problem' of anti-Semitism in Labour and has called on Labour to establish who is involved in your group, take action to discipline those involved and remove any representative platform from the group at conference."

As you would expect from a reporter who works for a newspaper hostile to the left, Lucy has forgotten the word "probably" in the first sentence and is quoting half-sentences from our guide - and those entirely out of context. Still, even then, anybody apart from Jeremy Newark will struggle to find anything "anti-Semitic" in the above sentences.

Had Newark had his way, then the mere fact that he feels we are acting out of "hostility or prejudice" would have been enough to see LPM members sent to the compliance unit. As the NEC formulation stands, this will not be enough.

Thinking bad things

Of course, Newark is right: we are hostile to the Jewish Labour Movement. The JLM is, of course, an affiliate to the World Labour Zionist Movement, a loyal supporter of the state of Israel and home to many of those who have been so keen to save the Labour Party from its 'unelectable' leader.

Unfortunately, we are seeing yet another compromise that has characterised much of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. Clearly, Corbyn and his allies seem to believe that they can pacify saboteurs and achieve 'party unity' by giving ground on these sorts of issues. This is dangerously naive. The outcome of the Chakrabarti enquiry showed the opposite to be true. The witch-hunters' appetite will grow in the eating.

The worst excesses of the JLM motion (which, worryingly, also successfully went through six CLPs) have been removed, yes. But the fact remains that the NEC - and Corbyn - now seem to accept, albeit implicitly, the premise that Labour does indeed have an anti-Semitism problem. That is palpably untrue. It clearly does have an anti-left witch-hunt problem, as the suspensions of Ken Livingstone, Jackie Walker, Tony Greenstein and others clearly demonstrate. No doubt there are a minuscule number of individual members who hold anti-Semitic views - most of whom you would expect to belong to the party right, by the way. Labour is not some chemically pure ideological sect of a few hundred acolytes. We are a mass movement and therefore, to varying levels, may find in our ranks trace elements of some irrational minority prejudices that exist in wider society. The party - or, more specifically, the Labour left - has no more of an institutional anti-Semitism 'problem' than we have a problem with paranoid notions that 9/11 was an inside job or that shape-shifting space lizards run the world.⁴

Clearly, the huge scale of the 'scandal' that broke over members in 2016 (and still reverberates) is actually in inverse proportion to the real size of the



Ken Livingstone: biggest scalp so far for Jeremy Newmark and the Jewish Labour Movement's fake 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' campaign

problem itself. Even at the height of the feverish hunt for 'anti-Semites', the NEC only 'identified' and took action against a grand total of 18 members.⁵ Quite a few (like MP Naz Shah) were fully reinstated. Others, like Ken Livingstone and Jackie Walker, should be fully reinstated - nothing they said was even vaguely anti-Semitic.

In truth, we are in *Alice in Wonderland* territory here - or rather, Humpty Dumpty's corner of it and his fast and loose approach to semantics.⁶ Sections of the right of the party - with quite stomach-churning cynicism - have attempted to rebrand as 'anti-Semitism' even the discussion of some sensitive but real facts of Zionism's relationship with the early Nazi regime and the left's critical stance on the Israeli state's savage oppression of the Palestinian people.

The latter is a particularly smart move on behalf the witch-hunters. With a few dishonourable exceptions,⁷ the Labour left is highly critical of the Israeli state's ongoing colonial/expansionist oppression of the Palestinians and the appalling discrimination, displacement and denial of basic democratic rights that go with it. However, it is a crude and transparently false conclusion to draw from this that the left of the party wishes to see the poles of oppression simply reversed. There are different strategic approaches amongst comrades in solidarity with the Palestinian people (a single secular state, two viable state formations, etc). But a common

theme of the left is the need for democratic consent of these two peoples to live side by side, sharing common, substantive democratic rights. In other words, the left in the party is overwhelmingly anti-Zionist, not anti-Semitic.

These two very distinct categories have been conflated

for the most contemptible of reasons. In the struggle between the left and right for the soul of the party, 'anti-Semitism' has been "weaponised", as Chris Williamson MP quite rightly put it.⁸ It has proved to be a successful tool in the drawn-out campaign to destabilise Jeremy Corbyn. Historically, Corbyn has been an ardent supporter of Palestinian rights. Worryingly, we are not sure where he stands now. It is probably fair to say that his stance has become more 'flexible'.

We sincerely hope he has not come around to the stance of the national policy forum. The NPF is recommending a document to this year's conference that would dramatically change the party's stance on the question of Israel/Palestine. The 2017 election manifesto called for an end to Israel's blockade, illegal occupation and settlements. But these basic democratic demands have been dropped, along with the pledge that "A Labour government will immediately recognise the state of Palestine".

We would urge delegates to vote to refer back the NPF international document ●

Notes

1. *The Guardian* September 18.
2. www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/labour-executive-gives-backing-to-new-measures-on-antisemitism-1.444751.
3. <http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/lpm-voting-guide-for-labour-party-conference-life-long-bans-and-significant-silences>.
4. All genuine manifestations of the poison of anti-Semitism must be fought vigorously. However, it accounts for a very small percentage of 'hate crimes' in this country. The House of Commons home affairs committee published an October 2016 report, 'Anti-Semitism in the UK', noting that anti-Semitic hate crimes, however defined, total 1.4% of all racially inspired attacks. In the first half of the year there had been a rise of 11% in anti-Semitic incidents, compared with 2015. Numerically, this rise was from 500 to 557. However, 24% of the total - 133 incidents in all - were on social media. And social media accounted for 44 out of the increase of 57.
5. *Labour List* May 4 2016.
6. "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."
7. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty, for instance.
8. *The Guardian* September 18.



OUR HISTORY

In the footsteps of Lenin

The official CPGB's leading theoretician, Rajani Palme Dutt, followed the example of Lenin when assessing the reputation of Karl Kautsky, writes Lawrence Parker

Rajani Palme Dutt (1896-1974), the Communist Party of Great Britain's leading theoretician in its first decades, is not often thought of as a rebel in respect of his communism; or at least not in relation to the Comintern/Soviet controllers of the world communist movement.¹

After being caught in the right of Zinoviev's Comintern in 1923-24 through taking a conciliatory attitude to the minority Labour administration, Dutt, keeping in step with a Comintern that was politically to the left of the CPGB leadership majority through the mid-to-late 1920s, subsequently took a leftist tack in relation to issues such as the CPGB's work in the Labour Party. Dutt was always capable of rebelling against the more parochial sensibilities of his British comrades (through overseeing the adoption of the Comintern's 'imperialist war' line in 1939, down to leading a CPGB minority in 1968 backing the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia) in favour of a graveyard of Soviet-inspired 'internationalism'.

This article, however, reveals details of a minor ideological rebellion by Dutt on the issue of the reputation of Karl Kautsky (1854-1938). Dutt, as a good 'Leninist', upheld Lenin's view of Kautsky as a leading Marxist theoretician who had betrayed his earlier writings in 1914. As we shall see, there are pieces of evidence suggesting some elements in the early CPGB did not follow Lenin or Dutt on this matter. Rather, the implicit idea appeared to be that Kautsky had always been a renegade and that 1914 was hence implicit in all of his *oeuvre* (a view that has become generalised among sections of the contemporary left, either from ignorance or through an interpretation of writers such as György Lukács).

This is not written as some kind of revisionist exercise to rehabilitate Dutt's reputation. Rather, the final judgement on him has to be that he generally espoused, as from this example in the CPGB's crisis year of 1956, "Stalinist realism and political *machismo*" that "constituted an exercise in displacement intended to re-infuse communists with the hard-nosed mentality that 'You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs'"² Indeed, such an attitude proved to be fatal to Dutt's already reduced authority inside the CPGB after 1956. For some sections of the party he became a figure of fun,³ although Dutt was still respected by the CPGB's pro-Soviet left, particularly after his intervention during the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.⁴ (In fact, contrary to received contemporary wisdom, not all Dutt's writing was dross.)

However, despite figures such as Dutt not being candidates for any kind of rehabilitation, one still has to explain the generalised fragmentation afflicting organisations such as the CPGB in the world communist movement. By the 1970s such political and organisational fragmentation is obvious to anyone who has studied the CPGB (it was certainly also obvious to anyone active inside it). By and large, its trade union contingent was stuck inside a silo with its own structures and trade unionist ideology. Another 'party in a party' was its left, which had its own pro-Soviet ideology, foisted on top of confused ideas of militant class struggle. It too had its own structures of command (some of which were focused on Sid French and the Surrey district of the CPGB; others around figures such as Fergus Nicholson), set apart from the leadership of King Street.

