

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



**Welcoming Richard Leonard's
victory and then calling for
separation is worse than dumb**

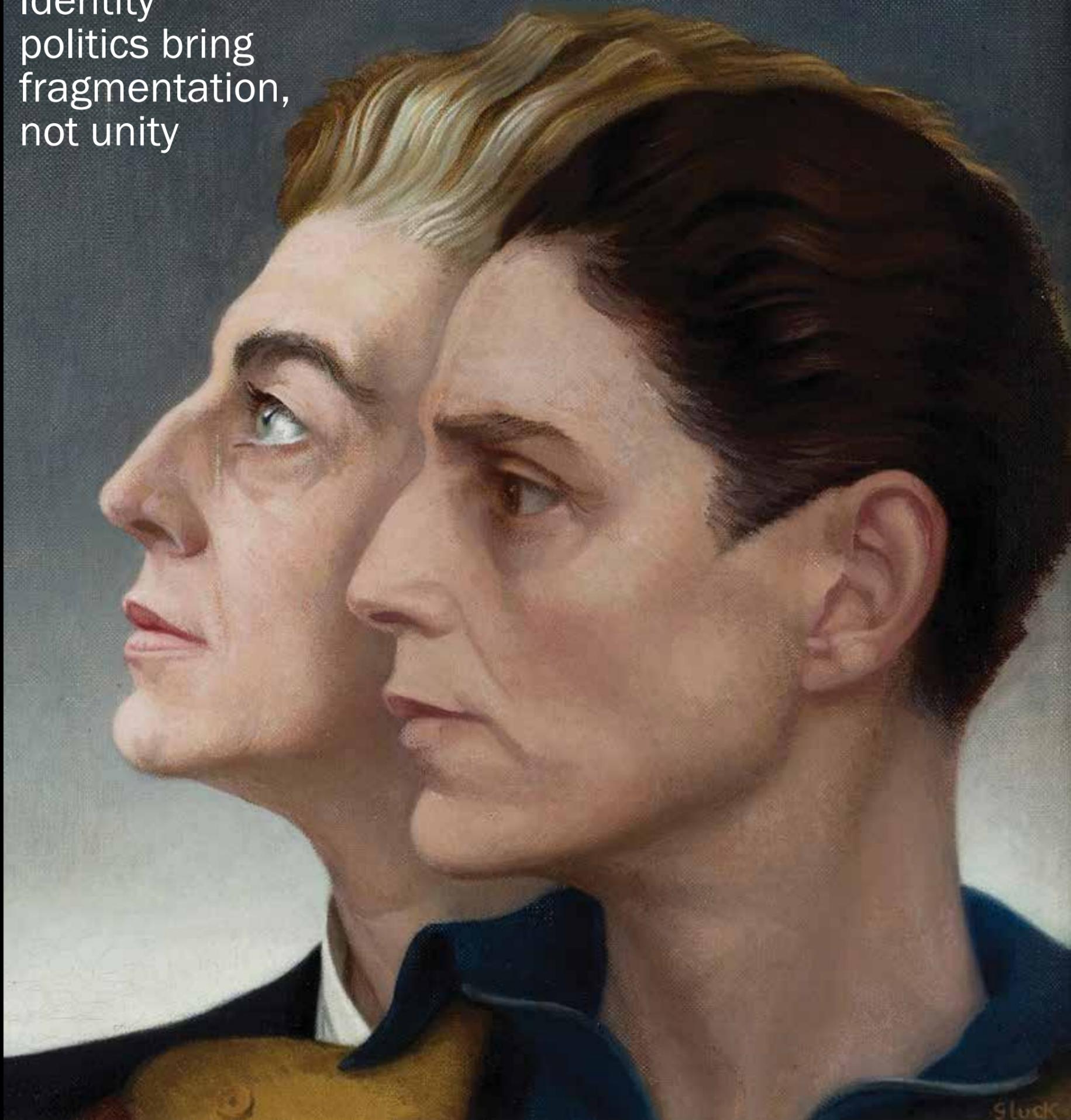
- Letters and debate
- Soviet women
- Labour and soviets
- Holocaust abuse

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Identity
politics bring
fragmentation,
not unity



LETTERS

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

Distorted

In last week's *Weekly Worker* you published three short letters from supporters of the Football Lads Alliance, who were critical of my article, 'Rising to the challenge' (November 16). I would like to reply to Julie Stanley, Shane O'Neill and Michael Daley and thereby further develop what I was attempting to argue in that article.

I had two main purposes in writing about the FLA. One was to discuss its emergence and whether its two quite sizable marches in June and October had any wider political significance - especially given some recent comments by politicians and commentators about the 'dangers of populism' internationally. The second, and perhaps more important, aim was to discuss how the left was responding to this new movement. Above all, I hoped that this discussion would illustrate the current political moment and point out some of the limitations and quite serious mistakes of groups like the Socialist Workers Party, which has made 'mobilisation' against racism and fascism a central part of their politics. These purposes are, of course, intimately connected and I hoped by writing this piece to begin a debate about these much broader aspects of contemporary politics.

It is interesting, and quite significant, that Julie, Shane and Michael focus on the issue of 'racism' and race in their short comments. Like many of the key speakers at the FLA marches, and in the subsequent comments about my article that have appeared on various social media sites, they vehemently deny they are racist or that they are part of the far right. Instead they claim to represent the politics and the 'family values' of a social group they refer to as the "white working class".

