



weekly **worker**



Referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan threatens new round of war and sectarian strife

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Left made limited,
but real, gains

LETTERS



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

Popular frontism

I accept Jack Conrad's correction (Letters, September 21) to my letter (September 14) about whether it is possible to say with any certainty that there was a specific vote taken to come to the decision that there would be open public discussion about the differences arising over Lenin's April theses. There may well have been a consensus on taking this course of action with no formal vote necessary. However, I am unsure how his 'victory' on this secondary point helps Conrad in his defence of the CPGB's shibboleth about their unique version of democratic centralism.

I am using the term 'shibboleth' in the following senses, given by the Merriam-Webster online dictionary: "a word or saying used by adherents of a party, sect or belief and usually regarded by others as empty of real meaning"; "a use of language regarded as distinctive of a particular group"; "a custom or usage regarded as distinguishing one group from others".

The CPGB present their version of democratic centralism as a unique selling point for their little group - as against the "confessional sect" nature of every other left group, who apply a different understanding (which is not to defend all those other versions of democratic centralism, many of which are, to varying degrees, effectively what I would personally understand as bureaucratic centralism).

However, what is absolutely clear from Lenin's foreword to 'Letters on tactics' is that a *decision* (whether by formal vote or consensus) was made by the Bolsheviks to make discussion among the Bolsheviks about Lenin's April theses open to the public. Conrad makes no attempt to explain why, if the CPGB shibboleth stands so clearly and uniquely in the Bolshevik tradition, Lenin felt it necessary to explicitly explain that "we unanimously concluded that it would be advisable *openly* to discuss our differences" (Lenin's emphasis) and that "*complying* with this *decision* concerning a discussion, I am publishing ..." (my emphasis).

This was an example of the real Bolshevik norm regarding openness of discussions. Decisions on whether or not to debate issues openly (in the public press) were the result of internal discussion and votes or consensus decisions - just as with any other political activity.

Conrad then gives a potted history of Kamenev's disputes with Lenin, trying to show that Lenin's description of "a clamour of protest" by the "old Bolsheviks", led by Kamenev (who stated: "As for comrade Lenin's general scheme, it appears to us unacceptable ..."), in response to Lenin's April theses was in fact just a matter of "shade and temperament". Conrad makes a great deal of a reference by Lenin at the end of April that his differences with Kamenev "are not very great". What to make of this apparent discrepancy?

In his letter of September 7 Conrad actually provides an insight into what is probably the answer. He refers to the period between Lenin's presentation of his April theses (resulting in a "clamour of protest") and the later "not very great" quote as being "a few, albeit highly concentrated, weeks" which saw "an unmistakable convergence of views". As Lenin did not recant the views put forward in the April theses and the Bolsheviks' pronouncements and actions took on this new perspective from May onwards perhaps it is simply a matter of Kamenev having been won over.

So Lenin would be being accurate in both describing a "clamour of protest" (led by Kamenev) as the *immediate* response to the April theses and then *later* after a period of concentrated debate saying the differences with Kamenev were *now* "not very great".

But let's not just take my supposition as the definitive word on this question. Here is the full quote from Lenin's own speech at the end of the debate on the 'Report on the current situation', given on April 24 at the Seventh All-Russia Conference of the RSDLP(B), that Conrad takes the "not very great" reference from: "I think that our differences with comrade Kamenev are not very great, because by agreeing with us he has changed his position." (<https://www.bolshevik.info/the-seventh-april-all-russia-conference-of-the-r-s-d-l-p-b/3-speech-winding-up-the-debate-on-the-report-on-the-current-situation-april-24-may-7.htm>).

One might almost see Conrad's out-of-context use of the "not very great" quote as being an example of someone who will refuse "to see what is in front of their eyes, refuse to take on board, right or wrong, what is absolutely explicit in the writings of Lenin they are so selectively, so disjointedly, so crudely quoting [that it] testifies to a religious approach to politics that more than strays into what might well appear to be borderline madness. The attempt to deceive others is clearly inadequate in terms of an explanation" (taken from Conrad's letter of September 7).

But, as I pointed out in my last letter, of far more importance than this historical dispute over the exact severity of the differences among the Bolsheviks over the new perspective put forward in Lenin's April theses (though I do think there is a much higher degree of internal consistency in my account than there is in Conrad's) is the CPGB's use of their interpretation of these events to justify their current-day capitulation to popular frontism.

Conrad describes this claim as "bizarre". However, I did more than just make this claim in the absence of any evidence. I looked concretely at the CPGB's actual practice in relation to the most recent historical example of popular frontism in Britain (which Conrad himself had referred to) - Respect.

And this is just one example from what is a *consistent* history of the CPGB giving political support to popular frontist projects. For more examples see the section, 'Working class independence vs class collaboration' in the International Bolshevik Tendency pamphlet, *Bolshevism vs CPGB-ism*. It is almost as if the CPGB's "extreme tactical flexibility" in applying the "principle" of working class independence that results in *consistently* giving political support to popular frontist projects is as much an unchallengeable shibboleth for the CPGB as is their unique version of 'democratic centralism'.

As a final point I note that in his latest letter Conrad repeats his assertion that in my first letter (August 31) I denied the reality that Lenin described the soviets that existed in April 1917 as being the concretisation of the 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' slogan. So I will repeat my challenge for him to provide any quote from that letter which proves his assertion. If in fact my first letter was "a stonewalling polemic against any such suggestion", as Conrad claims, then I imagine that would be a relatively easy task ...

Alan Gibson
Co Cork, Ireland

Madness

"If you have nukes, never give them up. If you don't have them, get them." Those were the words of

president Trump's director of national intelligence, about the lessons taught from the US destruction of Libya and the assassination of Muammar Gaddafi. That is why North Korea is a nuclear power.

If there is any comfort in living with a nuclear-armed North Korea, then be thankful that it is not even close to the dangers of the cold war. The propaganda mill and the mainstream media greatly exaggerate the risk: it is for their own greedy self-interest to spread panic and paranoia among the American people.

If Kim Jong-un wanted to kill Americans out of insane hatred, he has that capability now with conventional weapons. There are over a quarter of a million American citizens living in Seoul, 100 miles from Pyongyang. Kim Jong-un has not attacked Seoul to kill Americans because he is not insane or suicidal, and that is according to experts on North Korea such as Dan Coats and Donald Gregg, and others.

It is the US that is the most dangerous country and threat to the world, not North Korea. The US has beaten its own world record as a serial mass murderer of the 21st century. That does not go unnoticed by small, vulnerable countries. For North Korea to fear the US is reality. To want a nuclear deterrent is sanity.

This week's performance at the United Nations by Trump raises more questions of his sanity. Without knowing it, Trump gave the same message that his national intelligence director. His raving has sent any vulnerable country back to the nuclear weapons-planning drawing board, if they know what is good for them. Trump's speech has done more for nuclear proliferation than Iran and North Korea combined could ever do.

For North Korea it is not a game, like it is to the US planners. North Korea rightly fears for its life and its existence. We may not like the way they live, but that is not for us to decide. It is for the North Koreans to determine.

Trump says he is going to succeed where Obama and Bush failed. He should take a page from president Bill Clinton, who successfully negotiated with North Korea, until Bush destroyed the agreement. Trump talks big and the mainstream media and Trump backers love it.

Trump says he is going to kick down Kim Jong-un's door, take away his rockets and free his people. That is cowboy insanity. But it is nothing new for America. US history is a history of wars of aggression, sold to the public as "making the world safe for democracy", but really for the profits of tycoons.

If Trump is so concerned about "Rocket Man's" human rights record, then Trump would make a good start by correcting the behaviour of the dozens of US-backed rightwing dictators. He could learn from history about the military dictatorships and human rights violations of US-backed military dictatorships of South Korea. After military rule from 1945 to 1948, the US installed the military dictatorship of Syngman Rhee, and later Park Chung-hee.

Better relations between South Korea and North Korea is not what the US wants. Bush killed it, Obama embalmed it, and Trump is trying to bury it. The US neocons could not be happier. Better relations, normalisation, a peace treaty and eventual reunification are against the US empire's interest. That is why South Korea's wishes are never mentioned, except in rare staged events. Strange, since Koreans are said to be our thankful beneficiaries.

Kim Jong-un does not need

teaching on fire and fury. In the past 30 years the US has taught North Korea and anybody else about that, committing military aggression against approximately 20 countries in the past 30 years (not including covert operations and support of proxies) - and none of those countries had a nuclear deterrent.

North Korea is willing to negotiate. They have negotiated in the past. They have made offers to negotiate. They have no preconditions. *They want a peace treaty.* The US knows it. The mainstream media knows it. They are lying.

Kim Jong-un is not the insane one, Trump may be, but it is too soon to say. We will know for sure that he is if he uses the military option. If the US tries to wipe North Korea off the face of the earth with "fire and fury", not only will it kill tens of millions of North Koreans, but before they go they will take millions of South Koreans, hundreds of thousands of US expats living in Seoul and 25,000 US troops with them. It could also lead to war with China, Russia and a nuclear holocaust, which will take us all.

Whether the US agrees to negotiations or not, North Korea is keeping its nukes. The old cold war policy of mutually assured destruction is now 'mutually assured madness'.

David Pear
Florida

Orwell socialism

Alan Stewart reported that the Wakefield Socialist History Group held a meeting on September 16, which attracted 41 people to discuss "George Orwell and socialism" (Letters, September 21). Apparently some interesting stories were told, but the event appears to have remained at a superficial level - concerned mostly with the left's attitude to Orwell, and whether he was a committed socialist. The point about Orwell is that he raised, if only indirectly, important issues for the left, which after all these years remain unresolved.

These issues relate to the two ideological tendencies in the socialist camp, when it comes to leadership, which interpenetrate each other and can exist in the same party; they represent different social tendencies, which are: those who believe in a democratic socialist society; and the opposite tendency - those who represent the totalitarian tendency. I may be wrong, but I don't think Orwell consciously theorised the existence of these two opposed tendencies on the left.

At the Wakefield meeting we are told that Granville Williams, former editor of *Free Press*, argued that during the cold war the right used Orwell to bolster their argument that socialism inevitably leads to totalitarianism. I would argue that socialism only inevitably leads to totalitarianism when it takes an anti-democratic form. The reason I bang on about the need for a democratic socialist society is because I am aware that there are two trends in socialism: one leading to a democratic socialist society and the other leading to totalitarianism. Put another way, these two historical trends finds their expression within socialism.

The latter, the totalitarian trend, tries to conceal itself before the revolution and thus is able to garner support from the politically naive. But when in power it begins to reveal itself openly. By the way, when I speak of these two trends, I am not referring to the split between reformists and Marxists: both these two trends contain anti-democratic, totalitarian tendencies. Nor am I only referring to the Bolsheviks. The totalitarian

or anti-democratic tendency existed within Menshevism as well. Note how they walked out of the soviets after the Bolsheviks won a majority. It's best to regard totalitarianism as a cross-party tendency.

In my view, Marxism is not the cause of the totalitarian tendency on the left, but it opens the door to this tendency and facilitates its development, thus becoming an ally of totalitarianism. One of the reasons for this is that Marxism struggles to survive the democratic process and has to resort to totalitarian methods to keep in power. A good example was the Soviet Union. As soon as an element of democratic debate was allowed, the Marxist regime collapsed like a house of cards.

So what I am saying is that on the left Marxism facilitates the totalitarian tendency without being the cause of it. This is one of the contradictions within Marxism. Marx was right to support the struggle for socialism, but wrong about how to bring it about. Marx's called for a dictatorship to set the ball rolling and Lenin picked it up and ran with it, calling for dictatorship untrammelled by any law which would have warmed the heart of Al Capone himself, because what we are talking about here is gangsterism unintentionally introduced into the socialist movement by Marxism. History has shown how Marxism leads to the suppression of democracy in the interest of a bureaucratic caste. This caste and its potential coming to power after a socialist revolution is not the result of backwardness, as the Trotskyists maintain. Bureaucracy is the product of complex societies, ready to take power after a socialist revolution, in the absence of a democratic socialist society.

The only socialism we should be interested in is one which can survive the democratic process and a socialist regime which does not implode when exposed to democratic debate. This is why a democratic socialist society is the way forward, and why Orwell is so relevant to the left - and also why our attitude towards Orwell tells us which side of the democracy/totalitarian divide within socialism we belong to.