By the 1970s, the CPGB's



Palme Dutt: posing

national leadership had effectively decided to organise around such fragmentation rather than counter it.⁵ But this fragmentation was nothing new to the CPGB. Right from its earlier expansionist attempts at 'Bolshevisation' in the 1920s, where an attempt was made to centralise its structures of command and provide uniformity to its ideology, this was always aspirational rather than real. The CPGB's leaders could never completely control their activists and intellectuals, and were thus always worrying about low-level deviations of one sort or another. The kind of brittle centralisation espoused by the CPGB, unlikely to consistently engage the democratic energies of its members, produced its opposite: fragmentation and attempts to route around the party's central structures. There was little that was politically positive about such actions, which, in general, did not step outside the boundaries conventionalised by the world communist movement. People often rebelled on the basis of previous bad periods of Comintern or CPGB politics (for example, general secretary Harry Pollitt argued briefly against 1939's new 'imperialist war' on the basis of a previous popular frontism; and the post-war CPGB 'anti-revisionists' tended to sanctify the reputation of earlier 'revisionists', such as Pollitt and Dutt).

Dutt, of course, was usually involved in this desiccated attempt at centralisation and the episode here is at the outer edge of this general process of fragmentation. But in many ways Dutt proves the complete hopelessness of the 'Bolshevisation' project of ideological unanimity. If the party intellectual

who seemed most attuned to Soviet conceptions was prepared at points to register his own intellectual dissonance, then what chance had anyone else in the CPGB of becoming a model of 'Bolshevised' perfection?

Differing views

Before we begin to discuss some of the early CPGB's thinking on Lenin and Kautsky, it is necessary to state that this article follows the argument of Lars T Lih. Lih focuses on a "central paradox" that "after the outbreak of war in 1914, Karl Kautsky was at one and the same time Lenin's greatest enemy and his greatest mentor". Lih goes on to mention "a constant stream of comments by Lenin praising 'Kautsky when he was a Marxist' on a wide range of topics".⁶ In other words, Lenin treated Kautsky in 1914 as betraying an earlier, theoretically sound, Marxism and reacted with shame and anger when Kautsky tried to excuse the action of the German SPD Reichstag deputies in voting for war credits.⁷ It was this framework that Palme Dutt absorbed from Lenin.

However, this perspective was not automatically generated in the early British communist movement. Rather, an alternative idea also took root - as against Lenin's more nuanced approach - that Kautsky had always been a problematic figure for Marxists. For example, in a review of Kautsky's *The dictatorship of the proletariat* (1918; first published in English in 1919) in *The Call*, the paper of the British Socialist Party (shortly to become part of the fledgling CPGB), in February 1920, WH Ryde took Kautsky to task for an overextension of ideas of capitalist democracy and the

forms of class struggle.⁸ Ryde stated: "In 1893 and 1900 [Kautsky] discussed this matter [of capitalist democracy and class struggle] and arrived at the following conclusion, which he believes is still valid."⁹

There then follows in the review a quote that condenses a couple of passages that Kautsky cites in chapter four of *The dictatorship of the proletariat*, taken, as Ryde suggests, from unspecified Kautsky works from 1893 and 1900:

This so-called peaceful method of the class struggle, which is confined to non-militant methods, parliamentarism, strikes, demonstrations, the press, and similar means of pressure, will retain its importance in every country according to the effectiveness of the democratic institutions [that] prevail there, the degree of political and economic enlightenment, and the self-mastery of the people.

On these grounds, I anticipate that the social revolution of the proletariat will assume quite other forms than that of the bourgeoisie, and that it will be possible to carry it out by peaceful economic, legal and moral means, instead of by physical force, in all places where democracy has been established.¹⁰

It is actually Kautsky who, ironically, seems to suggest this idea to Ryde that his pre-1914 standpoint was flawed, by conflating his views of 1893, 1900 and 1918. As Kautsky remarks of the passage quoted immediately above: "The above is my opinion today."¹¹ (The issue as to whether Kautsky's conflation of views from different periods of his political

career was legitimate is one that I will leave aside.)

Tom Quelch's review of the 1920 BSP edition of Lenin's polemic with Kautsky simply treats the latter as "the intellectual head and front of all those proletarian forces [that] still fall under the spell of social patriots on the one hand - men [such as] Scheidemann in Germany, Renaudel in France, Henderson, Thomas and Clynes in [Britain] - and the uncertain socialists such as Longuet in France, and the leaders of the ILP in this country", with no mention of any of the contradictions in Kautsky's long career.¹²

Such schematic conclusions were also present in some of the CPGB's early writings on the Second International. JT Murphy, writing in 1925, said: "The Second International ... represents the organisational growth of the proletariat divorced from revolutionary leadership. No wonder it was shattered by the first great shock of war and revolution."¹³ In other words, the collapse of the Second International was implicit in its earlier trajectory before 1914; and, by this logic, the Third International was the only genuine successor to the First International.

Yet, unsurprisingly in a movement premised on an unfolding 'Leninism', there were other attitudes to Kautsky. CPGB member Harry Wicks remembered Kautsky visiting London in 1924 to speak on the 60th anniversary on the founding of the First International:

I was in the group from our economics class, along with Jack Clancy and Bill Ryder, that went to hear that arch anti-Bolshevist. The occasion was an ILP dance and social; the band stopped for some minutes and, from a raised dais, Kautsky spoke. He was an old man with a white beard, mumbling softly in an English [that] was very bad to my ears. All I recall was, he conveyed greetings for the International's anniversary.

Bill Ryder never left the small coffee table even to listen, but, on our return, he was most critical. "What was Kautsky doing on the 50th anniversary in 1914?" he asked. But the point is, his criticism and opinions were confined to our small circle. It shows how the movement was still one: you could have a group of CPers going along to hear that outstanding critic of the Bolshevik Revolution, without feeling bound to heckle.¹⁴

Wicks added:

Long after his political demise as a Marxist thinker, Kautsky's books were still sought after by Marxist students. Three years later [1927] when I was told to prepare myself for the [Moscow] Lenin School, his *Economic doctrines of Karl Marx* was on the short list of compulsory reading.¹⁵

Wicks obviously has something more in common with Lenin's understanding of Kautsky, of a great theoretician who has fallen from grace, while he alludes to a division in CPGB ranks on the subject. Some were more hostile because of Kautsky's failure in 1914; others were more respectful because of his theoretical stature prior to the fall.

'When he was a Marxist'

It was this latter viewpoint that Dutt had taken over, as an inheritance of 'Leninism', in this period. In 1927,

in his 'Notes of the month' in *Labour Monthly*, Dutt discussed the fallacies of what he called the "imperialising" of the Labour Party and the incorporation of a 'socialist' colonial policy. He drew attention to the rejection of such policies by the Seventh Congress of the Second International in Stuttgart in 1907. He argued: "In this debate the decisive speech was made by Kautsky, who was then still a revolutionary socialist and Marxist."¹⁶

Dutt then moves on to approvingly paraphrase Kautsky's speech, concluding:

The conception that certain peoples are 'children', are incapable of self-rule: this is the basic conception of all despotism, the invariable argument of all slave-owners in favour of slavery. So Kautsky argued 20 years ago, and carried the congress with him.¹⁷

Unlike the tendency in the writing of Murphy that we have noted above, to treat the Second International as an aberration and the Third International as a simple continuation of the First, Dutt, using the example of Stuttgart, drew up a much more nuanced balance sheet of the Second:

It is to be noted that, as in all the discussions of the old pre-war Second International, while the Marxist position is more or less laid down in principle, the practical conclusions are not clearly drawn, and dangerous loopholes are left for opportunist distortions.¹⁸

This was no aberration on Dutt's part. Even the irruption of the 'third period' of the Comintern (roughly 1928-33) - where communist parties were pushed (with Dutt involved in the 'pushing' in the mid-to-late 1920s) into a more hostile and confrontational posture towards the social democratic organisations of the Second International, and which may have been expected to lead to more ideological venom being squirted at key figures such as Kautsky - provoked no essential change in Dutt's basic conception. Thus in his short book *Lenin* (1933), Dutt repeated his analysis of 1927:

The Socialist International numbered 12 millions by 1914. The programme of Marxism remained in name the programme. But the practice turned increasingly to opportunism: that is, to adaptation to the existing capitalist regime for the sake of limited immediate concessions.¹⁹

But Dutt does not merely shrug his shoulders at this occurrence as an immediate justification for the Third International; rather he stresses the *tragedy* of 1914. Or, as he puts it himself, "This moment was the blackest moment in modern history ... the instrument ... built up with the labour and sacrifice of generations to be ready for the crisis ... appeared to have failed."²⁰ Later in this work, Dutt, picking up on Lenin's quoting of Kautsky in '*Leftwing communism: an infantile disorder*'. The quote comes from the same article ('The Slavs and the revolution', 1901) with the preface that, back in 1901, Kautsky was "then the recognised theoretical leader of international socialism",²¹ which is similar to Lenin's "when he was still a Marxist and not a renegade".²² For Dutt, on this issue at least, 'Leninism' was an arena where Lenin had to be taken literally.