In my article I suggested that in endlessly repeating this type of claim the FLA was protesting too much and that its sensitivity on this topic betrayed a concern about how some of its support base could be portrayed. Indeed the FLA's attempts to distance itself from some leading far-right figures who have attached themselves to the group, and to wheel out 'unrepresentative' Sikhs, 'apostate Muslims' and other 'ethnic minorities' at its rallies, illustrates this problem for the organisers of the FLA all too well.

However, my characterisation of the FLA did not turn on race or racism. Neither did I refer to the term 'white working class' in describing the composition of the two marches. Instead, by using a language of *racial categorisation*, it was our three correspondents, especially Michael Daley, who brought race, in this from, into the argument. Their language of identity politics not only mirrors 'official multiculturalism', which the FLA claims to stand against, but also fits very easily into the frames of the racialised politics that shapes the anti-racism of the SWP. Thus, far from challenging 'politically correctness', as they claim, it is the pleas of Julie, Shane and Michael for recognition for their self-defined "white working class" which ultimately reflect the dominant consensus they claim to rail against.

Rather than define the FLA in a rather lazy way as simply racist or fascist, my original article was at some pains to closely examine the language and the themes of its 'politics', such as they are, and locate this alliance in terms of chauvinism and a 'plebeian patriotism' which had deep historical roots and antecedents, especially amongst supporters of the Conservative Party. My main target was not the rather confused and reactionary nostalgia of

the FLA or even its more dangerous, because unspecified, demands for 'action against extremism'. The focus was rather on how the development of the FLA and groups like it reflected the failure of the left in general to provide a viable alternative for the working class.

The FLA is just one aspect of the widespread discontent with bourgeois 'politics as usual', which has emerged internationally since 2008. It has not yet taken a fascist form, the SWP's alarmist calls to action notwithstanding: the crisis of politics and society has not yet reached that pitch, despite the overwrought analysis of Paul Mason *et al* (see *The Guardian* November 28), who constantly see fascism knocking at the door. However, the FLA is both a warning and a reproach to all of us who claim to be Marxists. We stand for the interests of the whole working class - a universal class that embodies the project of human emancipation, not a narrow, particularist politics based on identity and national chauvinism.

With their distorted echoes of 'official multiculturalism' both the FLA's 'white working class' identity politics and the SWP's 'liberal anti-racism' represent a dead end for the working class - and both are fundamentally opposed to revolutionary Marxism. In this volatile period of confused, inchoate politics, our goal must be to expose the reactionary nature of both of these particularist positions, and focus instead on developing a truly transformative politics that can rebuild and rearm our movement.

James Harvey
email

Knee-jerk

One of the most pernicious features of official anti-racism is its predilection for sniffing out bigotry and prejudice in any behaviour seen as ambiguous, 'off message' or 'inappropriate'.

A great deal of the SWP's knee-jerk hostility towards the Football Lads Alliance is politically motivated intolerance - zero tolerance - for views they consider objectionable. Much easier to write people off as racists than take the arguments on. James Harvey rightly identifies the lazy opportunism of the SWP, while giving the FLA some credit for adopting a "strong anti-racist stance" and explicitly distancing itself from "any connection to the far right".

But I'm afraid he betrays his own prejudice when he reads evidence of bad faith in the group's self-identification as anti-racist. If the FLA "protests too much", then what about all those schools, prisons, police forces, universities, factories, shops and government departments that are publishing all those diversity and cultural awareness policies? When immigration removal centres are dutifully promoting anti-racism policies and guidelines for 'faith and cultural provision', it is clear that we are all anti-racist now.

Groups like Kick it Out, Show Racism the Red Card and Stand Up To Racism work on the assumption that British football clubs are breeding grounds for thuggish and racist behaviour. Considering the level of official restrictions on language and behaviour, whether through the policing of 'bubble matches' or zero tolerance of 'vulgar and offensive' chanting, it is not surprising that football fans might object to 'political correctness'. There is a history of fans organising against official restrictions, including campaigns against the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act. Likewise political commentators like Kenan Malik, Adrian Hart and your own Kevin Bean and Mike Macnair have consistently put the left case against official multiculturalism, arguing against those colour-sensitive comrades whose imposition of

racialised identities and promotion of competitive victimhood is corroding class solidarities and sowing division.

The SWP's preoccupation with silencing opposition suggests a weakness in their own position - if all you've got is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. I expect more of the *Weekly Worker*. The FLA is voicing its disaffection with a government that appears unwilling or unable to govern in the interests of the electorate. I think James Harvey might agree with me that there could be some justification for this complaint. If their political stance is "reactionary and chauvinistic", then that is another matter, and it is up to the left to simply put forward a better alternative.

Pauline Hadaway
email

Nihilist bubble

Judging by James Harvey's article on the FLA and the letters in reply, it appears that the 'far left' is set up on repeating all the mistakes that were made with the English Defence League.