Tony Clark
Labour supporter

Communist hero

I am pleased to announce the publication of my latest English book, *A Jewish communist in Weimar Germany: the life of Werner Scholem (1895-1940)*, which recently appeared in the Historical Materialism book series. The hardcover edition, published by Brill, will be followed in 12 months by an affordable paperback edition from Haymarket Books.

The book is a biography of nearly-forgotten communist leader Werner Scholem, chronicling his rise and fall, subsequent expulsion from the party and ultimate death in a concentration camp - hounded by the Nazis both for his convictions as a communist and his identity as a German Jew. Originally published in German in 2014, it represents the culmination of years of research, and received a broadly positive response upon its release.

The hardcover edition's price tag puts it out of reach for most casual readers. For this reason, I would greatly appreciate it if you would consider ordering it for your local academic libraries.

If you know colleagues who might be interested in writing a review or are interested in writing yourself - the publisher will be happy to provide copies. Simply contact me or Loren Balhorn (lbalhorn@gmail.com).

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LABOUR 2017

Now the real work begins

The left made limited, but real, gains at conference, reports
Carla Roberts of Labour Party Marxists



Something of the past?

Labour conference 2017 was certainly historic: almost 1,200 delegates and 13,000 visitors made this officially the “largest conference ever”, as national executive committee member Pete Willsman says. It was also very leftwing, at least in its composition.

And there are many things the left can and should celebrate about this year’s gathering:

- We defeated attempts by the right to portray Corbyn supporters as anti-Semites. Clearly designed to shut up the left and make it fearful to speak out on the injustices committed by the Israeli state, they achieved exactly the opposite effect: dozens of podium speakers condemned the right’s vile witch-hunt and in favour of the rights of Palestinians. This ran like a red thread throughout the conference.

- Pressure from below (and perhaps Corbyn himself?) forced the conference arrangements committee to reinsert Labour’s support for the Palestinian cause in the national policy forum’s report.

- The right in Labour First and Progress were totally marginalised. And they were visibly upset about it: Labour First’s dismissal of the majority of new members as “naive” “John Lennonists” and its rants against the Marxist “bullies” - who apparently are fans of “secret police goons”, fetishists for “the violence of the Russian Revolution” and South American “authoritarianism” - show that LF and Progress have their backs against the wall: it is a sign of their weakness.

But conference business itself - while slightly less stage-managed than under Tony Blair - was still firmly in the hands of the right wing: to be precise, the conference arrangements committee (CAC). For example:

- There were no real, focused debates on anything. The documents produced by the NPF (the national policy forum, to which Tony Blair outsourced policy-making) are full of waffle and without any concrete policies. Contemporary motions were distributed way too late and, once merged, were too vague and non-committal.

- The NEC exercised a lot of pressure on delegates to remit *all* their rule change proposals in favour of the ‘Party democracy review’ - even those that do not fall in the review’s remit. Conference should have had a chance to properly debate and vote on, say, the McDonnell amendment (which

would have lowered the number of nominations required from Labour MPs/MEPs in a leadership election); the need to abolish the 12 months delay affecting rule changes proposed by Constituency Labour Parties; and the fight to democratise Young Labour.

- About a third of contemporary motions were ruled out of order by the CAC, including a dozen that wanted to end British weapons exports to Saudi Arabia, because one of the NPF documents already touched on the issue (without giving any clear commitment, of course). That is a travesty of democracy.

Clearly, the left still has a long way to go in its fight to transform the Labour Party. For a start, conference really must become the sole, sovereign decision-making body and to that end the NPF should be abolished immediately. It is an instrument designed to stop members shaping party policy.

The next 12 months are going to be very important in our fight to democratise and transform Labour and take it out of the hands of people like Iain McNicol, the compliance unit and the unaccountable ex-officios, who were seen hobnobbing at various fringe events. But though Corbyn is leader and the CLPs are ever more in the hands of the left, the right is far from finished. It dominates the PLP, the councillors are overwhelmingly on the right, under McNicol it controls the bureaucracy and there are more than a few of them in the shadow cabinet. But the left is making inroads:

- With the addition of three more members chosen by CLPs, the NEC now has a (slim) leftwing majority.

- The new CAC (which will come into office in October and remains in charge for two years), will have a pro-Corbyn majority: Seema Chandwani and Billy Hayes were elected by the membership and two more seats will be taken up by the Unite union. This might lead one to think that the 2018 and 2019 conferences will be a lot more democratic. But, on the other hand, we do have the terrible example of what happened to Momentum’s democracy at the hands of Corbyn’s close allies.

- The so-called ‘Corbyn review’, which will examine party democracy, will be run by Katy Clarke, Claudia Webbe and Andy Kerr - all firmly in the Corbyn camp. Not that we should to rely on Corbyn and his allies to sort everything out. Corbyn himself has relented to pressure from the right on

too many issues - be it the ‘Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism’ smear campaign, Trident or free movement. Corbyn *et al* seem to believe that the saboteurs on the right can be pacified and ‘party unity’ consolidated by giving ground on these issues. This is dangerously naive. The outcome of the Chakrabarti enquiry shows the opposite to be true. The witch-hunters’ appetites grow in the eating. Nonetheless, this gives us an unprecedented, historic opportunity to begin the transformation of the party.

What about the left? Most of them, including Momentum, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and Labour Representation Committee, are so concerned about uncritically supporting Corbyn that they have voluntarily downed tools on a number of important questions: for example, the fight for mandatory reselection of MPs. So we cannot rely on them either.

We believe that members need to exercise as much pressure as possible over two concrete issues arising from conference:

1. The Corbyn review must be as democratic and wide-ranging as possible. Clearly, the Labour Party is ripe for top to bottom reform, but this must not be conducted behind the backs of the members. Branches and CLPs must be invited to put their views - and genuinely democratising changes must then be implemented. 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 left and right. This is, of course, the way the NPF currently works.

2. The NEC compromise on ‘prejudice’ in the membership conditions is a fudge. Yes, the worst excesses of the Jewish Labour Movement’s rule change have been removed. But the fingerprints of this pro-Zionist organisation are all over the compromise - we hear that the JLM is lobbying Corbyn and the NEC to be allowed to help write the new code of conduct. They hope this will enshrine in our rulebook the controversial ‘Working definition of anti-Semitism’, produced by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. This conflates anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism and has been widely criticised. The JLM must not be allowed to continue to exercise pressure way beyond its numerical size. Conference has shown clearly that the membership has no interest in appeasing those determined to destabilise Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership ●

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday October 1, 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 October 3, 6.45pm: Series of talks on human origins, Daryl Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. This meeting: ‘The sleeping beauty and other tales: the structural analysis of myths’. Speaker: Chris Knight.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

Marx’s original vision

Friday September 29, 6.30pm: Emar seminar, meeting room 3, Finsbury Park Trust, FinSpace, 225-229 Seven Sisters Road, London N4. Speaker: Nick Rogers.

Organised by Easdale Foundation for Labour Research: www.emarvakfi.org/index_en.php.

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>.

Support bin workers

Tuesday October 3, 7pm: Support group launch meeting, Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1.

Organised by Birmingham People’s Assembly: www.facebook.com/BirminghamPeoplesAssembly.

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.

No to smears

Tuesday October 10, 7.45pm: Meeting, Labour Rooms, Nelson Street, Otley LS21. ‘Is it anti-Semitic to oppose Zionist colonisation?’ Speaker: Moshé Machover.

Organised by Otley Palestine Support Group: 07887 400551.

Social histories of the Russian Revolution

Thursday October 12, 6.30pm: Discussion meeting, Birkbeck, University of London, 26 Russell Square, London WC1. ‘Local soviets in 1917-18 and their relations with the central executive committee’. Speaker: Lara Cook.

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

The Yorkshire miners

Saturday October 14, 1pm: Socialist and labour history and discussion, Red Shed, Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1. Speaker: Ken Capstick (former vice-president of Yorkshire NUM) on the “curious case of David Swallow”.

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

Britain deserves a pay rise

Tuesday 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:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1295709963872854>

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.

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 2017

Stuffed parrots and Momentum texts

There was a joyous, even jubilant mood, but the decision-making was opaque, writes first-time delegate **Gerry Green**



Good atmosphere, bewildering procedure

I really enjoyed my first time at conference. It was fantastic to see so many like-minded people - quite a few of whom were very happy to describe themselves openly as Marxists. I did not expect the mood to be so overwhelmingly pro-left, so clearly behind Corbyn and so visibly pro-Palestinian.

It is evident that the panic in the rightwing press over the 'anti-Semitism' scandal helped to consolidate the left. Of course, delegates were eating out of John McDonnell's and Jeremy Corbyn's hands. But I did not expect everybody around me to get up to whoop and cheer when Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi made her pro-Palestinian speech. I could not see anybody staying in their seat. Another speaker received loud applause for mentioning that she was a member of Momentum.

I also did not expect the right to be quite so small and useless. Apart from a handful of people handing out Labour First's *White Pages*, I hardly came across them and they were almost invisible.

Having said all of that, I cannot say I really understood what was going on most of the time. I do not think delegates were really in control of things. Everything is left to the last moment, and because of the various NEC compromises it was difficult to prepare. You really have to study the daily update from the conference arrangements committee (CAC). For example, it was only by chance that I saw in the CAC report of September 24 the proposed change to the document on Israel/Palestine, submitted by the national policy forum (NPF).

This year's agenda was designed, so we were told, to maximise the number of contributions from the floor, as opposed to just the party big-wigs. But the method of selecting these ordinary delegates was hard to believe. Speakers were selected by the chair in groups of three, from different parts of the floor. However, up to 50 would-be speakers attempting to catch the eye of the chair led to the employment of ever more bizarre theatrics: comrades were seen holding up hats, scarves, stuffed parrots, inflated bananas, open umbrellas... you

get the picture. Those just raising their hand stood no chance!

But it was worse than that - in one session the chair admitted that she could only see the delegates in the front section of the audience, so anyone wanting to speak from the raised section at the rear would have a long wait. Delegates around me commented that often the randomly selected speakers seemed to be very well informed - their speeches must have taken quite a while to prepare - so perhaps it was not that random after all.

This chaotic method of speaker selection was matched by the incoherent structure of the sessions. In no way could they be called debates - there was no order to the contributions and many topics in the NPF documents were not covered at all.

It was not much better when it came to contemporary motions. We only got to see them in the CAC's September 24 report issued on Sunday morning: a thick booklet with over 120 motions, which were grouped into different 'themes'. And by 3.30pm we were supposed to have read them all and then decide in the 'priorities ballot' which four themes we would like to see debated at conference. It was impossible to do that thoroughly, of course. And, of course, it was meant to be impossible.

This is where the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy comes in. The CLPD had certainly worked through the conference agenda - and dragged Momentum along with it. (The two are linked, of course. As I understand it, Momentum owner Jon Lansman used to be a leading light in the CLPD back in the day.)

As the CLPD's Pete Willsman has been off-and-on the NEC for decades, he gets prior access to material and so his comrades were able to read through all the motions in advance. The CLPD used its fringe meeting on the Saturday evening to instruct/suggest to delegates which themes to vote on. Its comrades already knew that the unions would go for growth and investment, public-sector pay, workers' rights and Grenfell. So, in order to maximise the subjects

discussed, delegates were urged to vote for social care, NHS, housing and railways. Lo and behold, these themes got the vast majority of CLP votes.

As a normal delegate, I felt pretty much out of the loop most of the time, so this attempt to coordinate and explain issues was most welcome. At their fringe meeting on Monday night, however, CLPD comrades urged CLP delegates to remit *all* their rule changes in order to get the 'Corbyn review' through unopposed. I must say I had my doubts

about that tactic, as my own CLP was one of those which voted to support the 'McDonnell amendment': we wanted to see a dramatic reduction to five percent of the nominations needed from MPs and MEPs in order to get a leadership candidate on to the ballot paper. In the end, we were one of the many CLPs who "regretfully" remitted their rule change.

Momentum was a bit short on arguments, but better with technology. They were texting us throughout the conference, giving voting advice.

The session on Monday afternoon in particular has to be regarded as a brilliant example of Momentum's ability to issue voting instructions to delegates at very short notice. The very last speaker in the session moved a reference-back of a couple of paragraphs in the NPF document on 'Work, pensions and equality'. As nobody else had commented either for or against, delegates really had no idea which way to vote.