However, the ideological backdrop here was not static, as Kautsky continued a stream of polemics against the Soviet Union into the 1930s. For example, Allen Hutt complained of a "contemptible farrago of the most vulgar and childish *Morning Post* lies about the Soviet Union" in Kautsky's *Bolshevism at a deadlock* (1931).²³ In *Bolshevik* (an official Moscow magazine) in March 1931, there was

also an attempt to damage Kautsky's pre-1914 reputation and smear the Marxist theoretician and archivist, David Riazanov (1870-1938), at the same time. In an unsigned article in July 1931's *Labour Monthly*, a letter from Marx to Jenny Longuet of April 1881 was reproduced from the *Bolshevik* article alongside a poisonous commentary.

In this letter, Marx said of a young Kautsky:

When this beauty first appeared before me - I am speaking of this odd fellow, Kautsky - the first question [that] escaped my lips, was he like his mother? Absolutely not at all, he replied; on which I inwardly congratulated his mother. He is a mediocrity, with petty points of view, too wise by half (he is only 26 years' old), knowing better than anyone else, to a certain extent industrious, occupying himself with statistics, but getting little sense out of it; he belongs from the year of his birth to the genus philistine, for the rest he is in his way, a respectable fellow - I shall endeavour as far as possible to pass him on to friend Engels.²⁴

Not a very flattering assessment perhaps, although not the most hard-edged *political* one. However, the letter was used by elements in the Soviet bureaucracy and its OGPU to move against Riazanov, who was now being classed, in the lying commentary reproduced in *Labour Monthly*, as a "Menshevik savant and archivist".²⁵ It went on:

Riazanov, who has enlarged so much on the theme that he, in contrast to Bernstein, gives Marx without falsification, printed this letter ostensibly without any kind of abbreviation, but in fact carefully concealing the original of this letter in order to safeguard the authority of Kautsky, and in point of fact excising from the letter the deadly characterisation of Kautsky that it contains.²⁶

Trotsky

Leon Trotsky very effectively rubbished this frame-up, pointing out that Riazanov had "published not a few documents and works [that] had caused Menshevism considerable vexation".²⁷ He also praised Riazanov's "exceptional perseverance and ingenuity" in gathering the Marx and Engels archive, and stated that, far from representing some kind of skulduggery, the archivist's pruning of the judgement on Kautsky from the letter was probably related to the conditions of its sale:

It is beyond doubt that the 'Menshevik Lydia Zederbaum' did not simply turn over the letter to Riazanov, but she probably sold it as an intermediary for Bernstein or someone else among the old men who had the letter by Marx. It is quite natural that in selling this letter, which draws a crushing picture of Kautsky, Bernstein or the other proprietor of the document from the same circle, put as a condition for the sale that the letter should not be published while Kautsky was alive or while the one selling it was alive. The rigorous manner in which Bernstein submitted to this sort of censorship the correspondence of Marx and Engels is sufficiently well known.²⁸

Yet, despite his stout defence of Riazanov's actions, Trotsky appears to agree with the Soviet bureaucrats that Marx's judgement on the young Kautsky was revealing. He stated that the "crushing characterisation" of Kautsky therein "was, in short, *fully* verified by the future".²⁹ Leaving aside whether a short personal jab at a precocious youth can be truly crushing or some kind of magical portent of 1914, we can state with certainty that this would not have

been Lenin's judgement, in that he found *part* of Kautsky's future thought extremely conducive to his own political development (so Marx's words, if you treat them as any kind of pointer, were not *fully* verified). Neither did Dutt apparently think much of using this youthful portrayal of Kautsky as any definitive guide to the future.

To be fair to Trotsky, he did later correct his view on Kautsky and the Soviet bureaucracy. In 1938 he wrote:

The attempts of the present historiography of the Comintern to present things as if Lenin, almost in his youth, had seen in Kautsky an opportunist and had declared war against him, are radically false. Almost up to the time of the world war, Lenin considered Kautsky as the genuine continuator of the cause of Marx and Engels.³⁰

Contradict

This is a strange episode because, as the editor of *Labour Monthly*, it is implausible that Dutt would not have had full sight of the 'Marx on Kautsky' article before it went to press. And yet he chose - probably on purpose - to directly contradict this entirely negative view of Kautsky in his 'Notes of the month' in the very same issue. Dutt discussed the "deep corruption" of the "petty-capitalist outlook" that he saw as dominating the British trade union movement.³¹ He quoted Kautsky's *The social revolution* (1902) to illustrate the contradictions of the British movement's tradition:

The English workers today stand lower as a political factor than the workers of the most economically backward country in Europe - Russia. It is the real revolutionary consciousness in these latter that gives them their great political power. It is the renunciation of revolution, the narrowing of interest to the interests of the moment, to the so-called practical politics, that have made the latter a cipher in actual politics.³²

To underline this, Dutt made an appeal for the contemporary usefulness of Kautsky's remarks: "The foundations of this contrast, made by Kautsky with clear judgement then as to what constituted real backwardness and real strength in a working class movement, are not yet wiped out today."³³ Reading between the lines, Dutt is telling his audience that they should not pay too much attention to Marx's acerbic remarks about the youthful Kautsky; nor to the Soviet bureaucracy's promotion of them, even though Dutt felt obliged to print them in his magazine as a matter of course. At least in his own contribution to this particular issue of *Labour Monthly*, Dutt stayed faithful to Lenin's view of Kautsky as someone who, in his pre-1914 writings, could be a useful repository of knowledge for the working class movement.

To be clear, this was a fairly minor act of ideological rebellion by Dutt (although this issue was, of course, not a minor one for Riazanov, then being hounded by the OGPU) and has been recited here due to its interest in terms of understanding how the early CPGB understood its relationship with Kautsky; and because it is illustrative of the general framework of the overcentralisation/fragmentation couplet with which we began this excursion. Indeed, Dutt had more serious, although still perhaps ultimately secondary, disagreements with the Comintern line around 1928, over India's industrialisation prospects.³⁴

Dutt's view of Kautsky was an example of the manner in which 'Leninism' (a state-sponsored ideology) had developed: Dutt would have only seen himself as repeating the authoritative voice on Lenin on this

topic. But the fact that Dutt's reiteration only led in this instance to a partial fragmentation shows the contradictions inherent in such a process. The practice of 'Leninism' was meant to lead to precisely the opposite. JR Campbell, elaborating the doctrine to the CPGB's membership in 1925, argued that in the Second International

Groups with the most diverse views of socialist theory and policy ... sheltered under the expansive social democratic umbrella. The result was that the social democratic parties contained groups and schools waging continuous war against each other. There was no ideological unity. Against this method of party organisation Lenin waged unrelenting war.³⁵

Cruder CPGB advocates of 'Leninism', such as JT Murphy, arguing that a version of Bolshevism was entirely applicable to British conditions, considerably over-egged the pudding: "The Communist Party is pursuing day by day the policy Lenin enunciated as the world's greatest Marxist and proving from experience that Leninism is not for Russian consumption alone, but a vital factor in the progress of the working class of Britain."³⁶ So, here we have the proposition that the *policy* decisions of Lenin, and not just the Marxist method or process used to arrive at such decisions, have to be carried through into the very microbes of the CPGB's daily work.

But how Lenin's body of work (ie, a highly sophisticated, nuanced edifice concretely elaborated in another time and space) directly applied to the CPGB in the 1925 was a good question to ask and, at the very same time as the above two quotes appeared, an editorial in *The Workers' Weekly* partially stepped back from Murphy's conclusions:

In commemorating Lenin by making his doctrine accessible to the British working class the Communist Party is not claiming that doctrine as perfect and infallible. Leninism is not something that will guide us in all phases of the workers' struggle without us [referring] to the actual conditions in which we are operating. It is rather a body of knowledge [that] enables us to understand the conditions in which we are living, and to act on them in such a way as to get the best possible results.³⁷

This more dialectical version of 'Leninism' points up the fallacies of merely draping an idealised Lenin onto subsequent arguments and actions. But even this eminently more sophisticated version was really only ever the royal road to ideological fragmentation, as the *Collected works* continually threatened to burst the bounds of the more shabby expediency demanded of them by the world communist movement and its leaders.