Perhaps the most despairing letter comes from Michael Daley who asks: "Have you ever sat with anyone from the FLA and asked about their aims? Should you wish to discuss the issue at length, maybe you could learn something real about the working class people of the UK - the group you claim to be part of." In fact, the vast majority of the left are of petty bourgeois social composition and the leaderships of the sects overwhelmingly so. Any 'discussion' would probably be marked by mutual incomprehension, especially concerning Islam, PC and immigration.

The sects only view as legitimate any 'movement', etc, set up in Conway Hall by Tariq Ali and other leftist 'celebrities'. They would surely see the FLA as an insolent attempt by their social inferiors to bypass the 'normal' manner of setting up a protest organisation. Yes, I know that the left are always quoting "The emancipation of the workers must be the task of the working class itself!", but this is said only as camouflage, to be safely ignored.

My prognosis is that it will not be very long before some Labour MP looking to secure their Islamic vote will denounce the FLA and attempt to label them as 'troublemakers', thus allowing the ubiquitous and totally misnamed Unite Against Fascism to decide that the FLA is indeed fascist and worthy of being no-platformed. This then absolves the lefties of any need to even pretend to engage in debate and, having totally failed to have made any progress on progressive, never mind revolutionary, activities, they can return to their nihilist bubble, untroubled by the real world.

Ted Hankin
email

Oppressor Jews

It would seem absurd in the middle of a campaign against socialists in the Labour Party, for part of the left - itself under attack with suspensions and expulsions - to refuse to defend others and imply that some socialists really *are* worthy of expulsion. Such behaviour would surely be regarded as grotesque treachery by any class-conscious worker.

Apparently three members of the steering committee of Labour Against the Witchhunt have decided that Socialist Fight, one of only two organised Marxist trends at the initial meeting, are to be excluded. A statement to this effect was published in the *Weekly Worker* of November 23:

"Those, like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, who promote the false anti-Semitism smear, who conflate anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism and who promote the myth of left anti-Semitism, are not welcome in LAW.

"Those, like Socialist Fight, who

promote the 'socialism of fools' - the view that imperialism's support for Zionism and Israel is because of the influence of Jews - are also not welcome in LAW" (signed by Tony Greenstein, Stan Keable and Jackie Walker).

Aside from the anti-democratic nature of this decree - apparently we are to be excluded without any kind of hearing or democratic process, purely for our political views on the Israeli/Jewish question, there is a glaring contradiction between the two paragraphs above.

Apparently, the AWL are excluded, not because of their *actions* - refusing to defend leftwingers, which would be correct and rational - but purely for the *ideas*, from which those actions flow. This is no accidental formulation: if people were to be excluded from Labour Against the Witchhunt for refusing to oppose the witch-hunt, then surely these comrades would, on the basis of this statement, have to exclude themselves.

After all, by excluding expelled Labour member Gerry Downing from LAW, they are behaving no differently from the AWL: seeking to exclude Labour socialists whose programmatic and political stance they oppose, contrary to the elementary working class maxim that "an injury to one is an injury to all". Whatever anyone may say about the politics of Socialist Fight, we are the only tendency demanding a genuine united front defence campaign and the reinstatement of all socialists expelled from Labour.

So the AWL are unwelcome for their ideas - conflating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, and thus believing in "leftwing anti-Semitism", which is apparently a "myth". But if "leftwing anti-Semitism" is a myth, how come Socialist Fight is being excluded on the basis of the same myth? For two of the three signatories of the above statement are fellow-travellers of the *Weekly Worker*/CPGB, supporting its allied group in the Labour Party, known as Labour Party Marxists, as is comrade Keable, or a years-long sympathiser and contributor, as is comrade Greenstein.

Consistency is not the CPGB's strong suit. Their anathema against our analysis of the role of Jewish bourgeois in the diaspora in bolstering Israel's strength in the older imperialist countries goes back to 2014, when one of our now-leading members was driven out of the CPGB-initiated Communist Platform in Left Unity, before the Corbyn movement emerged. That anathema stated that our comrade had to be driven out because "Advocacy of anti-Semitic ideas is not the exclusive preserve of the far right ... there is a left anti-Semitism too. Sadly that is still the case Anti-Semitism, especially its

leftwing version, plays directly into the hands of the Israeli government" ('No place for anti-Semitism' *Weekly Worker* September 18 2014). So it seems that the ideological rationale by which CPGB fellow travellers seek to exclude AWL supporters from Labour Against the Witchhunt is one that the CPGB are also guilty of. It is key to their rationale for purging Socialist Fight.

This exclusion decree from the CPGB's fellow travellers has the name 'Jack Conrad' written all over it. It is his practice, in the past and now, to sabotage real political and programmatic debate on the left through bureaucratic tricks. His motion in the Communist Platform in 2014, quoted above, was designed to stop discussion of the document, 'Draft theses on the Jews and modern imperialism', submitted for debate within the Communist Platform.

This time around, the exclusion has a similar purpose: stopping the kind of principled political debate that a genuine united front campaign should engage in to arm the workers' movement *politically* against the Zionist/Blairite witch-hunt.

The CPGB's fellow travellers accuse Socialist Fight of believing that "imperialism's support for Zionism and Israel is because of the influence of a Jewish component of the capitalist class". It is factually demonstrable that there exists a Jewish component within the ruling classes of western countries that exceeds, by many times over, the proportion of Jews in the general population, and that this part of the ruling class is overwhelmingly loyal to Israel. This does not determine the bare existence of a western alliance with Israel. What it does, however, is play an important role in transforming what would otherwise be a 'normal' relationship, similar to that of the US, UK, Germany, etc with each other, into a servile relationship, where states like the USA give barely critical support to Israeli atrocities against Palestinians that certainly do not accord with obvious US, UK, etc imperial interests.