But the Momentum organisers must have decided it was an important issue, because text messages were despatched to all their supporting delegates: "Please vote for the reference back to reverse cuts to social security!" The document only criticised the cuts, but the delegate wanted Labour to commit to reversing them. By the time the vote was taken a few minutes later, the message had got through. The reference-back was carried, with support from a huge majority of CLP delegates. The NPF will now have to look at it again - though, of course, ordinary members will have to wait to see if the 200 or so members of the NPF will actually enforce this in their next annual report.

This kind of decision-making is very much hit and miss. There were plenty of other issues in the very vacuous NPF reports that deserved to be referenced back, but I presume nobody was called in to make the point! In the end, I ended up abstaining on all of the documents, because they are really full of waffle, without any clear, coherent policy proposals. Ditto the composited contemporary motions. As has been common practice, they were merged into the most bland and uncontroversial 'motherhood and apple pie'-type statements. Impossible to vote against.

The atmosphere of conference was joyous, even jubilant. It is just a shame that the membership has not yet got a hold on the running of the party. Conference really hammered home to me the need to change that! ●

Labour First on the run



Luke Akehurst

Those at the Labour First rally on the Sunday afternoon were a pretty riled up bunch. Luke Akehurst and his mates are clearly feeling under pressure from left-wing delegates - and they are not handling the stress at all well.

For example, the chair launched an attack on Labour Party Marxists as "not real Labour" - unlike the rows of Tory-lite manikins in the hall, for whom genuine Labour principles are as expendable as autumn leaves. Furthermore, our very name is a "contradiction in terms" - a short course on the history of the Labour Party might clear up any confusion.

The ever-delightful John Mann MP scowled at our comrades, but

did not deign to speak to them - presumably because there were no cameras nearby. However, he did prevail upon a minion to pick up a copy of the latest issue of *Labour Party Marxists*.

Not surprisingly, given the general election result and Jeremy's huge spike in popularity and profile, Akehurst and co did not attack Corbyn directly. Instead, they concentrated their venom on his supporters - the organised Corbynistas particularly. These were "Stalinists" who "fetishise military dictatorships" like Venezuela and Cuba. The June poll was downplayed, however - "We have even fewer seats than under Neil Kinnock," Chris Leslie MP complained. He went on to illustrate his encyclopaedic ignorance of Marxism, which he dismissed as a "destructive, hate-filled ideology". In comments that must have shocked many in the audience, he revealed that Marxism is "revolutionary" and wants to "overturn capitalism" (well spotted).

Akehurst himself suggested that the Labour Party should "purge the anti-Semites" (for this, read 'the left') and "stand up to the bullies" (that is, 'silence all criticism of

the right'). Pretty classic - and pathetic - tactics of bureaucrats who are politically incapable of answering critics and are aware the game is moving away from them. For instance, in one of his more honest moments, Akehurst had to acknowledge that the right's forces are now too weak to "stop the McDonnell amendment".

Wes Streeting MP suggested that Labour should "not argue for unilateral disarmament", but that the government should "increase defence spending". Just what the world needs - more weapons capable of annihilating our species and more sabre-rattling.

A bulletin from our temperate friends had a very odd, over-the-top and laughably ignorant attack on the "cynical Leninists" who have wormed their way into the party. While the majority of the pro-Corbyn recruits are just "a bit naive", we Marxists are "bullies" and fans of "secret police goons".

This idiotic rant is only worth noting for one thing - it illustrates that the right is under pressure, feels its grip on the party slipping away and simply has not got the politics to argue cogently against the left - Marxist or otherwise.

They are on the run, comrades! ●

Conference didn't buy it

Delegates identify with the Palestinian cause and reject the smears, writes **Kat Gugino**

It was very encouraging to see the overwhelming majority of delegates stand firmly against that relentless (and utterly cynical) 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' smear campaign. Fringe meetings organised by Free Speech on Israel and Jewish Voice for Labour (JVL) were packed out, as was Jackie Walker's show *The lynching*. Comrade Wimborne-Idrissi (a member of the new formed JVL) made an impassioned pro-Palestinian speech from the podium and deservedly got a standing ovation when she concluded: "The Labour Party does not have a problem with Jews".

She clearly spoke for the overwhelming majority in the hall. In another indicator of the mood of comrades attending the event, the front page of *Labour Party Marxists* - emblazoned with the headline "Anti-Zionism does not equal anti-Semitism" - drew many "Quite right"-style comments. There was praise in particular for the article by Moshé Machover - which, as several national newspapers reported sympathetically, had been condemned as "anti-Semitic" by the pro-Zionist Labour right - from people who had found the time to actually read it. In fact a number took small bundles to distribute to their own contacts.

That said, LPM comrades were caught out on the final afternoon of conference, when two smiling young delegates asked for some extra copies - only to ostentatiously rip them up. They were presumably members of the Jewish Labour Movement - demonstrating that organisation's unbending commitment to open debate and the democratic clash of ideas.

Other LPMers report (verbally) aggressive approaches from JLM types. One was particularly instructive. A young woman informed an LPM distributor that we were "despicable" - "Why would you ever quote the words of a Nazi?" she demanded. "Er, to verify what he said", our comrade replied - not unreasonably. At this point our pro-Zionist friend dug herself a little deeper by stating: "But he's the only person you do quote in the article." "No, he's not - have you actually read it?" responded the LPMer. "No! And I'm not going to!" she shouted in triumph and marched off.

However, we know that the vast bulk of the 3,000 copies distributed were closely read and made a real impact. For instance, in a long chat, Dennis Skinner complimented us by saying: "I really appreciate that you are disseminating Marxist politics in the party" - although the veteran MP thought we were slightly overstating the importance of the need to defeat the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' smear campaign. We disagree, Dennis - at least with your last point!

And it seemed to us that the overwhelming majority of delegates and visitors too are clearly seeing through the right's thinly veiled attempt to beat Corbyn and his supporters with the 'anti-Semitism' stick, despite the increasingly desperate attempts by the capitalist press to paint the audience as anti-Semitic.

In fact, apart from a couple of JLMers, there was only one speaker at conference who was ambivalent on the question. In the session discussing the various rule changes submitted, Zack Murrell-Brown from Bristol North-West argued in favour of an abstention on the NEC's compromise rule change on the issue. His claim that "there are ideas on the left that have an anti-Semitic logic" went down like a lead balloon. Well, of course he is sort



JLM given Del Singh award - but loses argument

of right, but he had a lot of people in the hall puzzled when he assured them that he is "on the left of the party". They had naturally presumed him to be a supporter of the JLM. Towards the end though, he cleared up the confusion when he outed himself as "a proud supporter of Stop the Labour Purge" - which is, of course, a campaign set up by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty to oppose the expulsion and suspension of (particularly its own) members from the party. The AWL has been less vocal in its opposition to the suspension of Jackie Walker, on trumped-up charges of anti-Semitism, of course. While it claims to be against that suspension, it voted in favour of her demotion from the post of Momentum vice-chair because of comments that had been falsely condemned as "anti-Semitic" by the right.

Meanwhile, in the real world, the pressure from pro-Palestinian campaigners led to a fascinating about-turn when it came to the national policy forum's annual report. The NPF, of course, is a relic of the dark days of Blairism: it is a body Blair established to outsource the party's policy-making. When it published its dire, 90-page annual report in August, Palestine campaigners quickly noticed a glaring omission: the call in the 2017 general election manifesto for an end to Israel's blockade, illegal occupation and settlements. These basic democratic demands had been dropped from the NPF document, along with the pledge that "A Labour government will immediately recognise the state of Palestine".

Had conference supported this document, it would presumably have overridden the pledges in the manifesto, as conference is - at least on paper - the sovereign decision-making body of the party, so the omission was no oversight. Campaigners went into overdrive: LPM joined others in calling on delegates to refer back this section of the document.

Page 14 of Sunday's thick report from the conference arrangements committee included, without explanation, this small paragraph:

The following text, as agreed in the Labour Party manifesto 2017, is now included in the national policy forum annual report 2017. On page 56, column 2, line 43, add:

"There can be no military solution to this conflict and all sides

must avoid taking action that would make peace harder to achieve. That means both an end to the blockade, occupation and settlements, and an end to rocket and terror attacks. Labour will continue to press for an immediate return to meaningful negotiations leading to a diplomatic resolution. A Labour government would immediately recognise the state of Palestine."

It is obviously not the kind of programme we would write on the Middle East (it includes the attempt to equate the violence of the oppressor state with the struggle of the oppressed Palestinian people - note the reference to "rocket

attacks"). But clearly this return to the formulation carried in the manifesto is down to pressure from below (and maybe even Corbyn himself) and represents a victory against those (like the Jewish Labour Movement) who want us to take the side of the Israeli state. The fact that the JLM has perversely been given the Del Singh award for 'best practice' by Iain McNicol serves as a reminder of how well connected this organisation is to the party bureaucracy.

However, conference has shown that the wider membership has no interest in appeasing the forces determined to destabilise Jeremy Corbyn's leadership - as the standing ovation for Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi's comments

dramatically illustrated. Very oddly, however, a leading light of the JLM, Mike Katz, tried to convince one of our comrades that Naomi's speech had trotted out a well-worn trope about the 'Jewish media'. Specifically, the comrade has said something about the JLM 'running to the media' about what it calls instances of 'anti-Semitism'. Apparently comrade Wimborne-Idrissi's implication was that the media is part of a Jewish conspiracy! At least that was Katz's interpretation. Huh? Comrade Wimborne-Idrissi was actually implying that the JLM might have a decent press officer.

Asked if he thought LPM should be expelled from the Labour Party, he was non-committal and a little incomprehensible. However, he did take the opportunity to dub Moshé Machover - the author of the offending article - as an "amoral historian". He put forward a very convoluted explanation for this, which seems to boil down to the claim that the accuracy or otherwise of the Heydrich quote mentioned above is essentially irrelevant. These things should not be spoken of: such historical citations should no longer be read, let alone reproduced.

Was Katz saying that what comrade Machover had written had been historically inaccurate? Katz did not suggest that it was. His argument was simply that it cannot be said because of the emotional reaction it engenders in people who feel a close cultural or religious affinity with the victims!

Individually, Katz was very friendly and generally willing to engage with our arguments. However, the practical result of a 'subjective' approach that disregards things like historical facts and objectivity for the 'perceptions' that various groups or individuals have (or claim to have) of oppressive speech or prejudicial actions is *not* friendly or open ●

'I'm not an anti-Semite!'

Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi, delegate from Chingford and Woolford Green CLP and media officer of the newly founded Jewish Voice for Labour, received a standing ovation following this speech



I want to welcome the insertion into the NPF annual report's section on the Middle East of the key paragraph from our ground-breaking election manifesto, which referred to Israel's occupation and settlement of Palestinian land. I'm so pleased that this section has been put back in, after it had been inexplicably omitted from the NPF report.

Let me tell you my perspective on this: I'm Jewish, I come from a tradition of anti-racist and anti-colonial struggle - a

socialist Labour tradition of international solidarity with oppressed people. This is not some meaningless David Spart slogan out of the pages of *Private Eye*: it is a fundamental feature of our tradition as a party committed to justice and equality.

Oppression and discrimination are rampant in today's world, so why Palestine? Well, it's not only that this year marks the 50th anniversary of the Israeli occupation and illegal resettlement; it's not only that this year marks 10 years of the siege of Gaza, with intermittent military onslaughts against its people. This year also marks 100 years since the Balfour declaration, when a British foreign secretary promised the land of Palestine to the Jewish people - my people. The civil rights of the existing population - that's the Palestinians - were meant to be protected, but that turned out to be an empty promise.

We Brits - all of us - have a responsibility for what occurred. Despite huge misgivings and even

outright opposition from many Jews, our leaders - that's British leaders - facilitated founding a state which privileges Jews such as myself over non-Jews.

Seventy years ago, 750,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes, in what for them was a catastrophe that they call the Nakba. More than 450 towns and villages were destroyed. The world's longest-running refugee population was created. We Brits need to take responsibility for the ongoing Palestinian tragedy dating from Balfour's pledge.

So, in this policy report, we call for an end to Israel's blockage of Gaza, an end to the occupation and the settlements, and endorsement of the Palestinian state. This is the very least that we should be doing. I say this as a Jew, as an anti-racist and as a dedicated member of this - this revived, internationalist - Labour Party.