Even Dutt, stiff-necked Stalinist though he was, briefly demonstrated to the world in 1931 the precise incompatibility of Lenin's *oeuvre* with the short-term needs of a grotesque OGPU frame-up ●

Notes

1. For a relatively recent biographical treatment of Dutt there is J Callaghan *Rajani Palme Dutt: a study in British Stalinism* London 1993. However, while this work does highlight some interesting materials for the study of Dutt's life, its analytical framework for understanding his communist career is, at best, thin and at times positively banal.
2. J McElroy, 'Communist intellectuals and 1956: John Seville, Edward Thompson and *The Reasoned*' in P Flowers and J McElroy (eds) *1956: John Seville, EP Thompson and The Reasoned* London 2016, p21.
3. James Klugmann, a CPGB intellectual from a later vintage than Dutt, apparently called him 'Palme-Dotty' shortly before his own death in the 1970s (G Andrews *The shadow man: at the heart of the Cambridge spy circle* London 2015, p219). Considering that Klugmann had very similar Stalinist form to Dutt, this seems to be a particularly brutal case of the pot calling the kettle black.
4. Other more prominent, and perhaps unexpected, intellectual fans of Dutt included the Marxist art writer and critic, John Berger. See L Parker, 'Berger and Stalinism' *Weekly Worker* February 2 2017.
5. By the time of the departure of Sid French and much of the Surrey and Hants and Dorset districts to form the New Communist Party in 1977, the CPGB's leadership admitted that it was being forced to reconstitute the party in those areas by relying on members with whom it had sharp differences - see L Parker *The kick inside: revolutionary opposition in the CPGB, 1945-1991* London 2012, p89.
6. LT Lih, 'Lenin, Kautsky and the "new era of revolutions"' *Weekly Worker* December 22 2011.
7. LT Lih, 'Lenin, Kautsky and 1914' *Weekly Worker* September 9 2009.
8. WH Ryde 'The mistakes of Karl Kautsky' *The Call* February 19 1920. This article does not specify what Kautsky work it is reviewing, although it offers some clues in terms of quotes and page numbers.
9. *Ibid.*
10. K Kautsky *The dictatorship of the proletariat* (www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1918/dictprole/ch04.htm).
11. *Ibid.*
12. T Quelch, 'The proletarian revolution: an appreciation of Lenin's book' *The Call* April 22 1920. The BSP's 1920 edition of Lenin's book was published with the slightly lumpy title of *The proletarian revolution and Kautsky the renegade*.
13. JT Murphy, 'The First and the Third: the 60th anniversary of the First International' *The Workers' Weekly* September 26 1924.
14. H Wicks *Keeping my head: the memoirs of a British Bolshevik* London 1992, p35.
15. *Ibid.*
16. 'Notes of the month' *Labour Monthly* February 1927.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.* For a similar reading of the Second International, see JR Campbell, 'Leninism and the party' *Workers' Weekly* January 16 1925.
19. RP Dutt *Lenin* London 1933, p18.
20. *Ibid* p19.
21. *Ibid* p88.
22. VI Lenin '*Left-wing communism: an infantile disorder*' (www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch01.htm).
23. G Allen Hutt, 'The final stage of Kautsky' *Labour Monthly* August 1931. Hutt repeated the Lenin/Dutt understanding that "many years ago Kautsky betrayed Marxism".
24. 'Marx on Kautsky' *Labour Monthly* July 1931. From Trotsky's comment on this case it seems as if a version of the *Bolshevik* article probably also appeared in *Pravda* (March 12 1931) - see L Trotsky, 'A new slander against DB Riazanov' (www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/xx/riazanov.htm).
25. *Ibid.* A year earlier, Riazanov had been praised by the same journal for his "indefatigable labours" on the collected works of Marx and Engels - see HCS (author), 'Book review: the early intellectual development of Karl Marx' *Labour Monthly* May 1930. Riazanov was swept up in the OGPU net after the arrest of a research assistant at the Marx-Engels Institute, Il Rubin. Rubin gave false testimony that Riazanov was a member of an underground Menshevik organisation. Riazanov was dismissed as director of the Marx-Engels Institute in 1931 and subjected to administrative deportation. The slanders in relation to Riazanov's handling of Marx's letter were very obviously part of the OGPU case against him. He died in 1938 in the Soviet purges.
26. *Ibid.*
27. L Trotsky *op cit.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid* (my emphasis).
30. L Trotsky, 'Karl Kautsky' (www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/11/kautsky.htm). Trotsky was also expressing late in his life the impact that Kautsky had had upon him. "Trotsky was telling us about the first time he had been invited to Kautsky's home in Berlin, and how Kautsky had been discussing something with Bebel (or Bernstein?) and he had listened in silence with the feeling: 'These are the great men of the movement, and I am an unknown young man ...'" - A Rühle Gerstel, 'No verses for Trotsky: a diary in Mexico (1937)' *Encounter* April 1982.
31. 'Notes of the month' *Labour Monthly* July 1931.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. Dutt maintained that the prospects for rapid industrialisation were good and that figures such as Gandhi reflected petty bourgeois, and not monopoly capitalist or feudal, concerns. Comintern figures such as the economist, Eugene Varga (1879-1964), argued that imperialism had impeded India's modernisation and that India's nascent bourgeoisie was unable to lead the anti-imperialist struggle. For a flavour of this debate, see E Varga, 'Economic policy in the fourth quarter' *Inprecorr* March 1928; and RP Dutt, 'The Indian awakening' *Labour Monthly* June 1928. Varga's position chimed well with the leftism inherent in the politics of the third period - and Dutt was in the strange position of being an advocate of leftism in Britain, while having a more sober appreciation of the travails of Indian anti-imperialism. This debate went forward to the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928, where the British delegation argued against the CI secretariat's thesis on colonialism - although even here such opposition did not mean they were opposed to the application of a third period line to India. See LJ Macfarlane *The British Communist Party: its origin and development until 1929* London 1966, p208.
35. JR Campbell, 'Leninism and the party' *The Workers' Weekly* January 16 1925.
36. JT Murphy, 'Leninism in Britain' *The Workers' Weekly* January 16 1925.
37. 'Leninism' *The Workers' Weekly* January 16 1925.

TORIES

Boris's cunning plan

Foreign secretary will never be good enough for Boris Johnson, reckons Paul Demarty - but the top job is hardly guaranteed

The silly season, it seems, has ended with a bang. And no sooner does British politics resume in earnest than the scheming in the upper echelons of the Conservative Party is restored to its customary pace and viciousness.

Boris Johnson is the plotter *du jour*, if that is not too lily-livered and continental a phrase for the blustering blonde Brexiteer, and he has chosen as his outlet *The Daily Telegraph*. Four thousand words tumbled forth from his pen in cod-Churchillian mode - scoffing at the risk of a 'cliff-edge' Brexit, refusing once more to countenance any 'divorce bill', and generally putting on the sort of show the petty bourgeois Tory right just love to see.

His 'people' have protested that this is all perfectly innocuous - merely a restatement of official government policy - and that the foreign minister backs Theresa May. There cannot be anyone alive stupid enough to swallow this line. May is about to deliver a speech in Florence, stressing the importance of obtaining a transitional deal with continuing access to the European market for some number of years. The divorce bill is to be reframed as the price of ensuring such access - nothing more British than a simple business transaction! - and a figure of £30 billion floated, about half of the opening offer from the European Union powers. None of this is likely to impress the true believers, but may reassure big business, and certainly has the fingerprints of chancellor Phillip Hammond all over it.

Boris, in stating the formal, pre-existing government policy, is flagrantly undermining a change in such policy, of which he cannot possibly be unaware, unless he is genuinely as thick as he sometimes wants to seem. The line to which he hews, remember, was cooked up in order to strike a sufficiently defiant note to make June 8 into a Hottentot election, and earn a thumping chauvinist victory for the Tories.

That scenario - to put it mildly - has not panned out terrifically well, and May is now restricted to such policies as she can steer through parliament. The Labour leadership has allowed itself to be bounced into a much clearer crypto-'remain' position over the summer by people like Kier Starmer - Labour abstentions cannot be relied upon by the government as they have often been before now. On the other hand, the Brexit-bankers hard core are getting organised - witness the 40 or so MPs signing this notorious leaked letter explicitly refusing to countenance continued membership of the single market. The parliamentary mathematics is pretty sensitive to minor disruptions like the open rebellion of the foreign secretary.

On the face of it, Boris's cunning plan has not panned out too well either. The irritation among his cabinet colleagues is clear - they signed up to collective responsibility, to propping up the government, and here is Boris, triumphantly off-message. Amber Rudd gently admonished him, from a BBC sofa, for "backseat driving" - it is Theresa May who is in charge of the vehicle, she said, not reassuring anyone. *The Times* of September 18 cited people close to Michael Gove denouncing the plot, although who knows what side he is on? He was spotted on holiday in Bayreuth with a certain Gideon Osborne, taking in some Teutonic opera.

In the pantheon of Wagnerian villains, we see Gove as a sort of Klingsor, a magician and satanic tempter, whereas Osborne is an Alberich, driven mad by his avaricious



Boris Johnson: sights still set on Number 10

pursuit of wealth; mad indeed is his reported line to *Evening Standard* staffers that he will not be happy until Theresa May is "chopped up in bags in my freezer". On the face of it, Boris does not fit into the mould of truly tragic villainy, appearing instead as a sort of jumped-up buffoon (Beckmesser from *Die Meistersinger*, perhaps?). But he is smarter than he looks, and so cannot have expected to immediately offload May as PM. So what does he expect?

Fragile

The context is, of course, that May is in an incredibly weak position. We have mentioned the arithmetical difficulties she faces in the Commons, but that is merely the most debilitating symptom of a grievous cause. May took hold of a fragile, small parliamentary majority, eyed up the prize of a landslide election victory against a fractious official opposition, but obtained for herself a minority government propped up by a cabal of grasping, swivel-eyed Orangemen. Her authority is shot and, though the success achieved by Jeremy Corbyn and Momentum in working around the defeatist party apparatus was important in the election result, so were the disastrous errors of May and her botched 'presidential' campaign.