This is an empirically obvious fact that has been noted by a wide range of observers - from Israeli dissidents like the late Israel Shahak and more recently Gilad Atzmon to Jewish diaspora dissidents like Norman Finkelstein, and even conservative US bourgeois observers like Mearsheimer and Walt.

Yet the CPGB and its allies deny that this phenomenon exists, and seek to deny workers' democracy to those who draw attention to it. This is not an anti-racist struggle on their behalf, but a pandering to the nationalism and communalism of an oppressor people - as Jews have become today insofar as under Zionist leadership they manage to act collectively.

Socialist Fight
email

Fighting fund**Showing they care**

As I write, there is still a day to go before the end of our November fighting fund, but already the total stands at £2,323 - a fantastic £573 over and above our £1,750 monthly target!

Pride of place this week goes to KD, who sent in a cheque for £100. She writes: "Just to show that I care!" You've well and truly proved it, comrade! There were also three standing orders - from JT (£50), GT (£15) and SS (£10), plus two £10 PayPal donations - thank you, MN and SF.

Well, November's fighting fund total has well and truly exceeded the target - and wiped out the

deficit for the whole year too! But, after a sudden surge in online readership last week (over 4,000), this week we're back to a more normal-looking 3,142. Don't ask me what pulled in all those extras last week, but one thing is for sure - there are more and more people like comrade KD who are showing their appreciation.

Anyway, let's not quibble - we've had a fantastic month. I'll let you know the final total for November next week. Then we'll see if December will be just as successful. Let's hope Christmas doesn't mess things up! ●

Robbie Rix

SPEW

It is a 'binary choice'

Working class independence and nationalism are two conflicting outlooks, writes Peter Manson

Like most of the left, Philip Stott of Socialist Party Scotland has welcomed the victory in the Scottish Labour leadership election of Corbynite candidate Richard Leonard over his Blairite rival, Anas Sarwar. Writing in *The Socialist*, paper of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, he says that the result "can potentially open up the possibility of building a real left and anti-austerity Labour Party in Scotland" (November 22).

Comrade Stott's article, 'What does the left victory in Scottish Labour mean?', then moves on to pose a list of demands on the new Labour leader in Scotland:

... this will only be possible if the Labour Party under his leadership pursues a consistent anti-austerity policy, ends the acceptance of Labour politicians carrying out cuts, and recognises its mistakes on the national question and Scottish independence.

In addition, a wholesale transformation is needed to the democratic structures of the party to allow for the reselection of councillors, MPs and MSPs who refuse to fight for left and socialist policies in words and deeds.

Leaving aside Labour's "mistakes on the national question and Scottish independence", which we will come to shortly, yes, it would be good news if the party began to oppose austerity and cuts to public services - in practice, as well as verbally; and, yes, a "wholesale transformation" of its "democratic structures" would be entirely appropriate. But what does SPS - or SPEW, for that matter - intend to do to aid this process? It is still refusing to call on all unions to affiliate to Labour, in order to swing the balance away from the right and win reforms that would favour the working class.

Comrade Stott rightly rubbishes Leonard's claim that within Labour there is now "a consensus established on a radical policy agenda, which will form the basis for our unity in going forward". He is correct to point out:

There simply cannot be a "consensus" with the pro-capitalist forces of the Labour right ... The idea of peaceful coexistence between left and right is a utopia. The rightwingers in the Labour Party are ruthless. They will do everything in their power to defeat the left and remove Corbyn and, for that matter, Leonard over time. In this they have the full backing of the capitalist establishment.

A broad socialist Labour Party is one thing. Socialist Party Scotland is in favour of trade unions and socialists from all backgrounds being in one party, with the right to organise into trends and platforms to assist democratic debate and discussion. But the avowedly pro-capitalist and pro-war right is another question altogether. They should be removed through methods like democratic reselection of MPs, MSPs and councillors, in order to create a genuine anti-austerity and leftwing Labour Party.

Once again, we agree with the broad thrust of all this. But the obvious question is: what will the comrades do to back up their words? Elsewhere SPEW and SPS are still making it clear that, far from affiliation or reaffiliation, those unions that are presently outside the party should not reverse this position until the battle to defeat the right has already been won.

According to SPEW and SPS,

affiliation for unions like PCS, RMT and NEU, the new teachers' union, would mean 'wasting' tens of thousands of pounds at a time when the right is still in control of the party machinery. After all,

the reality is that Labour is still two parties in one. The right wing has major influence in the party and is, at council level especially, voting through cuts at an unprecedented rate.

So the message is: I'm afraid you'll have to get on with the fight to transform Labour without our help!

The statement that Labour is "still two parties in one" is an interesting one. Does that mean that Labour is still a bourgeois workers' party, consisting of a working class base, but a largely pro-capitalist leadership? In our view that is certainly the case, even though quite clearly the top leadership, in the shape of Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, is no longer in the hands of pro-capitalists. But it is worth asking the question, because for three decades SPEW and its Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) insisted that Labour was now a bourgeois party pure and simple - in other words, no longer "two parties in one". We are still waiting for the comrades to admit they were wrong.