Comrades, I'm not an anti-Semite! And, conference, this party does not have a problem with Jews! ●

RULE CHANGE

Poisoned fudge

Mike Macnair explains why NEC concessions to the JLM will only serve to whet the right's appetite

The front page headline in the *Daily Mail* of September 26 was "Labour is the real nasty party". One might imagine that the story was about Labour advocating stamping on some section of the downtrodden poor. But no. Surprise, surprise - Labour is "the nasty party" because it refuses to suppress anti-Zionist speech, and, indeed, (shock, horror!) delegates have even applauded such speech. The *Mail* calls this an "outbreak of intimidation and anti-Semitism at its annual conference".

The *Daily Telegraph* had the same story, with a bit more elaboration, under the headline, 'Labour activists compare Israel to Nazi Germany, as Jeremy Corbyn accused of behaving like "ostrich" over anti-Semitism'. The trigger for the story was the Monday fringe meeting called by Free Speech on Israel.

Canned denunciations were provided to the *Mail* by former Tory minister Andrew Percy and by Labour MPs John Cryer (chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party), Wes Streeting, and John Mann. In addition, the *Mail* linked the issue to the (actually old) story of trolls' threats to Laura Kuenssberg in relation to BBC bias in the run-up to the general election, with quotes on this issue provided by MPs Harriet Harman and Jess Phillips.

The *Mail* tells us that:

A Labour spokesman last night said Mr Corbyn was now tightening up the rules on those who make anti-Semitic comments. He said the party "condemns anti-Semitism in the strongest possible terms" and "will not tolerate holocaust denial".

The reference is to a rule change agreed to go to conference by the national executive committee, which will change the present rules to allow certain sorts of 'expression of opinion' to be the basis of expulsions.

In the *Telegraph*, the *Mail*'s 'amalgam' (smear by combining unrelated issues) with trolls threatening Kuenssberg is not repeated. But, as well as very similar quotes to those in the *Mail* from Wes Streeting, John Cryer and John Mann, denunciations in the *Telegraph* are also provided by shadow health secretary Jonathan Ashworth MP, Jeremy Newmark of Poale Zion (which misappropriated the name 'Jewish Labour Movement' in 2004) and Jennifer Gerber of Labour Friends of Israel.

By September 27 the story had spread into other news outlets, notably *The Times*, which spread a headline on the point across the two pages of its Labour conference coverage and added a leader demanding that "Jeremy Corbyn must at last declare himself on the side of Israel and British Jews" - a very revealing word order: this campaign is about demanding support for *Israel* - and for "British Jews" only insofar as they support *Israel*. In the same day's coverage in the *Times* and elsewhere Labour Party Marxists is targeted for publishing articles by Jewish anti-Zionists which called into question the factual basis of the complaints against Ken Livingstone.

In other words, the 'weaponisation' by the rightwing press and the Labour right of the false and defamatory claim that anti-Zionism amounts to anti-Semitism is persisting in full force. It persists in spite of the 'unity' talk of all sides in Labour. And it does so in spite of the concessions made to the



Israel is a racist state. Therefore those supporting it are ...

PZ-JLM claims by Labour's national executive committee, which have not defanged the argument. If anything, the NEC's fudge on the issue is poisoned: it is at risk of conceding the substance of the PZ-JLM claims under cover of superficially neutral language.

To understand why this is so involves understanding both the traps - Scylla and Charybdis - posed by the PZ-JLM's and the NEC's (different) proposed rule changes: the problem of the tension of freedom of speech and freedom of association and disassociation. And it involves understanding how these *specifically* play out in the character of the Labour Party - which is not a 'normal' political party, but one which is founded on two contradictory claims, driving a permanent tendency to witch-hunting. The 'anti-Semitism scandal' is merely the most recent iteration of 'bans and proscriptions' in the interest of the British state security apparatus.

Fudge

The issue is about changing the rules - under PZ-JLM's proposal, in order to get rid of Livingstone and to proscribe anti-Zionist speech. The current relevant rule is in Labour Party rulebook 2016, chapter 2 ('Membership rules'), clause 1, rule 8. It reads:

No member of the party shall engage in conduct which in the opinion of the NEC is prejudicial, or in any act which in the opinion of the NEC is grossly detrimental to the party. Any dispute as to whether a member is in breach of the provisions of this subclause shall be determined by the NCC [national constitutional committee] in accordance with chapter 1, clause IX above and the disciplinary rules and guidelines in chapter 6 below.

Where appropriate the NCC shall have regard to involvement in financial support for the organisation and/or the activities of any organisation declared ineligible for affiliation to the party under chapter 1.II.5 or 3.C above; or to the candidature of the members in opposition to an officially endorsed Labour Party candidate or the support for such candidature. *The NCC shall not have regard to the mere holding or expression of beliefs and opinions* (emphasis added).

The rule is primarily a part of the system of bans and proscriptions, concerned with excluding supposed Trotskyist infiltrators (without explicitly using the T word). The final sentence, which I have italicised, is the Labour bureaucrats' concession to the party left's fear that people might be expelled for merely holding Trot-like views.

The practical significance of this final sentence is that if the party had actually *expelled* Ken Livingstone on the basis of his comments about Hitler and Zionism, as various pro-Zionist politicians and journalists demanded, it is likely that a court would find that the sentence barred an expulsion.

PZ-JLM proposed:

Add an additional sentence after the first sentence:

"A member of the party who uses anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, racist language, sentiments, stereotypes or actions in public, private, online or offline, as determined by the NEC, shall be deemed to have engaged in conduct prejudicial to the party."

Add at the end of the final sentence after "opinions":

"... except in instances involving

anti-Semitism, Islamophobia or racism".

Insert new paragraph E:

"Where a member is responsible for a hate incident, being 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, the NEC may have the right to impose the appropriate disciplinary options ...

The NEC's version of the rule change is (so far as relevant) to insert:

The NEC shall take account of any codes of conduct currently in force and shall regard any incident which in their view might reasonably be seen to demonstrate hostility or prejudice based on age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; or sexual orientation as conduct prejudicial to the party. These shall include but not be limited to incidents motivated by racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia or otherwise racist language, sentiments, stereotypes or actions, sexual harassment, bullying or any form of intimidation towards another person on the basis of a protected characteristic, as determined by the NEC, wherever it occurs, as conduct prejudicial to the party.

And to add at the end:

... except in any instance inconsistent with the party's aims and values, agreed codes of conduct, or involving prejudice towards any protected characteristic.

As Bob Pitt has pointed out,¹ it is clear that PZ-JLM has not got all it wants. What it has got, however, is a very considerable watering-down of the commitment in the existing party rules not to expel people on the basis of "the mere holding or expression of beliefs and opinions". It is this that makes the NEC proposal a fudge.

Free speech

Marxists stand for very broad freedom of speech and communication (I will use 'speech' as a shorthand for the broader issue).² The fundamental underlying reason is that the collective appropriation of the means of production - the cooperative commonwealth - requires democratic decision-making. If access to information is restricted, the controllers of the access have obtained private property in that information. Controls on freedom of speech restrict potential hearers' access to information in the hands of potential speakers, for the benefit of the gatekeepers.

Moreover, the absence of freedom of communication tends to produce 'planning irrationalities' of the sort found in the old Soviet-style regimes: planners are led to take decisions in the dark as to actual needs; false pretences become the norm, and 'They pretend to pay us; we pretend to work'.

This argument may appear to apply only to information which is immediately relevant to material production. But this is untrue. It applies with equal force to such intangibles as education, or to artistic production (remember the artificial resource preference given to 'socialist realism'). Hence, it is not possible to draw a clear line, which would say 'We need freedom of production-related speech, but not of other speech'.

Below this level of generality, the working class immediately needs freedom of speech and communication in order to organise itself to take decisions for collective action - strikes, and so on, but equally electoral campaigns - democratically. It needs to organise itself democratically because undemocratic decision-making tends to demobilise and atomise the participants.

There are limits, as liberal writers on the issue recognise.³ Notoriously, freedom of speech does not authorise or protect the prankster who falsely shouts 'Fire!' in a crowded theatre, causing a panic. False statements made in circumstances where it is not easy for the recipient to check and with a view to making a gain or avoiding a loss - frauds - are more or less universally penalised in legal systems.⁴ 'I'm going to kill you', said in a realistically threatening manner face to face, justifies the hearer in using deadly force in self-defence.

Beyond such cases, speech may be hurtful (for example, in the context of rows in sexual or family relationships); or defamatory, as a smear tactic; or (particularly when used by a superior to a subordinate, or a majority member to a minority member or dissident) belittling as a form of bullying. And so on.

In these areas Marxists are generally opposed to state/legal regulation of speech; but support the right to *challenge* speech. The reason is not that we endorse the use of speech to hurt people, defame them or belittle them, and so on. It is that the nature of the *state* is such that it can be routinely expected to abuse speech control powers given to it. A few examples:

section 5 of the Public Order Act 1936, supposedly directed against Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, was from the outset used mainly against leftwing protestors, trade union pickets, and so on. The first person convicted of incitement to racial hatred was a black power activist. A Canadian reform of pornography law along feminist lines produced as the first item prosecuted under the new law a lesbian magazine. These are merely examples of *normal* state behaviour.

The *theoretical* point of libel law is to repress the sort of campaign of defamation which is being run by LFI and PZ-JLM and their MP supporters and media friends. But it would be useless to sue. This is, first, because recent British monarchs have franchised to the bar and solicitors' profession the sale of justice contrary to Magna Carta article 29, through the 'free market in legal services', under which deep pockets routinely win lawsuits - and *especially* so in defamation cases. It is, second, because this campaign of defamation is in fact being conducted in the interest of the British state and its foreign policy, so that judicial bias in favour of the libellers is to be expected.

The case of a workers' state would not be different. Empirically, witness, in practice, all the Stalinist regimes, including the most 'liberal' ones. Witness also the use of speech controls by the *trade union* bureaucracy - as, for example, in the 'Unison monkey trial'. Theoretically, the permanent bureaucratic apparatus of a trade union, or of a workers' state, is a form required by the limits of the transition to communism: a persistence of 'bourgeois right'; and the individual state or bureaucratic officials have particular interests in their individual posts and their bureaucratic 'turf' - as Marx pointed out in his *Critique of Hegel's philosophy of right*. These interests motivate the abuse of speech controls, which is found empirically.

From this point of view, the statement that "The NCC shall not have regard to the mere holding or expression of beliefs and opinions" is a desirable rule, and diluting it is straightforwardly a bad idea. But matters are not quite so simple.

Freedom of association

The Labour Party is not a state. It is, in a certain aspect, an agency of the United Kingdom state - a point to which we will return later. But basically it is a political party: a voluntary association whose aim is to pursue certain political aims, mainly through persuading other people to support these aims (for instance, by electing Labour representatives into office).

This does not make free speech irrelevant to the Labour Party (or any other political party). But it does mean that it has certain limits. If the Labour Party routinely tolerated prominent figures who called for people to vote Tory - or, for that matter, for the party to adopt Tory policies - it would render itself completely nugatory.

But, of course, it does. We argued in this paper in 2010 for the expulsion of the Labour figures who took jobs from the Con-Dem coalition government: Frank Field, John Hutton and Alan Milburn.⁵ No wider forces took up this call.

The Blairites were, in essence, advocates of Labour adopting a great deal of Tory policy. During their ascendancy the party *really* was tending towards becoming a political zero as a result, meaning merely an office-gaining machine for careerists; but in doing so it actually paved the way for actual electoral *failure*, as happened in Scotland in 2015. If the Blairites had retained control, Theresa May might have succeeded in her project in the June election of winning the Labour Brexiteer votes and thus completing

the job of smashing Labour started in Scotland.

It is thus perfectly legitimate to say that people who want to campaign for conservatism should openly and honestly join the Conservative Party, rather than covertly do so in the Labour Party. And in that sense the 'absolute' guarantee of freedom of "expression of beliefs and opinions" in the party rules as they stand is inappropriate. If the left defends this absolute guarantee unequivocally, it will actually be preparing the ground for pro-Tory advocates in the future.