May is clearly a strong fighter in internal Tory politics - by such means did she stitch up the leadership amid the post-referendum chaos in the first place; and indeed cling on when the world demanded her head after June 8. She only managed the latter, however, by making deals, and surrendering authority to the people she needed to prop her up. Hammond reportedly demanded a Brexit policy

that 'put jobs first', and we all know what sort of Brexit policy he means by that. Yet she also needed Boris, to guard her right flank. Given the clear divide opening up between the Tories' bourgeois benefactors and petty bourgeois electoral base on the question of Europe, it is hardly surprising that the parliamentary party has significant factional divisions. With a big majority, that could be managed by the whips' office; without one, the divisions are hardwired into a restive cabinet.

The upshot of all this is that, as I write, Johnson is still in charge of King Charles Street. It is difficult to imagine any government since that of Jim Callaghan tolerating such open insubordination; even *Liberal Democrat* members of the 2010 coalition would, surely, be easy enough for David Cameron to get rid of, even if he had to ask Nick Clegg nicely. May is trying to laugh it off - "Boris is Boris", she says, and ridicules (as has the office for national statistics) the utterly false claim, bizarrely reheated by Boris in his *Telegraph* piece, that Britain will be £350 million a week better off after Brexit. It does not matter. All that matters is that *she cannot sack him*. Paradoxically, the more she disciplines him without sacking him, the more obvious it becomes that the clearest and most reasonable remedy for such insubordination is denied her.

We may even concede, with *Times* columnist Oliver Wright, that "Mrs May doesn't want to sack Mr Johnson at the moment, even if she could", because

His performance as foreign secretary a little over a year into the job has hardly been inspiring and that in a way is the

point. High office has weirdly diminished Mr Johnson and the political threat he poses. The danger is if he returns to what he is best at - campaigning without having to make the kind of compromising that being in government inherently involves.¹

Such subtle calculations are grist to the mill of combatants in the Tory fray, and to learned pundits like Mr Wright; the cost of allowing Johnson to expose his inadequacy as a frontline politician is, at the very least, *appearing weak*.

It is, of course, possibly more severe even than that; for the lack of a properly prime-ministerial or presidential appearance seems to be no disadvantage in the current situation with electors quite tired of political 'professionalism', and the dishonest cynicism that attends to its every step. The meaning of Johnson's insubordination is that he is willing to sacrifice the foreign office if it will get him into Number 10.

There is a whole other section of the bourgeoisie implicated here, of course, which is its non-British members. The attitude of the EU powers in this whole process has been one of bloody intransigence - we suppose that such people are tired of trouble at the outer border of their bloc, what with the insolence of the Greeks and so on; but none have been more disruptive than the British, who have frustrated at every turn the closer integration that alone would allow Europe to challenge for global hegemony. We wonder often these days what they say amongst themselves - there are no end of public statements tutting at British childishness, but what are the calculations behind them?

Such things will only become truly clear in retrospect, but it seems at the very least that Brexit presents the European Union with an historic opportunity to discard its most debilitating fetter, the 'enemy agent' across the Channel. There is a limited analogy that places Britain as a sort of Confederacy, albeit without the clear moral line that divided the defenders and the overthrowers of chattel slavery in the 1860s; in the wake of that overthrow, America emerged as a nation capable of competing for global hegemony, the war itself opening the way to protectionism and a modern financial system, among countless other dizzying lurches into high capitalism. The Brits may be suffered to continue as a trading partner of some sort, or even - with appropriate demonstration of contrition - as a member-state of the EU; but gone forever will be its special vetoes and exemptions.

The disunity in the upper ranks of the Tories is an inconvenience from this point of view, merely because it introduces uncertainty, a distinct element of chaos, into proceedings: it dangerously mixes the class interests of the bourgeoisie with the personal interests of its squabbling hirelings. The appeal of 'strong and stable' leadership to the ruling class is ultimately a matter of such a leader being both amenable to the interests of his or her own class and able to deliver on them. Since we cannot accuse the government of any such crime, the situation remains delicate ●

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Notes

1. *The Times* September 19.

USA

New assault on migrants

Trump's latest moves emphasise once again the need for the left to get its act together, writes **Peter Moody**



Trump wants border wall

To a significant degree, media cycles in the US appear to be dominated by the general theme of 'What did Donald Trump try to do this week?' Whether it is a more or less inane Tweet-storm or an attempt to steer a policy proposal around the rocky shores of Congress, actual advancements on his agenda in a formal political sense seem few and far between, even taking into account the prevailing wisdom of increasing legislative deadlock.

From this perspective, it is unsurprising that one of the big recent achievements of the administration was the ending of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme, which could be done purely through rescinding the executive order that brought it into being in the first place, thus not having to deal with Congress at all.

Nevertheless, the elimination of DACA will throw the futures of hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants into doubt. As constituted, DACA bestowed upon its enrollees a form of legal status, providing them an ability to work outside of the more informal or 'under the table' areas of the economy that undocumented workers are typically consigned to. This status was never going to be simply permanent - a DACA applicant's status had to be renewed every two years and said renewal was dependant on the "good behaviour" of that applicant - but it still provided a modicum of stability not normally afforded to the undocumented.

Now, the programme will be phased out in such a way that renewals will not be accepted for anyone whose status expires after the beginning of March of next year, and even those who can renew for another two years must do so by October 5. And, while the Trump administration has said that the former DACA recipients will not be considered priorities for deportation, the inconsistent track record of the president regarding the programme in

general leaves one to be sceptical of that statement's sincerity.

In fact, despite the high profile of the DACA programme and the 'model' status of its recipients likely making attempted deportations very controversial, as evidenced by the detention of two of them in separate incidents earlier this year, it is possible that the nature of DACA itself may make its soon to be former recipients much easier targets for deportation, thus throwing a bone to the hard-line anti-immigrant sections of Trump's supporters. Applying to the programme in the first place meant revealing a person's immigration status to the state, thus meaning there are now databases of information on this group of the undocumented.

If the Trump administration was able to access that information and deliver it to immigration enforcement authorities, it would give them the ability to detain and start the deportation of potentially hundreds of thousands of people, quite possibly including the families of DACA recipients. While such deportation proceedings would ultimately be a significant undertaking of time and effort, it would provide the impression that the administration is doing something about illegal immigration, thus fulfilling at least an aspect of Trump's programme and shoring up some of his support.

Unless, of course, if the meetings that Trump has had with top Democrats is to be believed as the start of some process that would save at least some of the provisions of the programme. The possibility of saving DACA in part or in whole had been held out - Trump's follow-up statement to the announcement which rescinded it specifically called on Congress to take up immigration reform, and the manner in which DACA is being wound down does give a window for Congress to pass something that could potentially keep its provisions in place. But the combination of appearing to work with Democrats in order to keep any parts

of the programme, with an apparent suggestion from the same meeting that the border wall that is so eagerly desired by sections of the nationalist right may not be included with said deal, could easily do more to alienate the people that ending DACA would ostensibly be appealing to.

Conservative talk radio has been fielding caller after caller in recent days expressing frustration or dismay with Trump's meetings with Democratic politicians and, while the common refrain of interpreting this frustration through the lens of the midterms has been a tired one since Trump's first day in office, no doubt a number of Republican members of Congress are looking to their next re-election campaign with concern over having to explain any deal that their president comes up with behind their backs.

Stuck in the middle of this are the DACA recipients themselves. If DACA was codified wholesale into law rather than in its original state as an executive order, this would be one of the better possible outcomes: as mentioned before, executive orders are more easily undone than legislation. Furthermore, the question of constitutionality was going to be hanging over the head of the programme unless and until it was formally brought before the Supreme Court. And, as the attorneys general of several states had plans to file suit over the constitutionality of DACA, this would have potentially resulted in some finality, whether for or against. As it stands, however, the issue can continue to be live for debate and negotiation, in order for the Trump administration - not to mention Trump, the person - to achieve a policy that is probably wanted with increasing desperation. The DACA recipients, on the other hand, will be stuck in legal and social limbo: arguably not in as much immediate risk as millions of other undocumented immigrants in the US, but nevertheless with an increasingly large target on their backs.

So far, the left has been positively

involved with both formal and practical solidarity with these and other immigrants, and this will hopefully continue, as immigrant communities come under ever-increasing pressure - whether from the state or from reactionary groups. But, the current tendency of the administration - and the government generally - to move from one statement or policy objective to another erratically and with frequency can easily help exacerbate the tendency of the left to also jump to rallying against whatever is making the most news this week.

Already, plans by the Senate to re-attempt a repeal of the Affordable Care Act is starting to dominate

headlines, and if that succeeds in capturing people's attention as the Bad Thing Which Must Be Opposed Immediately, immigrant communities could be left bereft of valuable support in their self-defence. While the still-scattered nature of the American left makes this as much of a practical problem as one of politics or temperament, it still points to the need for a left that can carry on sustained activity - both for its own defence and that of all oppressed people - but also to rebuild itself and its base to be able to pose the question of something radically better.