Referring to Sarwar, comrade Stott writes:

The fact that a millionaire, whose family firm ... does not pay the living wage or recognise trade unions, and who sends his children to private school, won almost half the votes among Scottish Labour members underlines the lack of a Corbyn surge in Scotland.

So, on the one hand, comrade Stott states that, because of its previous rightwing leadership, Labour in Scotland has had "limited appeal to leftward-moving young people and workers". But, on the other hand, he claims that "Sarwar's opposition to Corbyn and his previous backing for the coup in 2016 counted heavily against him". So which is it? Is Corbyn's Labour Party appealing to Scottish youth and workers or isn't it?

Separatism

Incredibly comrade Stott takes issue with Leonard's excellent-sounding statement that "there will be no ground ceded to nationalism at the expense of progressive socialism under my leadership". Therefore, Leonard goes

on to say, he is not in favour of a second independence referendum.

This position will apparently be "an albatross around the neck of Scottish Labour", hampering its ability to "reconnect with vast swathes of the working class". Even if Labour in Scotland vigorously opposed cuts and austerity, writes comrade Stott, that would not be enough "to recover ground lost to the SNP".

That is because, although comrade Stott admits "the intensity of the mood around a second referendum has dipped", support in Scotland for independence is still at around 45% and a "new upsurge in the national question at a certain stage is very likely". So to win back working class supporters who have switched to the Scottish National Party, Labour must adapt to nationalism itself, it seems.

No, no, continues comrade Stott, it is wrong to talk about the "false binary choice of 'socialism or nationalism'". After all, "It is possible to fight for the unity of the working class across Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland, while defending the right of Scotland to self-determination."

Absolutely correct. But the online version of this article links this statement to a 2014 piece by the same author, in which the comrade reported on SPS's enthusiastic support for ... not "self-determination", but *independence*. In other words, for SPEW/SPS, as with so much of the left, self-determination is somehow conflated with separatism - the two seem to have the same meaning.

But for Marxists they are very much distinct categories. While we are totally in favour of the right of nations to determine their own future, that does not mean we encourage them to exercise that choice in favour of independence. In fact we actually advocate separation only in exceptional circumstances - when it is apparent that it is the only way, for example, to end the oppression of a minority nationality and rebuild working class unity. Clearly that is not the case with Scotland.

But for the CWI, because support for Scottish independence has massively increased in response to a decade of austerity, we must advocate separation ourselves in order to make up lost ground. This is totally counterproductive. We cannot build support for a mass working class party through nationalism - the effect of adapting to the latter is to *reduce* the potential for working class combativity. Workers' power and nationalism are two *conflicting* outlooks - support for one undermines the other.

So, yes, it is good news that the Labour right has suffered another setback, this time north of the border. But it is totally self-defeating to demand that Labour now goes for a second independence referendum. Instead we must do everything we can to continue the process of transforming the Labour Party, so that it appeals to all workers of whatever nationality and provides a counterweight to the nationalists.

We ought to aim for a Labour Party that is a united front of a special kind, to use Trotsky's expression. As comrade Stott says, it must be open to all working class bodies, including the groups and parties of the left ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.co.uk

**Richard Leonard:
against separatism**



ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday December 3: No forum.

Sunday December 10, 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 3, 'The "dress rehearsal" and the first duma' (continued).

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 December 5, 6.45pm: Series of talks on human origins, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. This meeting: 'Human evolution: where are we now?' Speaker: Chris Stringer.

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

Labour Against the Witchhunt

Saturday December 2, 12 noon to 3pm: Organising meeting,

Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1.

Organised by Labour Against the Witchhunt: info@LabourAgainstTheWitchhunt.org.

Adelante!

Saturday December 2, 10am to 5pm: Political conference focusing on Latin America, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1.

Hosted by Latin America Conference:

www.facebook.com/LatinAmericaConference.

Stop the war on Yemen

Saturday December 2, 1pm: Protest against Saudi/UAE aggression in Yemen, embassy of United Arab Emirates, 30 Princes Gate, London SW7.

Organised by Arab Organisation for Human Rights:

<http://aohr.org.uk/index.php/en>.

Defend the NHS

Saturday December 2, 12 noon: Public rally, Bedford Street, North Shields.

Organised by Save North Tyneside NHS: www.facebook.com/SaveNTNHS.

Cooperative Women

Monday December 4, 5.30pm to 8.30pm: Conference, Tramshed Tech, Pendryis Street, Cardiff CF11. Meeting of women in the Welsh co-operative movement.

Organised by Cooperatives UK: www.uk.coop/uniting-co-ops/events-calendar/co-operative-womens-voices-wales-lleisiau-cydweithredol-menywod-cymru.

Failed war on terror

Wednesday December 6, 7pm: Public meeting, Unison offices, 84 Bell Street, Glasgow G1.

Organised by Glasgow Stop the War:

www.facebook.com/Glasgow-Stop-the-War-Coalition-123022857777171.

Repression beyond exploitation

Wednesday December 6, 7pm: Book launch, Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester M2. Shir Hever introduces his *The privatisation of Israeli security*.