There is also an issue which is closer to the immediate one. Feminism, anti-racism and various other 'special oppression' issues have since the 1990s been 'weaponised' in the interests of US foreign policy. That does not mean, however, that the left should abandon opposition to racism, patriarchy, and so on. In the words of the 1880 *Programme of the Parti Ouvrier*, "The emancipation of the productive class is that of all human beings without distinction of sex or race" - and the same goes for all the other distinctions which have been made the ground of oppression.

Hence, conducting a racist agitation, for example, is agitating against Labour's - or Marxist - aims and values. It again poses the point that the *honest* racist should go and join an openly racist party rather than attaching themselves to the left.⁶

Getting closer still. The Zionists have argued that anti-Zionism - opposition to the project of creating a state for all the world's Jews in the Levant - in itself amounts to anti-Semitism. This is straightforwardly false. Nonetheless, there is such a thing as an anti-Semitic anti-Zionism. It is found where, instead of blaming the *political Zionist movement*, and the policies of the great powers, for the creation of the state of Israel and its ongoing colonial oppression and dispossession of the local inhabitants, an attempt is made to find some way of blaming these events on *the Jews as such*, or on specifically 'Jewish' capital.

This newspaper has encountered the phenomenon directly in the fairly recent past. In September 2014 we reported the expulsion of Ian Donovan from the Communist Platform of Left Unity, precisely because the overwhelming majority of members wanted Communist Platform to dissociate itself publicly from Donovan's arguments that the United States backs the state of Israel because of the large number and influence of specifically Jewish capitalists in the US.⁷

Suppose, then, that the Labour Party was a regular political party, which had unambiguous general anti-racist commitments in its platform. We would then support in principle the use of party disciplinary procedures to dissociate the party from people who argued that "Jews" as such or "Jewish capital" as such are responsible for the state of Israel and/or its conduct.

At present, however, to take this approach would involve obvious double standards. The reason is that the state of Israel is *explicitly and by its constitution* a racist state: a state for its *Jewish* citizens, not one for all its citizens, and still less one for all its *subjects*, which include the Palestinian inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza, who are subject to Israeli military occupation and expropriations to facilitate colonisation (West Bank) and siege warfare (Gaza).

Hence PZ-JLM and LFI, by promoting Labour support for Israel without explicitly condemning the racist provisions in Israel's constitution and the racist conduct of the Israeli state in (at least) the West Bank, *are actively promoting racism*. Yet the party takes no action against this activity. Indeed, any suggestion that PZ-JLM should be disaffiliated is denounced as ... anti-Semitism, and therefore racism.

Under these circumstances, even to proceed to take disciplinary measures against people who argued that "Jews" as such or "Jewish capital" as such are responsible for the state of Israel, while leaving the advocates of support for Israel in its present racist form untouched, would be double standards.

This, of course, is not what the Labour right's MPs, PZ-JLM, LFI and the rightwing media are demanding. They are claiming that *not supporting Israel* is anti-Semitism and racism. This is not merely double standards, but a big lie: "Leon Trotsky was a fascist, and I know it for a fact: first I said it, then I read it, in the Hitler-Stalin pact."

What drives this big lie machine? It might be imagined (and, it seems, probably *is* imagined among the Labour left) that it is merely a matter of securing a Conservative victory at the next general election by smearing Labour. An assumption of this sort is likely to have led to the idea of defanging the smear campaign by concessions to it, which explains the NEC decision on the rule change proposal and the responses of Labour officials to the media on the issue. If so, the concessions would lead to inability to exploit the issue, leading in turn to it fading out of public attention.

But this is not what has happened. And in reality, the agenda is something different. It is about who controls *the Labour Party*, given the risk that Labour might form a government.

Labour

The Labour Party is *not* (to quote my formulation above) "a regular political party, which has unambiguous general anti-racist commitments in its platform". Rather, it is a party founded on a contradiction.

On the one hand, Labour claims, both by its name and by its affiliate structure, to be *not* a party founded on a specific political platform, but rather the united representative of the working class as a whole. In this character, it blocks the *legitimacy* of the existence of alternative parties within the movement. (I emphasise 'legitimacy' because it is the first-past-the-post electoral system which is the primary obstacle to the *electoral representation* of alternative parties.)

On the other hand, in contradiction with this claim, Labour is characterised by commitments, not explicit in its constitution, to loyalty to *the British constitution* and to *the British national interest*. Though these are not explicit political commitments in the party's constitution, they extend way to the left of the centre ground, and can be found even among advocates of constitutional reform: Michael Foot at his most leftwing was still a loyalist to the constitution; Tony Benn advocated radical constitutional change, but still within a *British* framework (the restoration, in a sense, of the Commonwealth of 1651-54), and Brexiteering.

None of this is any novelty in Labour. It was already present before World War I in the PLP's tailing the Liberals on international politics and in Labour's support for the war.

Its primary institutional expression is, precisely, the regime of bans and proscriptions. Labour simultaneously claims by its name and its affiliate structure to represent the working class as a whole - but by the bans and proscriptions, it claims to *exclude* the representation of the part of the working class which is not loyal to the constitution and to the British 'national interest' in foreign affairs.

If Labour had open and transparent programmatic commitments to British nationalism and loyalty, it would be hard for it to claim that it represents the working class as a whole, and thus block the legitimacy of any alternative workers' party, hold on to the system of trade union affiliation, and so on. These commitments must thus take indirect forms; and those forms are bans

and proscriptions and witch-hunting, together with the protected privileges of the PLP.

In this aspect, the Labour Party serves as an indirect agency or arm of the British state: it propagates loyalty to the constitution and to the national interest among the working class, and Labour MPs can in principle be trusted to carry out ministerial roles in the interests of the state (and thus, indirectly, of capitals operating on British territory).

Jeremy Corbyn's victory in two leadership elections, and the Tories' failure to inflict a crushing defeat on Labour in June 2017, pose a particular problem for this regime. They do so because since 1940 the fundamental orientation of British state policy has been the acceptance of subordinate status in relation to the USA in exchange for protection.

It was not peculiar to Blair to get involved in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq: the Wilson government conducted various counterinsurgency operations, in particular in Yemen and Oman, and backed Vietnam (though it did not actually send in troops); the Attlee government took Britain into the Korean war.⁸

There is a particular need to hem in Corbyn, McDonnell and Abbott (and their supporters) on this issue because the Iraq war lacked united backing from the British state core, and consequently gave rise to an enormous, mass anti-war movement, with which Corbyn in particular was closely associated. The anti-war movement itself as an activist movement ebbed away; but it left behind a legacy of scepticism on the left towards US policy in the Middle East and the US's Israeli sidekick. The Gaza war of 2008-09 ('Operation Cast Lead') attracted much more open media and activist hostility than had been the case with previous Israeli operations.

The British state needs to restore the trustworthiness of a potential Labour government in the eyes of the USA. To do that means that Labour has to give explicit commitments to support US policy in the Middle East. This was the point of Cameron's demands for support for bombing the Syrian state, and then for bombing the Syrian Islamist opposition, and the ridiculous momentary glorification of Hilary Benn in December 2015.

But this *direct* demand for support has been rather unsuccessful. After all, US policy in the Middle East does not look terribly successful. Almost worse is Cameron's ostensible lead role, with Labour backing, in causing state failure and humanitarian disaster in Libya in the name of 'humanitarian intervention'.

It is in this context that the big lie that anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism has been promoted and continues to be promoted. It takes hold of a vulnerability of the broad left - its intersectionality, its inability to confront identity-oppression claims. By doing so it weaponises the idea of anti-racism.

The 'Labour's anti-Semitism problem' big lie will thus persist until the Labour leadership is prepared to give Israel the blank cheque which will - when the time comes - 'justify' bombing Iran and/or again invading Lebanon and/or further ethnic cleansing in the West Bank. It is a merely incidental advantage that it allows further and better 'compliance unit' purges of Labour lefts.

Poison

It is in this context that the NEC's amendment is not merely a fudge, but a poisoned fudge. The idea of the amendment is to make a more general and more limited limitation on free speech than the PZ-JLM proposal. The revised wording will read:

The NCC shall not have regard to the mere holding or expression of beliefs and opinions except in any instance

inconsistent with the party's aims and values, agreed codes of conduct, or involving prejudice towards any protected characteristic.

The idea of a "protected characteristic" is taken from the Equality Act 2010, sections 4-12, listing a range of characteristics - race, age, gender, sexual orientation, religious or philosophical beliefs, etc. Section 13 then prohibits direct discrimination on the ground of the protected characteristics and section 19 indirect discrimination.⁹

In this statutory context the terminology makes a degree of sense, and so does the term, 'prejudice'. In origin, 'prejudice' refers to the judge (or equivalent) who has made his mind up before hearing the evidence and argument (for whatever reason). In the context of direct discrimination in employment, etc, it also makes sense: the point is that the employer has made his mind up not to hire black people (or whatever) without waiting for the CV or interview.

In the context of penalising the "mere holding or expression of beliefs and opinions", however, "prejudice" is perfectly meaningless. There is no concrete *decision*, nor any concrete arguments of evidence, in relation to which there is a *pre-judgement*.

It can only then be taken to mean something in the nature of "negative attitude to" - so that, for example, radical feminists are 'prejudiced' towards trans women, no matter how much argument they offer; or feminists generally are 'prejudiced' against Catholic right-to-lifers on the basis of their religious views; or leftwingers are 'prejudiced' against the holders of Conservative philosophical beliefs; or anti-Zionists are 'prejudiced' against Jews because, it is alleged, all Jews are Zionists; or because Jews are, it is claimed, a nation and all nations have the right to self-determination (except ones targeted as 'rogue states' by the USA).

All of these arguments are versions of the same method - of converting *disagreement* into a supposed violation of someone's rights. But they all follow logically from the acceptance of the "prejudice" formula, made into an empty 'boo word' by taking it out of its proper contexts of judicial misconduct and direct discrimination.

The underlying dynamics of the Labour Party in the present period mean that partial concessions to the smear-mongers will not defang the issue, but they will just come back for more. And the concessions are then a means in which they are *helped* to come back for more. The fudge is poisoned ●

Notes

1. https://medium.com/@pitt_bob/did-the-jewish-labour-movement-get-its-way-over-labour-party-rule-changes-df628b5a1af. The quotations from the PZ-JLM proposal are taken from the JLM online source comrade Pitt cites there; the NEC proposal from Pitt.
2. See M Macnair, 'Marxism and freedom of communication' *Critique* Vol 37, pp565-77 (2009).
3. They often overstate the point.
4. An early example is H Badamchi, 'The meaning of "theft" in ancient near eastern law' *Folia Orientalia* Vol 53, pp369-86 (2016).
5. 'Expel the collaborators' *Weekly Worker* August 25 2010.
6. I do not mean by this to deny the undoubted history of racist commitments of the labour movement. An example from the 1906 Labour manifesto: "Chinese Labour is defended because it enriches the mine owners" (<http://labourmanifesto.com/1906/1906-labour-manifesto.shtml>). This does not alter the point that *Marxism* has a historical commitment against racism and sexism.
7. 'No place for anti-Semitism' *Weekly Worker* September 18 2014.
8. Before 1940, of course, it was a matter of maintaining *British* imperial interests: for example, the 1924 MacDonald Labour government continued support for 'air control' bombing in Iraq and elsewhere - see JS Corum, 'The myth of air control: reassessing the history' *Aerospace Power Journal* winter 2000, pp61-77.
9. In between sections 13 and 19 is a quantity of complexity posed by the fact that age, sex and disability actually pose *different* discrimination problems to race and nationality; but that is a problem with the design of the 2010 act, not with the Labour Party's new rule.

KURDISTAN



A victory for Barzani? Yes, but ...

Heading for chaos

Yassamine Mather looks at the reaction to the independence referendum

The much anticipated referendum on independence for the Kurdish region of Iraq took place on September 25 and, as expected, the result was decisive. According to the electoral commission of the Kurdish regional government (KRG), 92% voted 'yes' in a turnout of around 72% of those eligible to vote.

Of course, no-one ever doubted how the vote in Erbil, capital of the KRG, would go. This is the stronghold of president Masoud Barzani. But it was a different story elsewhere - particularly in the oil city of Kirkuk, where the referendum was boycotted by Turkmens, as well as Shia, Sunni and secular Arabs. In the days before the vote cities such as Kirkuk witnessed street battles and looting that worried everyone from the United Nations to the more intelligent members of the US state department. In the evening following the vote, as Kurds in Erbil and elsewhere were already celebrating in anticipation, Kirkuk was under curfew.