As the slogan goes, an injury to one is an injury to all ●

Fighting fund

Up our sights

Didn't I say things would improve this week? Seven days ago just under half the month had gone and our fighting fund running total for September was standing at only £644, when we need to raise £1,750.

But the below-average return from standing orders last week was well and truly turned on its head this week - no less than £815 came in from SOs. Thanks go (in order of the size of their monthly donations) to KB, SK, PM, MM, TB, DG and TR for their generosity and commitment.

And the number of SO donors has been added to this week in the shape of new subscriber AW, who has more than doubled the asking price for a subscription, paying £25 a quarter instead of the £12 we charge for comrades who pay by this method. Thank you, comrade. Also in the post was a £20

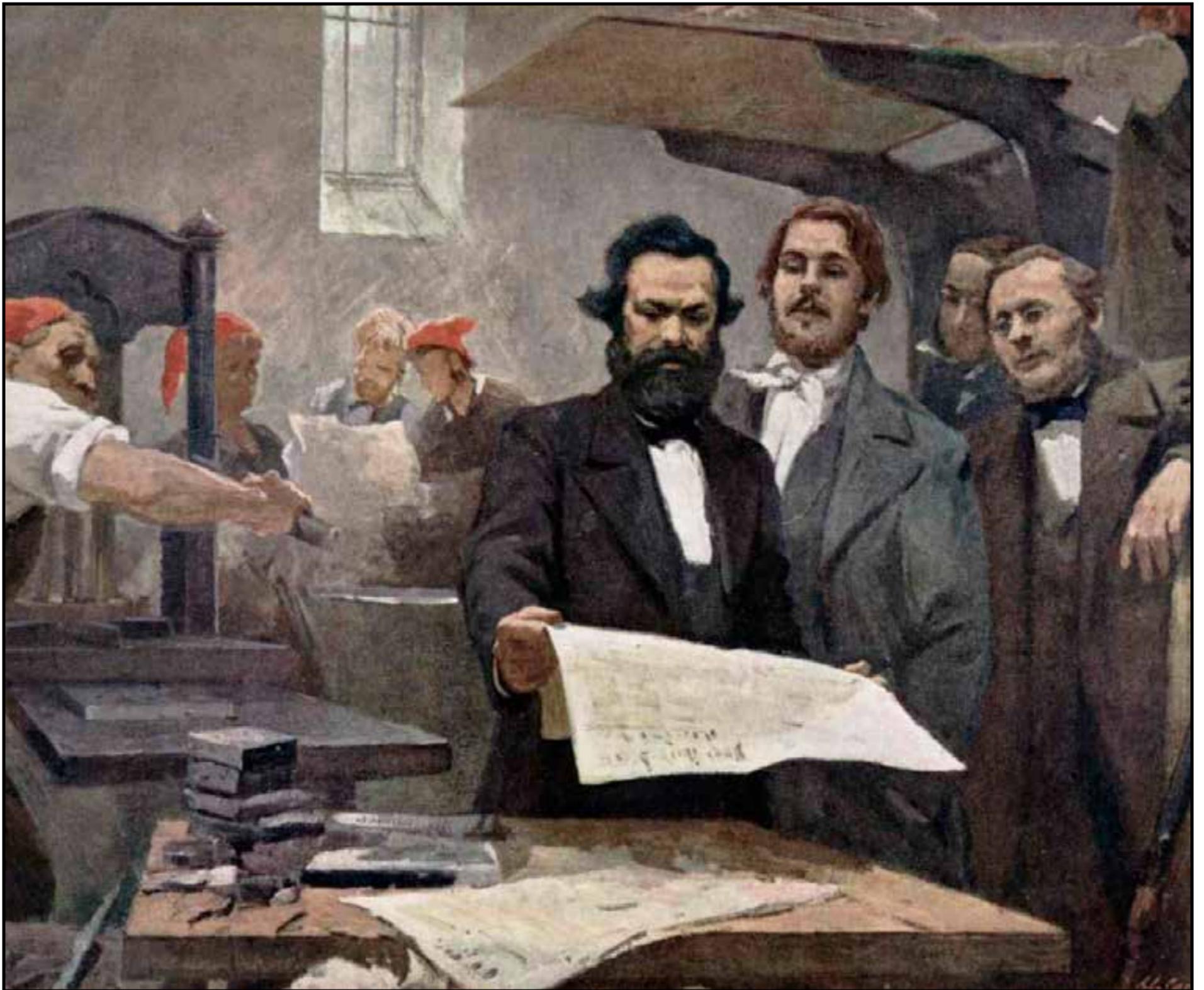
cheque from CD, while KC (20) and BR (£10) both made use of our PayPal facility. Mind you, they were the only two out of 3,064 online readers last week to click on that button.

Still, they contributed to an impressive £890 that we received from all those sources, taking our September running total up to a much more satisfying £1,534. Which means we now need just £216 to reach our target, with nine days still to go.

I think we should now up our sights. By my calculations the overall fighting fund deficit from the previous eight months of the year stands at £634. Let's see if we can eat into that!

Robbie Rix

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

1917**Marx and Engels: demands of the Communist Party**

Bringing Marx and Engels into the picture

Continuity was the link between Marxism's founders and 1917 Russia, argues **August J Nimtz**, in the first of three talks he gave to the CPGB's Communist University

First of all, many thanks for having me here to speak. I heard about the event for the first time a few years ago, and was curious to see it for myself. I am very happy that I have managed to fit it into my schedule and be here: we live in incredibly interesting political times and I think that it is vital that we have the kind of discussions we are having here.

In what follows I will begin with Marx and Engels. Subsequently, I will look at the implications of the ideas of Marx and Engels for Lenin's electoral strategy, based on the ideas outlined in my recent books.¹ My aim here is to try and bring Marx and Engels into the picture of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.

It was exactly 100 years ago in August that the decisive moment in 1917 took place - the defeat of the attempted *coup d'état* on the part of general Kornilov. The success of the Bolsheviks in defeating this coup put them on the map and gave them a kind of moral authority, which would allow them to lead workers and peasants to power in October. In September, in the wake of the defeated coup, elections

were held in Petrograd and other cities, and this is where we begin to see the Bolshevik success in defeating the coup registered in the electoral process.

In fact, a year later, in 1918, Lenin wrote an article on the prospects of revolutionary development in Germany, in which he made the following comment on the Bolshevik experience of 1917: "We not only thought - we knew - with certainty, from the experience of the mass elections to the soviets, that the overwhelming majority of the workers and soldiers had already come over to our side in September and in early October".²

Chinese wall

This relationship between elections and Bolshevik strategy is what I wish to focus on. I wish to make the case that Lenin developed a strategy of "revolutionary parliamentarism" (a term he begins to use around 1919-20) and I argue that this concept is more relevant today than it has ever been.

Why? First, the continuing and deepening crisis of capitalism - despite some evidence of a slight recovery in this or that economy - is still with us

and is taking its toll on working people. There is a lack of growth within the major capitalist economies, with some bourgeois commentators now referring to 'secular stagnation', for example.

Second, this crisis has enormous political implications and accounts to a large extent for the recent round of elections - often referred to as the 'populist elections' - which are a reflection of the problems in the economy which have been brewing for decades (we only need think of 1973-74, 1981-82, etc, when we began to witness the standards of living of working people deteriorate). The only solution capitalism had for these problems was credit and debt, but all of that came to an end, in a spectacular fashion, in 2008.

The only solution they have is again to reflate and to continue employing credit and debt in order to get out of this crisis. But there is no way in which they are going to be able to solve the problems in this fashion and it is only a matter of time before the next downturn comes.

What is particularly important in this is to look at how the crisis

has impacted materially on working people, and how this development has manifested itself in the electoral process. It is precisely at this moment, when working people are wondering whether the electoral process can be deployed at all in order to solve their problems, that revolutionary parliamentarism is required. The crisis of social democracy continues across the world (whether with Syriza in Greece or the Workers Party in Brazil).

To its peril, social democracy has not taken on board the advice of Marx and Engels (and the only correction they ever made to the Communist manifesto) with regard to the Paris Commune: namely that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes".³ This is the lesson of 20th and 21st century social democracy. I argue that revolutionary parliamentarism is the alternative both to social democracy and anarchist abstentionism. This is the case I now wish to make with reference to the ideas of Marx and Engels and their influence on Lenin.

When researching my books on

Lenin's electoral strategy, one of the things I noted in the existing literature was the absence of, the complete silence on, the relationship between Marx and Engels, on the one side, and Lenin's electoral strategy, on the other. There was the proverbial Chinese wall between them. Even in Trotsky's magisterial *History of the Russian Revolution*, there is little or nothing said about this connection between Lenin and Marx and Engels. Of course, it is not surprising that nothing should be said about it in the mainstream academic literature, which in one way or another is informed by social democracy. But even in the best examples of this research, such as Alexander Rabinowitz's three volumes on the Bolshevik's rise to power, he makes it clear that he has no interest whatsoever in exploring whether there are any connections between the strategy of Lenin and that of Marx and Engels. He gives Lenin his due in those three volumes, but Marx and Engels do not even warrant a citation in the index! To a large extent, addressing this gap was one of the motivating factors behind my own research.