Organised by Manchester Palestine Solidarity Campaign:

www.facebook.com/groups/PSCMAN.

Guantanamo justice

Thursday December 7, 12-1pm: Public vigil, opposite Parliament Square, London SW1.

Organised by Guantanamo Justice Campaign:

<http://londonguantanamocampaign.blogspot.co.uk>.

Britain and the Russian Revolution

Thursday December 7, 7pm: Discussion, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Speaker: Mary Davis.

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

War, racism and Islamophobia

Thursday January 11, 7pm: Public meeting, Dallow Learning Community Centre, 234 Dallow Road, Luton LU1.

Organised by Luton Stop the War Coalition:

www.facebook.com/events/132614697400854.

Discrimination and the law

Friday January 26, 8.45am to 4pm: Conference, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. For trade unions, law centres, etc.

Organised by TUC:

www.tuc.org.uk/events/tuceor-discrimination-law-conference-2018.

Palestine solidarity

Saturday January 27, 9.30am to 5pm: Palestine Solidarity Campaign AGM, London Irish Centre, 50-52 Camden Square, London NW1. Please register by January 20.

Organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign:

www.palestinecampaign.org/events/psc-annual-general-meeting-2018.

Britain's housing crisis

Wednesday February 14, 7pm: Discussion, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. First in a three-part course. Waged: £15; unwaged: £9.

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

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.

SEX

Historical inaccuracies

Rex Dunn's article, 'Poststructuralism and decline', in last week's issue of this paper makes some valid points - but it simultaneously undermines those points by some serious errors. This article addresses *some* of these errors.

The most basic valid point is one which we have made repeatedly in this paper. No-platforming and other speech controls in the name of 'safe spaces' and similar ideas serve the continuation of capitalist rule, and the continuation of the oppressions which they seek to combat. They are, further, specifically associated with the policy of 'divide and rule' using identity politics, which has been pursued by the United States and its allies since the 1980s, and is closely associated with the neoliberal project. In this project our rulers appropriate for *their* benefit ideas which were developed by the 1960s-70s 'new left' in opposition to the cold war regime.

'Terf wars' - named after the 'trans exclusionary radical feminists' - is merely the latest part of this liberal 'divide and rule' agenda (operating from *both sides* via sub-sub-Maoist 'speaking bitterness' techniques and the method of ultimatums).

Second, there is a close connection between this agenda and the claims of the academic/theoretical trend which has called itself, successively, 'structuralist', 'poststructuralist', 'postmodernist' and most recently 'post-Marxist'. Comrade Dunn has regrettably picked up only on the 'poststructuralist', and 'postmodernist' labels. That this is actually *one* intellectual trend - successively rebranded, as under each name the arguments have been discredited - is visible from the continuity of personnel and of common themes.

This trend, in turn, is closely linked to 1970s-90s Eurocommunism; to Blairism; and in the USA to the parts of the centre-left and ex-left among the Democrats which attached and attach themselves to Clintonian 'triangulation' projects.

Third, comrade Dunn is right to link identity politics and the academic/theoretical 'poststructuralist' trend both to the decline of capitalism and to Stalinism - meaning by the latter word, as Trotskyists commonly do, an umbrella category which includes 'official' communism, Maoism and *all* tendencies which accept 'socialism in one country' and 'national roads', the monolith concept of the workers' party, the people's front/broad democratic front and so on.

Fourth, Marxism - and any emancipatory project - involves transhistorical claims about human nature. For this point comrade Dunn relies, justifiably, on Scott Meikle's *Essentialism in the thought of Karl Marx* (1985); there are other theoretical routes by which one could reach the same conclusion. There is no reason to suppose that radical relativism and 'social constructivism' *could* be the basis of an emancipatory project.

Rather, on the 'constructivist' assumptions of 'structuralism'/'post-structuralism', 'postmodernism' or 'post-Marxism', the Islamist identity politics of Islamic State, the Zionist expansionism of Netanyahu, the Holy-Russia claims of Putin and his supporters, or the 'oppressed white majority' idea which has emerged in the US¹ have exactly the same moral validity as the identity politics claims of women, black and ethnic minority people, and so on.

On the other hand, comrade Dunn's article undermines the strength of these points in two ways. The first is that it is violently inaccurate as to the

Identity politics are prone to fragmentation, only the working class project of universal liberation can unite the oppressed, argues **Mike Macnair**



India's Hijras: a transgender tradition dating back thousands of years

history of identity politics (particularly of feminism, to which it pays most attention) and of the poststructuralist, etc, trend. This naturally produces the response: if you can't get the history right, how can we take seriously the criticisms?

The second is that it takes for granted a naturalistic claim for the gender binary (male and female) and then deploys this in a very uncritical way in relation to gender and 'transgender' issues. His argument in effect subscribes to a media moral panic around this issue, which the *Mail, Express* and so on are in process of developing - the latest 'threat to children', which used to be the role of gay men. Overstating the extent of the 'fashion' of transgenderism among children, it in effect gives a left spin to this moral panic.