There are divisions between the Sorani Kurds, who tend to support the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and the Badianis, who prefer Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP). PUK leaders and their supporters in Sulaymaniyah were reluctant to endorse the referendum and all reports from the city show there was little celebration there afterwards. Some in the PUK's leadership believe that the four-month campaign has actually damaged the cause of Kurdish independence and, what is more, they do not trust Barzani. Many in Sulaymaniyah were telling reporters that they are against 'one family' (ie, Barzani's) running the KRG.

The PUK, together with Gorran (Movement for Change), viewed the referendum as an opportunist move by Barzani, whose grip on power has been seriously challenged by a sustained economic downturn, due partly to the falling price of oil and partly to the incompetence and corruption of the Erbil government. The KRG has a debt of around \$28-30 billion and most Iraqi Kurds have witnessed a drop in their standard of living over the last few years.

Reaction

As I write, the only positive response so far has come from Israeli politicians. As has often been the case recently in the Middle East, Israel is the winner in all this. The country that strives with all its might to deny the Palestinian people the right of self-determination has been the champion of the Kurds' right to exercise it. Minister of communications Ayoub Kara had previously tweeted his support: "The Kurdish referendum will expedite a comprehensive arrangement in the Middle East, and correct the historic Sykes-Picot agreement, which failed to consider the needs of many minorities, including 40 million Kurds."

However, the opinion pages of the *Ha'aretz* newspaper in Tel Aviv carried more critical messages. For example, commentator David Rosenberg wrote on September 27: "Independent Kurdistan looks like a Zimbabwe in the making."¹

For her part, Dahila Scheindlin commented:

Israel's rightwing government might end up regretting its public support for Kurdistan. After all, if historical justice legitimates Kurdish and Jewish self-determination, it's just as applicable to the Palestinians.

Dahila quoted Ghassan Khatib, professor of political science at Ramallah's Birzeit University:

I think the Kurds have the right to self-determination and they should be allowed this right. Supporting the right of self-determination for the Kurds should encourage people to follow the same principle and support the right of self-determination, independence and statehood for the Palestinian people - although we Palestinians are used to double standards, when it comes to rights, by the international community.²

However, with the exception of Israel, the Kurds have found no allies amongst their former supporters. The United

States, which has been served well by Iraqi Kurdish leaders since 1990, has criticised the vote - called against the wishes of the Iraqi government - and leading US figures have declared that the fragile situation in Iraq could lead to a new conflict in the region. A US official who spoke to the *Al-Monitor* website "on strict conditions of anonymity" voiced worries that the referendum could even lead to the collapse of the government in Baghdad. The Republican chair of the Senate foreign relations committee, Bob Corker, told a reporter: "We've been very, very clear that this is not something we support ... we felt like it would weaken [Iraqi prime minister Haider] al-Abadi, as he runs for re-election, and we didn't think the timing of it was good."³ Congress is now considering blocking a pending \$296 million deal to arm two peshmerga brigades.

The reaction from Baghdad itself was what could have been expected - the vote was simply "illegitimate". However, the Shia government will do what it can to "preserve Iraq's unity". And on September 26, Baghdad ordered the KRG to hand over control of its airports to federal authorities or face a flight ban. Al-Abadi also accused Barzani of leading a corrupt government - ironic, given the level of corruption and nepotism prevalent in so many aspects of successive Iraqi administrations since 2003.

The referendum was also opposed by Shia clerics, although some Sunnis seem convinced that the country will be divided along religious and national lines sooner rather than later. Sheikh Ahmad al-Kubaisi, who came out in support of Kurdish independence, said: "Iraq will be divided. The strong Sunni area will be Kurdistan, and it will not be restricted to the Kurds, but all Arab Sunnis are insistent on joining it." But the Arabs in Kirkuk do not seem to agree with him.

As for Iran, on September 24 the Islamic republic cancelled all commercial flights to Iraqi Kurdistan and began shelling Iranian Kurdish fighters on the Iraqi side of the border near Haj Omran. However, on the same day, Barzani admitted that he had just

met Qasem Soleimani, head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards. One possible reason for Soleimani's trip to the KRG is that he was mediating between the PUK and KDP (both are former allies of Iran and the Revolutionary Guards, as such as some Iranian Kurds tend towards amnesia on this particular subject). Another explanation could be that, as Baghdad and Ankara harden their positions against the KRG, Tehran believes it can be the winner by presenting itself as less of an enemy, more a "concerned ally".

The official press and media in the Iranian Kurdish cities of Baneh and Sanandaj actually broadcast pictures of Iraqi Kurds celebrating the result - an interesting example of the way Tehran is dealing with the referendum. Once again Iranian opposition groups on the left who support 'regime change from above' got it badly wrong when they celebrated the Kurdish referendum as 'a first step to the overthrow of the Islamic regime'.

I mentioned Ankara's hostility and it is important to understand why Turkey's reaction is so important: the KRG economy relies heavily on oil and the 550,000 barrels a day it exports are the main source of its income. Unfortunately for Barzani, however, this is solely dependent on a pipeline running to Turkish terminals on the Mediterranean. The day after the referendum, Ankara, concerned about Kurdish nationalism within Turkey's own borders, made it clear that it will no longer be business as usual with the KRG - Turkey has financed major infrastructure projects there, including the new airport.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called the vote "illegal and illegitimate" and threatened to close the border and cut oil flows. Erdoğan referred regretfully to the close economic and political ties Ankara and Erbil have cultivated over the last decade: "This referendum is unacceptable. We stood by them during their most difficult times." Referring to potential Turkish military operations in Syria, he added:

We will not shy away from doing the

same in Iraq ... It will be over when we close the oil taps. All revenues will vanish, and they will not be able to find food when our trucks stop. Iraqi Kurds must give up on independence or go hungry.

US aims

As for Barzani himself, he is probably relying on the myth that the Kurds can only benefit from the threat of independence. Nothing can be further from reality. As I keep saying, the current US administration is now expressing openly what has been Washington's foreign policy for a while, even under Obama. Donald Trump spelled it out clearly in his speech to United Nations general assembly last week, when he made it clear that the US no longer claims to be interested in 'nation building'. Its involvement in the Middle East is purely to safeguard US interests - and those interests do not involve creating 'democracies' and empowering 'civil society'. On the contrary, the current level of military intervention, including air raids and drone attacks, can only lead to the weakening and eventual destruction of currently constituted states - even those that are considered allies of US, such as Turkey, or those headed by regimes imposed following US military action, such as the current Shia Iraqi government. Only idiots such as Barzani and supporters of Iran 'regime change from above' do not get this.

Of course, Marxists should welcome the destruction of dictatorial regimes in states created with artificial borders decided upon by colonial powers. However, there are two ways of achieving this: the revolutionary way from below; or the current US policy of deliberate destruction and creation of anarchy. In the Middle East, Syria and Libya - and to a certain extent Afghanistan and Iraq - all provide a clear indication of what that can lead to ●

Notes

1. www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/premium-1.814401.
2. www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/1.813823.
3. www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/09/congress-warns-kurds-iraq-independence-referendum.html.

FRANCE

Macron exposes divisions

The unions are split over the new laws. René Gimpel reports on the compromises and the protests



CGT: out in force

In the current edition of *Monsieur*, a men's style magazine, an editorial entitled 'Unbowed rebellion' takes the French national assembly to task.¹ The title puns on the radical political party, France Unbowed (France Insoumise - FI), the main opposition bloc to president Emmanuel Macron's Forward (En Marche - EM) majority.

Monsieur's editor expresses delight at the spectacle of raucous disputes erupting in the chamber over dress code. When attending debates, FI deputies ignored the requirement to appear in jacket and tie, thereby forcing the assembly's administration to amend those rules. *Monsieur's* editor slyly remarks that, while FI insists on its MPs' right to dress down, they do not do so for assembly staff and employees, all of whom have to dress formally.

This is a meagre gain for the opposition in a summer that up to now has seen the left on the defensive. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, trumpeting leader of FI and, admittedly, a skilful and disruptive debater at the assembly, has been touring the country all summer, holding rallies to raise morale among his followers. In the meantime, Macron has been splitting the trade unions over the issue of employment law reform - or, as Mélenchon and others call it, his social *coup d'état*.

The history of these proposed changes goes back to 1999, when two

national leaders, chancellor Gerhard Schröder of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and UK prime minister Tony Blair, jointly formulated the 'modernisation', as they called it, of unemployment benefit. Their guiding principle was: 'Better the poor sweat than live on the dole'. Mastermind behind the German plan was one Peter Hartz of the Volkswagen company and the final version of his plan is known as 'Hartz IV'. As implemented, this plan has led to the pauperisation of a million people and the precarious situation of millions more. As SPD president Franz Müntefering put in a speech to the Bundestag in 2006, "Only those who work should be able to eat." Hartz was lionised until disgraced for bribery and a prostitution racket. Sentenced to two years imprisonment, suspended and fined, he moved to France.²

Once there, Hartz expounded his plans to president François Hollande. He explained that dismantling employment security had allowed German firms to shed employees, then rehire them on piecemeal rates and zero-hours contracts, endlessly restocking workers from job centres. A pot of gold.

In turn, Macron has been seduced by this vision. Having secured a majority of deputies in the assembly, nearly all of them inexperienced and beholden to their master (who has made them sign a pledge of allegiance), plus a skilful peeling away of talent from other parties (notably the right), Macron has now moved to split the trade unions.

French unions have only a third of the membership of their British counterparts, but wheel a great deal more power. By statute they are present in all enterprises of 50 or more employees and on the boards of all major companies. It is this situation which Macron is aiming to dismantle. Historically, the largest and most militant union, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), traditionally under the leadership of the Parti Communiste Français (PCF), has led the charge against successive administrations' attempts to weaken employment rights. Last week it headed several demonstrations, culminating in

the September 21 march in Paris, where it claimed 150,000 came out on the streets. However, this year the CGT was overtaken in terms of membership by the Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT), which has now displaced it as the leading force in the private sector for the first time in a century.

The CFDT's general secretary, Laurent Berger, not only failed to fall in behind last week's protest, but went out of his way to announce that he had come to an agreement with the president after several meetings at the Elysée Palace. Berger added that he would not take orders from Philippe Martinez, the CGT's general secretary. Meanwhile the third largest union, Force Ouvrière (FO), likewise has chosen its own path to the president and is "in discussion". Given splits in the union response, groups of workers have begun to organise rolling sector days of resistance or, as *20 Minutes*, the free French morning newspaper puts it, "To each day its strike".³

Two weeks ago the PCF organised its annual *fête de l'Humanité* - a week-long cultural and political jamboree. A PCF leader took the opportunity to take a swipe at Mélenchon, to which the latter responded immediately. Mélenchon reminded the PCF that FI had overtaken the communists in numbers of deputies in the national assembly, while in turn the party reminded FI that without PCF support FI would find itself more than usually isolated.

A grateful guest of the PCF at the *fête de l'Humanité* was Benoît Hamon, defeated Parti Socialiste candidate in the presidential elections. Subsequently the PS was decimated in the June 2017 parliamentary elections, down from 290 to 29 seats. A slew of long-serving deputies lost their seats, while others defected to EM.

Meanwhile, the Trotskyist Lutte Ouvrière organised its own march in Paris, accusing Mélenchon of "café socialism" and of wanting a united left only if he can lead it. On September 23 it was the turn of FI itself to march in protest along the Paris boulevards, with

Mélenchon boasting that 400 coaches had brought supporters to the capital from all over France. This seemed to have mobilised around the same numbers as the CGT-organised event a few days earlier.

Monsieur's editorial finishes with a flourish. Referring to the French Revolution, it characterises FI deputies as "*sans culottes*". The *sans culottes* (trouserless) were the poor masses who drove the French Revolution. They radicalised it time and again, whenever it showed signs of faltering. *Monsieur* points out that before being guillotined, condemned

men were required to remove their cravats and open their collars.

If FI unites its forces with other left political groups and the trade unions, not least the PCF and CGT, might they be able to block Macron and condemn his proposals to the guillotine? Or might they fail, allowing Macron and French capitalism to lead the FI deputies to the scaffold? Sartorially at any rate they are already tielless ●

Notes

1. *Monsieur* September-October.
2. *Le Monde Diplomatique* September.
3. *20 Minutes* September 18.