What we fight for

Two addresses

The key document, I claim, which links Marx and Engels to Lenin's electoral strategy, is the March 1850 'Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League'.⁴ The underlying context of this document was the fact that revolutionary forces from the 'European spring' of 1848 were forced into retreat because the revolutionary process went into decline.

The expectation was that the process would heat up once again. But for the time being, Marx and Engels had to retire from the battlefield to London, with the expectation that they would be able to regroup once again. What was required, therefore, was to draw up a balance sheet of what had happened in those 17 months of 1848-49. The 'Address' was the result. There were, of course, other balance sheets - *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte; Revolution and counterrevolution in Germany*; even *The peasant wars in Germany*, but this 11-page document - I encourage those who have not read it to do so - lays out very clearly what revolutionaries have to do in this period of retreat in order to prepare for the expected revival of the revolutionary process.

I argue that the very last section of the *Communist manifesto* held open the possibility that the liberal bourgeoisie might come over to the side of the revolutionary forces. By contrast, the main lesson from 1848-49, as expressed in the 'Address', was that we could not rely on the liberal bourgeoisie to carry out the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

But who should the communists look to instead in Germany, with its small working class? Well, to the petty bourgeoisie. The 'Address' makes it clear that we look for an *alliance* with these forces, not *unity*. We have to work with them, but we should be wary of them. And the only way to guarantee that we defend the interests of the working class is for that class to be organised *independently*. In fact, the word 'independently' appears at least once on each of those 11 pages! It is a key word in the document.

Further, the 'Address' makes three major claims which I think support my case for it being the major document for understanding what Lenin would later do in 1917:

- First, if a new government is to emerge from the expected revival of the revolutionary process, then workers should have no faith in it. They should immediately set about establishing alternative governments - workers' councils, and so on. I argue that this anticipates the dual power of 1917.
- Second, workers need to arm themselves with workers' militias.
- Third, in the expected future elections, workers need to stand their own candidates - even if there is no prospect of winning, workers must field candidates in order to disseminate their ideas and assess their forces.

In other words, the electoral process should be deployed both to propagandise and to determine when it is most favourable to carry out armed struggle. The claim I am making is that, in many ways, these three tasks become the game plan for Lenin in 1917. Part of the evidence I draw on in order to make this claim comes from David Riazanov, the Bolshevik archivist, who claims that Lenin committed to memory the 1850 'Address' and used to love reciting it. Particularly in the debates between Lenin and Plekhanov regarding what is on the historical agenda in the revolution of 1905, Lenin draws on the 1850 'Address' in order to correct one of Plekhanov's erroneous claims.

But it should be emphasised that there are two 'addresses' in 1850 - there is also the 'June address'. The 'March address' does not mention the peasantry, which might seem to undermine my argument that it provided the basis for Lenin's

ideas, which always revolved around the alliance with the peasantry. But the question of the peasantry actually comes out in the June address. In fact, during 1848-49 Marx and Engels went to great lengths in their activity to realise the alliance with the peasantry.

Where does this idea come from? After all, as some people point out, there is no mention of the peasantry in the *Communist manifesto*. That is true. But if we look at the accompanying document - namely 'The demands of the Communist Party' - we see that within the 17 demands advanced in this document there is explicit reference to the alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry. Engels often referred to this as the 'people's alliance' - the alliance between the workers, the peasants and the petty bourgeoisie. So the reference to the peasantry in the June address does not come out of the blue, but flows from Marx's and Engels's previous work.

German example

Let us now fast-forward slightly. By 1861-62, Marx and Engels have once again turned their attention to electoral politics, because space has opened up in Germany for the workers' party to run candidates. The German party is thus in the vanguard of this process of employing elections in the interests of working class political action.

And the experience gained by the German party in this period will become important subsequently, when this question emerges once again in the context of Marx and Engels's activity in the First International (International Workingmen's Association). Marx and Engels will point to this experience in the 1860s as an example of independent working class political action, with Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel as role-models of how to intervene in the electoral process from a working class perspective.

The German experience thus becomes a positive example, to which Marx and Engels can refer in their debates with the anarchists and Bakunin's policy of abstentionism. In many ways, this debate with the anarchists was an attempt to put meat on the bones of the 1864 'Inaugural address', written by Marx, which claims that the task of the working class is to take political power. Many people, from various political backgrounds, signed up to this guiding idea when joining the International, but the concrete implications of it had not been fleshed out - this was the background to the growing clash with Bakunin's forces inside the First International. And, with the Paris Commune of March-April 1871, this matter of working class political power was no longer an abstract prospect, but a very real one: how does the working class respond to these opportunities?

In September 1871, the International held a conference in London. It is at this conference that the International went on the record, for the very first time, regarding independent working class political action and what this entailed in terms of the electoral process. The decisions - including the famous 9th resolution which emerged from this conference - would later be ratified by a delegate conference at the Hague, in September 1872. And all this was part of the split with the

anarchists. This schism revolved around narrow organisational issues, but, as we know, often in politics these issues are a reflection of political issues - in this case whether to intervene in the electoral process with an independent working class outlook.

I cannot recommend enough Marx's and Engels's interventions in these debates in September 1871 regarding the need for the working class to take advantage of the political space and not to abstain. Abstention only allows the working class to be duped by other, non-working class forces, they say. It is incumbent upon the working class movement to make use of this space. It is in this context that we see Engels writing on the need to defend and extend civil liberties, which are needed in order for the working class to develop a party able to take power.

Let us once again fast-forward slightly. After the Hague Congress the International basically became defunct. But Marx and Engels left the congress in the confident expectation that the seeds had been planted for the development of independent working class parties in various countries. And indeed this period (roughly between 1875 and 1895) saw the biggest ever growth of working class parties in Europe - I view this as the product of the decisions adopted by the International in London and the Hague.

Reformist dangers

In the meantime, their familiarity with the activities of the German party had allowed Marx and Engels to get a greater sense of what was involved in electoral politics. The party had such a long history of being involved in this process that Marx and Engels were able to offer advice - and caution - to provide a sober assessment of what the electoral arena entailed. Indeed, I argue that one of the most important documents in the Marx-Engels arsenal is the 'Circular letter' of 1879⁵ - a private letter sent to August Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Wilhelm Bracke and other leaders of the German party.

This correspondence is a critique of the tendencies towards reformism within the party - with a young writer by the name of Eduard Bernstein leading the charge in this direction. Marx and Engels are able to beat him back at this point, but we now know that Bernstein was simply laying low, waiting for the death of Engels before coming out with his true politics. At any rate, Marx and Engels zoomed in on the danger of being seduced by the electoral process and one of the phenomena they note was the tendency of the representatives in the Reichstag to seek increasing independence from the rank and file of the party - all in the name of manoeuvring and negotiating within the parliament.

So alarmed were Marx and Engels by this development that they threaten to break off relations with the German party. Bebel and Bernstein were then invited to come over to London to discuss with the two 'old ones' and to achieve some clarity about what was going on within the German party. What is significant about this episode is Marx's and Engels's recognition that participation in the electoral

process is fraught with all kinds of reformist dangers. As such, the 'Circular letter' of 1879 is a crucial document in the genesis of revolutionary parliamentarism.

One of the problems faced by the German party, of course, was the Anti-Socialist Laws of 1878, which ensured that the party could not hold the meetings and conferences required for rank-and-file control over the parliamentary fraction. The fraction was thus able to use Bismarck's limits on the freedom of assembly, and so on, to begin to make independent moves politically - away from the rank and file. When the Anti-Socialist Laws fell in 1890, Engels (Marx had died in 1883) was adamant that the party convene the kind of delegated meetings and congresses which could bring the parliamentary fraction under control.

I refer to Engels's struggle with the leadership of the German party - his attempt to maintain the revolutionary intervention in the electoral process that he and Marx had outlined - as his last struggle. Only in hindsight do we know that Engels was not successful in this battle (we are always wiser in hindsight, of course). But there was nothing inevitable about the reformist course within the German party. Engels was very clear about the importance of using the electoral arena as a means to an end. As he put it in a letter to Paul Lafargue, one of the leaders of the French party which had just won some seats in parliament in 1892, universal suffrage "indicates with the most perfect accuracy the day when a call to armed revolution has to be made".⁶

Engels marvelled at the weapon of universal suffrage - if only people knew how to use it properly, as a way of assessing the forces required for armed struggle! And in the last section of his *Origins*, when talking about universal suffrage, Engels uses the thermometer as an analogy. He had to camouflage his thoughts slightly in order to get the book past Bismarck's censors, but the analogy is clear: when things are heating up, the thermometer of universal suffrage can be used to decide when to launch the armed insurrection.