I do not mean by this to endorse uncritically all pro-transgender political claims or to reject uncritically all the concerns of the 'Terfs'. The fundamental point is that if we *are* to argue on the basis of transhistorical claims about human nature, we have to be seriously careful with the biology and anthropology which forms the *necessary basis* of such claims. We also have to be careful about the inference from biology to *telos*, necessary to arguments of the sort comrade Dunn makes on this issue. His argument is *not* careful - and again, by arguing carelessly on this front, he undermines his valid claims.

Atwood

Comrade Dunn's starting point is Margaret Atwood's 1985 dystopian classic, *The Handmaid's Tale*, which has become recently 'relevant' thanks to being televised. Quoting the one of the rulers of the dystopia - 'Gilead' - against the sexualisation of women in the old regime, Dunn goes on: "Presumably Atwood was writing this in response to the fact that the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 70s had turned sour."

A quick consultation of Wikipedia's entry on the book might have reminded comrade Dunn of the immediate context. In 1985 it was *already* the case that in the US the Christianist 'Moral Majority' was advancing such arguments - appropriating the feminist anti-sexualisation arguments which had first hit headlines with the 1968 protests against the 'Miss America' beauty contest. Further, radical feminists Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon had drafted an anti-pornography ordinance, which argued for the prohibition of porn as a violation of women's civil rights;

and such ordinances had by 1985 been passed in several cities - *with the backing of Moral Majority supporters*.² 1985 was around the middle of the battles in the courts over this proposal, and also of the 'feminist sex wars' between opposed sections of the women's movement which arose from this and related political issues.

Comrade Dunn goes on to say:

Hindsight is a wonderful thing and Atwood got it wrong. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a lament for the lost hopes of the sexual revolution. But the reasons why it failed are much more complex. As it turned out, the rise of political correctness was the result of developments within the secular sphere, not the religious one.

Atwood would only have "got it wrong" if her dystopia was intended as an *actual prediction* of US politics in the early 21st century. It was, of course, intended as something else: as an imagination of what an American fascism might look like, unjustifiably abstracting from the race question (as black commentators pointed out), and as a satire by dystopian caricature of the Moral Majority's ideas about the position of women in society.

Atwood is surely right, not wrong, that an American fascism, if it comes, would appeal to *American* nationalism and Christianity, not to the Nazi appropriation of German romantic iconography and so on. Hence serious far-rightist Steve Bannon's (surely correct) characterisation of the Charlottesville rightwing protestors as "losers" and "a collection of clowns". The Moral Majority and its successors (Christian Coalition and so on) have played a fundamental role in the rightwards ratchet of US politics, and have become more extreme as time has gone on. The Tea Party appeal to the American revolutionary past in order to mobilise small-town petty-bourgeois *enragés* after the 2008 crash and bank bailouts has faded away, but anti-liberal gender politics played a significant role in Trump's victory - his vice-president, Mike Pence, is self-identified as "a Christian, a conservative, and a Republican, in that order".

1968 and Stalinism

Comrade Dunn's argument for what happened *other* than the US religious right is about 1968 and Stalinism:

The defeat of the May events [in France] in 1968 had an adverse effect on the intelligentsia. Marxism fell

out of favour and was replaced by something called poststructuralism, which ultimately led to the notion that 'Men are the problem' (not capitalism). Out of this came today's political correctness.

And, a little later:

At a theoretical level, this is linked to the ideas of poststructuralism - the 'logics of disintegration' which arose in the 1970s and 80s. But without the poisonous legacy of Stalinism - in particular the defeat of 1968 - there would be no poststructuralism; without the latter, there would be no political correctness in its present form!

Stalinism, in the form of American 'soft Maoism', was certainly responsible for 'political correctness'. The term came, as a *self-satirising* expression, from this milieu, before it was picked up by American and later British rightwing journals and their tame academics to damn left and liberal agitations about racial and gender equality, and so on.³ Stalinism was also responsible for 'poststructuralism' and related ideologies. But the route was not demoralisation after the defeat of May 68 in France.

In the first place, comrade Dunn might be arguing that the French working class would have taken power but for the counterrevolutionary intervention of the Parti Communiste Français (by making a deal with the Gaullists to end the strikes). If so, the revolution might well have spread across Europe and beyond - after all, there was the 'creeping May' in Italy, and the big workers' struggles in Britain in the early 1970s, and so on. And, if so, 'poststructuralism' and all the rest of it would have been marginalised by the triumphant French working class leadership of Europe.

But this is plain spontaneism - or anarcho-syndicalism - and actually even more unrealistic than Atwood's Gilead imagined as a real attempt to predict the early 21st century. To take power, the working class needs a mass party and to imagine in 1968 that the PCF was such a party - after its conduct in the 1930s and again between 1945 and 1958 - would be ludicrous. On the other hand, the small groups to the PCF's left (Trotskyist, Maoist, anarchist, and so on), some of which did aim for workers' power, were plainly incapable of leading broad masses.