Fighting fund

Ups and downs

September really has been a month of ups and downs. Regular readers of this column will know that after the brilliant £890 that came in last week I felt confident that we would smash through our £1,750 monthly target despite the more than sluggish first couple of weeks.

After all, we had already reached £1,534 with 10 days still to go and I was even talking about clawing back most of the £634 deficit that had built up over the first eight months of the year.

But then what happens? It's back to the doldrums, with only £182 coming in over the last week. It goes without saying that I'm grateful to the nine comrades who contributed to the fighting fund over the last seven days. Six of them were regulars with their monthly standing orders: JT (£50), BB, GT and WC (£15 each) DC (£12) and SS (£10). Added to which were the cheques from VM (£25) and RG (£10, added to her subscription).

Once again though, the PayPal donations were a bit on the low side. Despite 2,948 online readers last week, only one of them thought of clicking on that button - thank you, comrade MN, for your handy £30.

However, despite the disappointing week, our running total for September now stands at £1,716. In other words, we only need another £34 to see us over the line by Saturday September 30 - which, as I write, is just three days away.

Comrades, please help us cross that line - and, if you can, how about throwing in a bit extra to help us eat into that deficit? Please use our PayPal facility or - better still - make a bank transfer from your online account (sort code 30-99-64; account number 00744310) ●

Robbie Rix

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

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London Communist Forum
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Speaker: Mike Macnair

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

TRANSPORT

California über alles

Uber's troubles in London are indicative of the brittleness of the Silicon Valley tech elite, argues **Paul Demarty**



Much controversy has followed the decision of Transport for London not to renew Uber's taxi licence in the capital, and one must own up to curiosity as to who holds the American start-up's British PR contract, for they have done a bang-up job.

Uber has a long-standing habit of urging its users to object to regulatory actions that affect the company; an email expressing "astonishment" at TfL's decision and pointing readers to a petition against the decision was duly dispatched, and the petition amassed 500,000 signatures with speed (at the time of writing, it stands a little short of 800,000). A fine piece of astroturfing, except for the fact that it does not seem to have worked: London mayor Sadiq Khan continues to back TfL, which in reality would hardly have dared to make such a politically sensitive call without the go-ahead from the top man. TfL is answerable to nobody else, and if Khan is not intimidated, Uber can - as Khan's predecessor might put it - go whistle.

If it seems for all the world as though Londoners are united in outrage at this new piece of regulation, it is worth maintaining a level of scepticism. Uber has

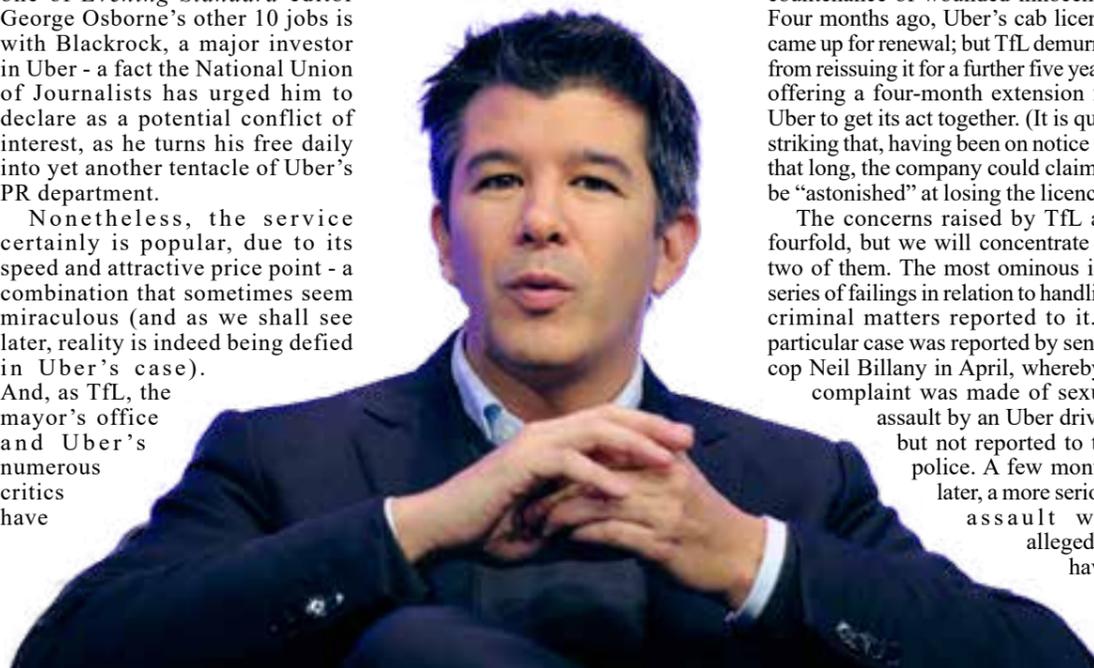
excelled at making friends in high places, muscling its way into those government/tech industry 'summits', by means of which top politicians try to catch some of the reflected glory of technological progress, along with Google, Apple, Microsoft and co. In this particular connection, it hardly hurts that one of *Evening Standard* editor George Osborne's other 10 jobs is with Blackrock, a major investor in Uber - a fact the National Union of Journalists has urged him to declare as a potential conflict of interest, as he turns his free daily into yet another tentacle of Uber's PR department.

Nonetheless, the service certainly is popular, due to its speed and attractive price point - a combination that sometimes seem miraculous (and as we shall see later, reality is indeed being defied in Uber's case).

And, as TfL, the mayor's office and Uber's numerous critics have

It is a case of not so new tech versus 'the knowledge'

Travis Kalanick ousted as CEO and facing legal battles



fought back robustly on points of fact, the narrative has changed: 'Mistakes were made - we can change'.

Bad company

It is worth dealing initially with the facts of the case, or some of them at least, to give some context to Uber's initial countenance of wounded innocence. Four months ago, Uber's cab licence came up for renewal; but TfL demurred from reissuing it for a further five years, offering a four-month extension for Uber to get its act together. (It is quite striking that, having been on notice for that long, the company could claim to be "astonished" at losing the licence).

The concerns raised by TfL are fourfold, but we will concentrate on two of them. The most ominous is a series of failings in relation to handling criminal matters reported to it. A particular case was reported by senior cop Neil Billany in April, whereby a complaint was made of sexual assault by an Uber driver, but not reported to the police. A few months later, a more serious assault was alleged to have

been committed by the same driver against a different woman. Uber dismissed the driver, but still did not report the matter to the police, telling instead the London cab authority, which *did* contact the police. According to Billany, Uber avers openly that this is company policy:

Uber hold a position not to report crime, on the basis that it may breach the rights of the passenger. When asked what the position would be in the hypothetical case of a driver who commits a serious sexual assault against a passenger, they confirmed that they would dismiss the driver and report to TfL, but not inform the police.

Our friend in blue understands well what is going on here:

The significant concern I am raising is that Uber have been made aware of criminal activity and yet haven't informed the police. Uber are, however, proactive in reporting lower-level document frauds to both the MPS and LTPH. My concern is twofold: firstly it seems they are deciding what to report (less serious matters/less damaging to reputation over serious offences); and secondly, by not reporting to police promptly, they are allowing situations to develop that clearly affect the safety and

What we fight for

security of the public.¹

A significant part of Uber's charm offensive is that it offers a safe, affordable travel alternative for people, otherwise vulnerable, coming home late at night. Given the nature of the allegations against it - which are absolutely routine if we look at Uber as a global concern - this seems particularly ill-judged.

The other aspect of the present charges against Uber worthy of notice is the notorious Greyball software, which Uber is known to have used in some hostile jurisdictions to evade regulation. The idea is simple - identify users of the Uber app most likely to be regulators or officials checking up on Uber's compliance with city ordinances, and send them a bunch of fake data about who is driving where and how soon you are likely to be picked up. The existence of these methods was exposed by the transport authority of Portland, Oregon, and reported to much fanfare in the *New York Times*; TfL claims that it is unsatisfied by Uber's assurances that no such software is being used in London.

It is, of course, devilishly difficult to prove a negative anyway, but - due to the structure of Uber - even harder in this particular context. Here we have to be precise. The cab operator that lost its licence is 'Uber London Limited'; the smartphone app, however, is operated by Uber, the global company; ULL's drivers use the same app as any other local Uber operation in the world, but do not themselves control it. Thus the body with which TfL is formally dealing cannot, by definition, offer convincing assurances of good behaviour. (The tax benefits of such a structure, of course, are hardly inconsiderable.)

The London debacle caps off a torrid year for Uber. A series of PR disasters led to the ouster of long-time CEO Travis Kalanick; in particular, the exposure of widespread sexual harassment and corporate dysfunction in Uber's technology organisation and a leaked video of Kalanick himself berating an Uber driver. He is now the subject of a lawsuit by Benchmark Capital, one of Uber's main investors, over claims he misled them over these and other issues (including Greyball).

The legal troubles do not end there. Uber's self-driving car project is in jeopardy, as, Anthony Levandowski - an employee it poached from Google's subsidiary, Waymo - was accused of taking 9.7 gigabytes of Google's intellectual property with him. Uber has since fired him, but is still embroiled in litigation over the affair and on the hook for close to \$2 billion in damages if Waymo gets what it wants. To that must be added the parlous state of the company's sub-prime car-leasing division - never intended to be a profitable operation, but a sacrifice in the service of increasing driver numbers - whose losses look to be far more severe than projected. By some counts, Uber stands to lose \$9,000 for every car in the scheme, at which point it may as well have just given away second-hand cars for free, with a total loss of \$360 million.

Valley of the dolts

Some more simple-hearted readers may be surprised to learn, however, that the running total of the potential losses mentioned above is dwarfed by the *actual* operating loss of no less than \$3 billion 'enjoyed' by the company last year.

Such readers, alas, are trapped in the outdated paradigm, which says that businesses should be expected to make a profit, and pay dividends and bond yields to their investors. How antediluvian such attitudes seem from the vantage point of Silicon Valley, which has taken a relatively marginal investment strategy - venture capital - and, for better or worse, rebuilt the tech industry around it.

For the uninitiated, here is roughly how VC works. A firm, just like other investment companies, will start off by opening up a fund and gathering investors' money, which will be distributed between a large number of companies - let us say, for illustration, 100. All of these investments are high-risk. Any one of the companies, taken alone, is likely to fail. *However*, say that each one of them has a 1% chance of succeeding to the level of a Facebook, finally coming in glory to the public markets. The odds might be fairly good that one of them will come in, and come in big enough to wipe out all the losses in the portfolio.

So far, it is hardly that eye-catching. Nor is it that surprising that VC is a big thing in tech, which (in theory) involves the inherent risk of research and development and proving out new things in a market that has never seen anything like its product before; hence the connection between the one wing of financial and the other of industrial capital long predates the current tech bubble. Bound up with this strategy, however, there is now a standard story of how a venture-backed start-up can 'win big'.

The idea is to take investment money and plough it into revenue growth above all else. Costs are (or should be) controlled, but not in the pursuit of short- or medium-term profit, but of keeping the lights on long enough for the company to reach a kind of inflection point, where enough of the addressable market uses its products for the much-prized 'network effects' to kick in and growth to become exponential and self-sustaining. The end result is a difficult-to-shift monopoly, from which economies of scale will follow and substantial rents can be extracted.² Then you go public; and the demands of 'normal' investors for dividends, etc, kick in.

At this point, we might innocently ask what could possibly go wrong,³ and there are many answers. We should say up front that VC investment is so plentiful in part due to the general economic environment, in which large institutional investors are driven away from their traditional haunts by near-zero interest rates towards more esoteric propositions. (Blackrock, whom we already mentioned, is not a VC fund as such, but a pension manager.) The Federal Reserve once again chickened out of raising rates recently, but presumably will do so eventually.

The risk Uber poses has to do with the *internal* modes of failure of the VC-backed-tech-start-up model, however. Written into it, as always, is the assumption that not even millions of dollars of free money sloshed at a company can buck the market: it is to be expected that those businesses which cannot reach 'escape velocity' will in the end be unable to attract further investment, or at least not at higher valuations, and will fall by the wayside. Indeed, this 'works' most of the time, with the half-life of VC-backed start-ups still pretty short.