Russian vanguard

There is a lot more that I could say on these matters, but I will finish with one final point. Contrary to standard Marxology-Leninology, Marx and Engels paid much attention to Russia, which became tremendously important in their thinking - so much so that Marx was learning Russian towards the end of his life and reading about the peasantry. His last research and writing revolved around the Russian peasantry, and Lenin's first writings also deal with the same topic - he picked up where Marx left off.

In the 1872 preface to the Russian edition of the *Communist manifesto*, Marx and Engels - not Lenin, remember! - are clear that Russia forms the vanguard of the revolutionary process in Europe. Engels, who outlived Marx by 12 years and was thus able to see how this process unfolded further, was clear on this too. In his last definitive words on the subject, written about six months before his death, he was adamant that, while the revolution can begin in Russia, its success will depend upon whether it extends westward - there can be no transformation towards socialism in Russia unless the working class takes power in western Europe ●

Notes

1. A Nimitz *Lenin's electoral strategy from Marx and Engels through the revolution of 1905* Basingstoke 2014; *Lenin's electoral strategy from 1907 to the October revolution of 1917* Basingstoke 2014.
2. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 27, Moscow 1965, pp19-29.
3. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ch05.htm.
4. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/communist-league/1850-ad1.htm.
5. www.marxistsfr.org/archive/marx/works/1879/09/18.htm.
6. K Marx, F Engels *CW* Vol 50, p29.

■ 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.

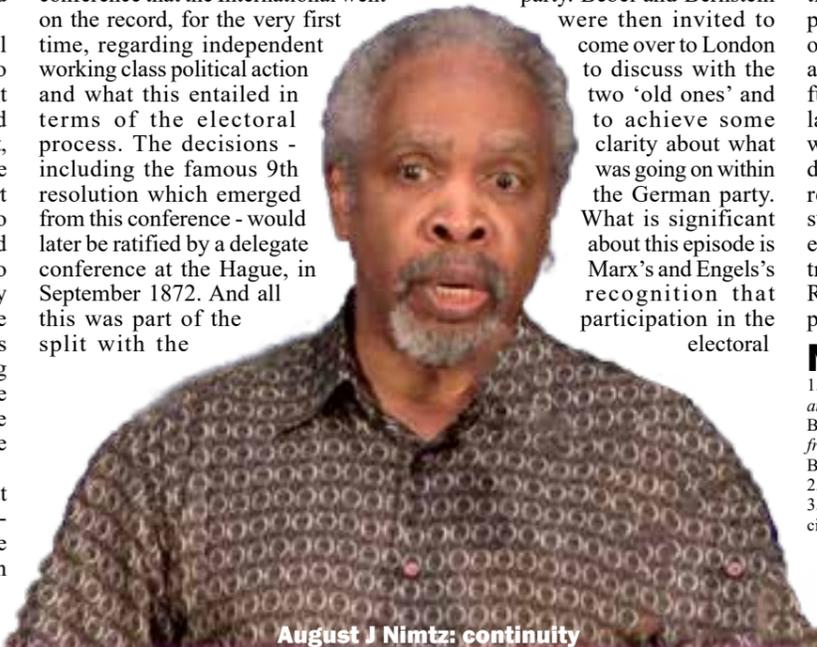
■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ 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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August J Nimitz: continuity

weekly Worker

**Bosses prefer
cheap labour
to expensive
technology**

Hire and fire as they please

With union combativity languishing, writes **Michael Roberts**, real wages continue to fall despite full employment

Britain's unemployment rate has fallen to a new 42-year low of 4.3% in the three months to July. That is down from 4.4% a month ago and the lowest since 1975. That sounds good news for all - until we look at what is happening to average wages for British workers after inflation is deducted. Average weekly earnings only rose by 2.1% per year in the last quarter, weaker than expected and the same as the previous figure. But inflation jumped from 2.6% to 2.9%. So real wages are falling and the decline is accelerating - for the average earner. When adjusted for inflation, the real value of people's earnings has fallen 0.4% over the last year.

Why is the UK's unemployment rate so low and how is it possible that wages are not keeping up with prices when the labour market is at its tightest for over 40 years? Well, as several posts on the excellent *Flip Chart Fairy Tales* blog site¹ show, British employers, rather than invest in new technology that could replace labour, have opted for cheap 'unskilled' labour - both British and migrant - with the full knowledge that, with little employment protection and weak trade union backing, they can hire and fire as they please.

Union membership has fallen to its lowest level since the government started counting in the 1970s.² This is not just a feature of the UK. In most advanced economies, union density (the proportion of those in employment who are members of unions) has fallen over the last few decades. At the same time, much of the employment increase since the great recession has been in low-paid self-employment, as people set themselves up online or take jobs as taxi drivers, etc that do not involve wage employment.

As the recent report on the state of the British economy ('Time for change: a new vision for the British economy' - the interim report of the Institute for Public Policy Research's Commission on Economic Justice) states:

The UK's high employment rate has been accompanied by an increasingly insecure and 'casualised' labour market. Fifteen percent of the workforce are now self-employed, with an increasing proportion in 'enforced self-employment', driven by businesses seeking to avoid employer responsibilities. Six percent are on short-term contracts, and almost three percent are on zero-hours contracts. More workers are on low pay than 10 years ago. Insecure and low-paid employment is increasing physical and mental ill-health.³

There is a huge sense of insecurity⁴ that has persisted since the recession. According to *Flip Chart*,⁵ "Even those in full-time jobs feel less secure⁶ than they did a decade ago and, when, combined with the rise in more insecure forms of housing tenure,⁷ it is hardly surprising that people lack the confidence to ask for a pay rise⁸."

The UK is the only major Organisation for Economic Cooperation



Car wash Britain

and Development country where gross domestic product has risen since the recession, yet wages have still fallen. Indeed, the UK is only one of six countries in the 30-nation OECD bloc where earnings after inflation are still below 2007 levels and the UK is the worst of the top seven G7 economies.

And what is also forgotten is that, if you allow for population growth (mainly immigration), the UK has barely seen any economic growth, with GDP per person only just above the level of 2007 and real consumer purchasing power still lower than in 2007.⁹ Indeed, according to the Bank of England, UK workers are suffering from the lowest real wage growth in 160 years!

When you run of out more workers, then growth in output is dependent on raising the productivity of each worker. In the UK, 'full employment' plus low economic growth has meant low productivity growth: ie, overall, output per worker is hardly rising. UK productivity is 13% below the average for the richest G7 countries and has stalled since 2008. According to the IPPR report,

UK leading firms are as productive as elsewhere, but we have a longer 'tail' of low-productivity businesses,

in which weak management and poor use of skills leads to 'bad jobs' and low wages. A third of adult employees are overqualified for their jobs - the highest proportion in the European Union. This has been enabled by a labour market that is one of the most flexible, or deregulated, in the developed world. Too many sectors have effectively fallen into a low-pay, low-productivity equilibrium.¹⁰

The irony is that, since the Brexit vote, there has been a sharp reduction in immigration from the European Union. With 'full employment' now achieved and the UK-born population no longer increasing, if EU labour stops coming to the UK, then serious shortages will appear in important sectors like hospitals, education, farm work, leisure staff, etc. And these 'low-skilled' jobs will not be filled by British citizens or even those from outside the EU.

The reason that productivity has stalled is because British capital will not invest in new technology. Again, here is the IPPR report:

Public and private investment is around five percentage points of gross domestic product (GDP)

below the average for developed economies, and has been falling for 30 years. Corporate investment has fallen below the rate of depreciation - meaning that our capital stock is falling - and investment in research and development ... is lower than in our major competitors. Among the causes are a banking system that is not sufficiently focussed on lending for business growth, and the increasing short-termism of our financial and corporate sector. Under pressure from equity markets increasingly focussed on short-term returns, businesses are distributing an increasing proportion of their earnings to their shareholders rather than investing them for the future.

As I showed in a previous post,¹¹ the rise in UK business investment since 2010, has mostly been in 'real estate' purchases and there has been no rise at all in hi-tech investment. UK businesses have invested not in productive capital that could boost productivity and sustain economic growth and rising living standards, but in speculative, non-productive capital. Total profits have risen as a result, but overall profitability against capital invested is still below levels before

the crisis.

The UK is probably at the peak in employment growth, but not with inflation. Real wages are set to fall further, while productivity and investment stagnate at best ●

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

Notes

- <https://flipchartfairytales.wordpress.com>.
- See www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jun/01/union-membership-has-plunged-to-an-all-time-low-says-ons.
- <https://ippr.org/research/publications/cej-time-for-change>.
- See <https://flipchartfairytales.wordpress.com/2017/06/29/has-insecurity-peaked>.
- <https://flipchartfairytales.wordpress.com/2017/08/08/ending-the-pay-squeeze-could-the-unions-make-a-comeback>.
- See www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/rsa-blogs/2016/07/insecurity-and-new-world-of-work.
- <https://flipchartfairytales.wordpress.com/2017/07/25/the-rise-and-fall-of-the-property-owning-democracy>.
- www.independent.co.uk/incoming/a-confidence-crisis-is-growing-among-british-employees-10494996.html.
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