But does it work *all* the time? Imagine - if you can! - a VC-backed taxi company. The 'total addressable market' of the taxi business is everyone who could ever want to be transported from one place to another relatively nearby place, which surely includes billions of people. It is merely a matter of finding a price that people will pay for it in ever increasing numbers - and, remember, for the time being, it does not matter if that price is less than the cost of the journey, for now; and so it is also possible to 'overpay' (from the capitalist point of view) the drivers. A few million dollars come in, and San Francisco (of course) is conquered first. Then you go back to the VC market for a few *tens* of millions - thus expanding into New York, and other major cities in the United States - their complacent taxi services and regulators reduced to spluttering, impotent rage.

Then another round, for *hundreds* of millions, and on to conquer the world ...

Notice that the script is being followed to the letter. Revenue keeps growing. The valuation at which investors buy in keeps growing. Yet we are no closer at all to a sustainable business. There are no economies of scale in taxis, to start with. To expand your taxi business, you need to expand the number of taxis and drivers in direct proportion to the number of rides. You cannot just buy a bigger warehouse, like Amazon. The network effect *sort of* works: more service users means more drivers, means faster response times, means ... But in reality, this is dependent wholly on subsidising rides with investors' money. In order to run Uber at a profit *ever*, you would need either to drastically increase the price of rides, in turn drastically reducing revenue; or attack the drivers, leaving them open to the idea of going elsewhere, and thus degrading the service for the users with longer wait times.

End is nigh

The point is this: Uber is not just an overblown start-up, but the very Platonic form of an overblown start-up. Its valuation, rather than its revenue, has reached the proverbial point of hockey-stick growth. At this point, investors are as much motivated by the 'animal instincts' cited archly by Keynes as VC tech-savvy - the 'fear of missing out' looms large among them. Yet there are signs that things might be turning. Benchmark's aforementioned lawsuit against Kalanick, in particular, has been interpreted in some circles as part of an attempt to get this company public sooner rather than later, leaving the dozy world of publicly traded equities as the greater fool, holding onto worthless Uber stock.

Uber's big answer to this is the prospect of getting rid of drivers altogether - moving to self-driving cars in the relatively near future (remember that, next time some shill sobs over the fate of the 40,000 London Uber drivers ...). There are so many things wrong with this idea it is difficult to know where to begin: the technology is still a long way off, political and regulatory comfort with human and non-human drivers sharing the same roads is further off; how much of the world's pensions need to be sacrificed before this fantasy is realised? In order to take advantage, meanwhile, Uber would suddenly need to manage its own vast fleet of cars - nobody's idea of a trivial venture (perhaps the leasing scheme was a sort of pilot for this, in which case the results speak for themselves). On top of that, with the Levandowski fiasco, Uber may have well and truly screwed itself on this front - for not only is the most brilliant AI company in the world and leader in self-driving technology taking Uber to the cleaners in the courts, but has recently started looking at ploughing a cool billion into Uber's nearest competitor, Lyft.

It is rare that the *Weekly Worker* condescends to look at the prospects of some individual capitalist firm. We want to expropriate the lot of them, so it hardly matters which ones fail. We present such a bearish outlook on Uber, at such length, because it is exemplary of a spur of groupthink in the capitalist class, and clearly the point in the tech bubble where surface tension is greatest; but beyond that because companies like it are exploited ideologically as evidence for the continued vitality and innovative thrust of capitalism.

This is, in fact, false. The great successes of the current wave of tech companies are built on fundamental technologies that were decades old, and proven out above all in the state and academia. Facebook is 10% inspiration (it noticed that the pervasive anonymity of internet culture was *unattractive* to broad masses) and 90% brute

force. Its fundamental technological innovations can be divided into two basic categories: new ways to arrange pixels in a web browser; and new ways to conduct mass surveillance on a scale that would make a Gestapo *Obergruppenführer* die of a thousand orgasms. There is scant evidence indeed that VC-backed start-ups, as opposed to R'n'D-focused corporates like Google or universities and state-military actors, are well placed to prove out truly transformative new technologies like self-driving vehicles.

Perhaps the ultimate indictment of Uber, then, is not its recurrent crime problem, or its Ayn Rand-inspired hostility to regulators, but its technological modesty. It uses route-finding technology of a kind available to everyone with access to a smartphone, thanks to Google and other companies in the space. Uber's version is certainly not qualitatively better, and indeed I have taken Uber rides where the driver was ignoring it and using their preferred app instead. It moves a lot of data from end users to suppliers via web servers, like almost any web-based commercial concern in existence. (The aforementioned allegations of sexual harassment and corporate backstabbing, while certainly an expression of the ingrained sexism of society and its strong redoubt among the world's middle managers, also put one in mind of the old cliché: 'The devil makes work for idle hands'. What exactly is this vast technology organisation *doing*, and therefore what else can we expect its lecherous, treacherous time-servers to get up to?)

In the London (and British) media, Uber's setback has been treated in part according to a narrative it would like better than mine - that black cab drivers and even minicab firms are under pressure from a threat to their complacent incumbency. There is a certain, limited reality here. The black cab monopoly is founded on the particular sliver of guild-maintained intellectual property called 'the knowledge' - the exhaustive recall of inner London's highways and byways, the polyrhythms of congestion, that will get you, within its purview, more quickly from one place to the next than any other method. That is *probably* still true.

However, it is not true *enough* in relation to the present state of automated route-finding to sustain it in the long run, and indeed its limits become pretty stark, as soon as your life takes you south of the Thames. There *is* a real benefit in automating things like this, and 'the knowledge' is already primarily a matter of London's cultural heritage, which does not yet realise that - if it is to survive - it needs to be preserved in the same manner as the Tower and Buck Palace. Communists are by no means opposed to technological progress: merely its identification with capitalist social organisation; we do not defend the petty bourgeoisie from the obsolescence of its economic methods, but only from the penury that follows under our present mode of production.

Foolish indeed, however, is the starry-eyed techno-utopian who sees Uber as the future, even if the black cab's time is past; for they buy into precisely the complacent fetishism of the new and shiny that so reliably brings capitalism to grief ●

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Notes

1. https://cdn.londonconnections.com/2013/12042017-NB-to-Helen-Chapman_Redacted-1.pdf.
2. This rent-seeking is rather more pervasive than the apparently 'innovative' technology at work in the industry would lead you to suspect: witness, above all, the bewilderingly intrusive collection and hoarding of data on consumers by Google, Facebook and the like - a most unpleasant variety of rentier parasitism.
3. Also at this point, I feel obliged to disclose that I am in the process of leaving one VC-backed start-up to join another.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly Worker

**Understaffed,
underfunded,
overworked**

Dedicated staff soldier on

The fight to save the NHS goes hand in hand with the fight to transform Labour, writes James Linney

The past seven years of Tory government have been the most devastating for the national health service since its birth in 1948. Never has the term 'frontline NHS staff' felt so befitting - as resources are spread more and more thinly, working in the NHS increasingly feels like fighting a losing military campaign.

As winter approaches, so begins the now familiar seasonal defensive battle that has sadly become the norm for our health service. The situation in hospitals was so bad last winter that the British Red Cross described it as a "humanitarian crisis". This year demand is likely to be even greater. For example, Australia has just experienced one of its worst ever flu outbreaks and this is usually an accurate predictor for the number of flu cases we should expect in Europe.¹ A forbidding thought for accident and emergency departments that have seen a 342% rise in people waiting on trolleys for more than four hours since 2012.² One testament of the Tories' underfunding and one of the main threats to the NHS's existence is its severe staff shortages, and in this article I will examine the depth of this problem.

In July, *NHS Digital* published data relating to advertised vacancies obtained from *NHS Jobs*, the health service's main recruitment website.³ It revealed that there were more than 86,000 NHS vacancies between January and March 2017 (these numbers do not include vacancies for general practitioners and GP surgery staff) - an increase of more than 8,000, compared to the same time last year. In March 2017 alone there were just under 31,000 full-time job vacancies on *NHS Jobs* - the highest number recorded in a single month since the data collection began. Yet these numbers are just a hint at the true problem. Years of severe underfunding have meant that for every job vacancy advertised there are many more posts that departments simply cannot afford to fill.

Nursing and midwifery represents the area with by far the most job vacancies and, considering the Tories' vicious attacks on the nursing profession, this is no surprise. As of August this year, trainee nurses will no longer receive a government bursary and, as the Royal College of Nursing has noted, this has already resulted in a 20% drop in nursing degree applicants.⁴ You have to be pretty dedicated to the caring profession to face the dismal average starting wage of £22,000 (£26,000 in London), whilst being crippled by £50,000 of university debt. This is a workforce already left demoralised by a pay freeze which has meant that on average nurses have endured a real-term wage cut of £2,000 over the past seven years.⁵ Already we are seeing the shocking reality of this Tory-imposed impoverishment of nurses, with reports of some having to rely on food banks to survive.

There are equally worrying trends in doctor shortages. The Royal College of Emergency Medicine recently stated that in order to continue to provide a viable service more than 2,000 extra emergency medicine consultants would



Desperately trying to cope

need to be recruited over the next four years.⁶ GPs too are desperately needed, as highlighted by Imperial College's published data. Its analysis concluded that the government's pledge to recruit 5,000 GPs by 2020 is vastly inadequate to meet the need, suggesting that in 2016 there was already a 6,500 shortfall and that this would rise to above 12,500 by 2020.⁷ This year has seen hundreds of GP surgery closures and a British Medical Association survey recently found that 54% of GPs would consider a temporary suspension of new patient registration, as they already feel patient safety is being compromised. A recently published BMA briefing leads us to conclude that the situation is only going to get worse, since medical degree applications have dropped by 15% since 2013.⁸

Add to these already alarming shortages the Brexit factor. The NHS has always relied on non-British nationals to fill gaps in the workforce. Past governments have led drives to recruit doctors and nurses from across the globe - most notably from Asia, where they could poach well-trained staff at bargain prices from other struggling health services. Of the total NHS staff 12% are other nationals and of this almost half (5.5%) are European Union citizens. A recently leaked department of health document

revealed that the government is well aware that Brexit is likely to deepen the NHS staff crisis: it estimated that within six years of leaving the EU there would be a shortage of up to 42,000 nurses.⁹ Ten thousand EU staff have already left the NHS since last year's referendum - an increase of 42% compared with two years ago. Yet despite this the government refuses to give any guarantee of rights to live and work in the UK for EU citizens after 2019.

Ultimate prize

So the current NHS staff shortages and recruitment crisis reveals a predictably bleak picture. The demoralised staff are overworked, underpaid and being forced to work in an environment that puts at the risk the very thing they most cherish: their ability to offer high standards of care to those in need. The demoralisation and undermining of NHS staff is only part of the Tories' strategy. Running parallel to this has been an accelerated continuation of previous governments' privatisation by stealth. The NHS brand name remains for now, but services are increasingly being provided by the likes of Virgin Care.

Yet the fight for the NHS has not yet been lost. As the Bob Dylan song goes, "Take the rag away from your face. Now ain't the time for your

tears." In the short term, the survival of the NHS depends upon the election of a Labour government and that is looking increasingly likely. This week's Labour conference has clearly demonstrated that within the party the left is in its strongest position in living memory. During the conference Labour leaders restated the manifesto promise of an extra £7 billion for the NHS, as well as bringing some 'private finance initiative' contracts back 'in house' and urging the government to immediately inject £500 million into emergency care in preparation for the winter season. This, along with Labour's renewed pledge to scrap tuition fees, is a step towards saving the NHS.

Yet the party's plans fall far short of what is needed. Its proposed annual funding increases are below even the 4% of Tony Blair's government. In fact, the long-term fight for the NHS goes hand in hand with the fight to transform the Labour Party into a radical, democratic party of the working class - the only class that can deliver a society based on need. The truth is that the NHS has always been underfunded and understaffed, and under capitalism it always will be. In fact, our ultimate goal in relation to healthcare is not just to end the funding and recruitment crisis, but to remove the devastating ill-health burden

that the working class shoulders for the benefit of capitalism. Of course there will always be illness, but the reality is that the vast majority of current physical and mental health diseases are the direct result of living under the conditions created by the current system.

So, as the NHS digs in for the difficult winter ahead, its survival will depend on the resourcefulness of its hardworking staff. While the chance of a Labour government in the next few years gives us every reason to keep soldiering on, it is more important than ever to focus not just on the immediate battles, but on our long-term strategy and the ultimate prize ●

Notes

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