The *most optimistic* line about May 68 offered was that of Daniel Bensaïd's and Henri Weber's *Mai 68: une répétition générale* ('May 68: a dress rehearsal'), which saw *les*

événements as analogous to the Russian Revolution of 1905: ie, as something that would *enable* the creation of a mass revolutionary party in the ensuing period. It did not work out like that. I suggested back in 2013 some reasons why not, and I do not propose to repeat those arguments here.⁴

Suppose we forget the idea that May 68 could plausibly have issued in immediate victory. It might nonetheless be true that 'poststructuralism', 'political correctness' and so on issued from demoralisation in the wake of its defeat. The problem, however, is that the chronology does not work. Zhou Enlai famously said of the impact of the French Revolution, in conversation with Richard Nixon, that "it's too soon to tell". At first this was thought to have been a reference to 1789 and the Chinese taking a very long view of history, but many now believe Zhou was actually referring to May 68. And of that, as of 1972, it *really* was too soon to tell. The Heath government was defeated by the miners' strike in January-February 1972, by the 'Pentonville 5' dockers' campaign in July that year, and fell to a second miners' strike in 1974. That was also the year of the outbreak of the Portuguese revolution. Saigon fell on April 30 1975. And so on, and so on. Serious demoralisation of the radical left did not set in until the *late* 1970s.

Meanwhile, 'poststructuralism' had as its starting point 'structuralism', based ultimately on Claude Lévi-Strauss's critique of materialism,⁵ but beginning on the left with Louis Althusser's 1965 works, *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, and *Lenin and Philosophy* in 1968 (translated into English in 1969, 1970 and 1971 respectively). In a sense, 'poststructuralism' and all the rest build on the work of Michel Foucault, starting with *Madness and Civilization* (1961) and *The Order of Things* (1966). Other authors the school relies on - Freudian Jacques Lacan, philosopher Jacques Derrida and so on - were all already actively publishing against 'orthodox', 'humanist' or 'historicist' Marxism in the 1960s.

'Identity politics', 'political correctness' and 'second-wave feminism' all originated in the 'soft Maoist' left in the United States, which grew out of the black civil rights and the anti-Vietnam war movements. Radical feminism - the claim that gender oppression underlies class and is more structurally fundamental - began with Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* and Shulamith Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex*, both published in 1970.

We are again talking about a late 1960s and early 1970s development. The point at which the political contradictions of the 'identity politics' approach and 'consciousness-raising' began to overwhelm the movements and drive into fragmentation was, again, in the later 1970s.

The movement into identity politics, as opposed to class politics, thus began contemporaneously with May 68, well before it could be seen to have been a defeat rather than a dress rehearsal. The development of the 'structuralist' critique of 'humanist' Marxism was even earlier. The demoralisation amongst the late 60s/70s left, in contrast, was much later, and what drove it was not defeat in 1968, but 'stagflation', plus the open turn of China to a pro-US political alignment in geopolitics, the failure of left strategies in Portugal, and so on.

There are, indeed, connections with Stalinism. But they are actually more direct than demoralisation resulting from defeat in 1968. The French

and theoretical overkill

'structuralist' and 'poststructuralist' writing in the 1960s, which got into English-language circulation from around 1970, came from authors who were either in the PCF, in its periphery or connected with French Maoism. They wanted to offer a critique of the PCF's *right wing*, and of people who criticised the PCF from the right in the name of 'humanism' - but without falling into the supposed errors of 'Trotskyism'.

The people who became enthusiasts for this stuff in the Anglophone world in the 1970s were certainly on the left in the immediate wake of 1968. But they were on the road, more or less rapidly, to Eurocommunism and the critique of Marxist 'dinosaurs' and 'old-fashioned' trade union militancy.

The 'liberation' conceptions which started to emerge in the US civil rights and anti-Vietnam war movements were an *adaptation of Maoist ideas* of how to implement the people's front conception of the 1935 7th Congress of the Comintern. It could only be argued with difficulty that there was a progressive 'national bourgeoisie' or 'democratic bourgeoisie' in the US or UK, though the attempt was made. There was certainly no significant relations of production in either country.

The argument for subordinating the interests of the working class as a class to those of some independent class ally needed additional help; and the idea that the 'black liberation movement', 'women's liberation movement' and so on were analogues of the peasant or national movement served this role. *Theorising* these issues as *theoretically* autonomous from class politics served the people's front projects. It has continued to do so in the US Communist Party's support for Clinton against Sanders in 2016.

Again, I have written on this issue in this paper before, and so has comrade Yassamine Mather, and I will not repeat the points further here.⁶

Waves of feminism

Comrade Dunn says that "identity politics, as a new political form, becomes the 'perfect' vehicle for movements such as second- and third-wave feminism, Black Lives Matter, etc, although this form is now being undermined by the rise of intersectionality". And: "The negation of the negation leaves the struggle worse off than it was before: first-wave feminism (aka socialist feminism) grew out of the revolutionary movement that sprang up during the Vietnam war in the 60s and 70s."

He continues:

Second-wave feminism emerged as a negative response to this failure, reinforced by the fact that, due to the continuation of sexist behaviour among men, the sexual revolution had turned sour. Thus second-wave feminists decided that 'men are the problem' after all; hence women can do without them sexually. (Camille Paglia personifies this trend.)

Capital-Libertarian academic provocateur Camille Paglia should certainly not be put in this company. Presumably comrade Dunn is influenced by her 1990 book *Sexual personae*, which had some aspects that could be drawn on by 'gender fluidity' theorists. But Paglia in fact makes criticisms of 'poststructuralism' and of 'transgenderism' along lines very similar to comrade Dunn's - if from a Libertarian (and imperialist culture-warrior) angle rather than a Marxist one.⁷

More generally: the standard usage

of 'waves' of feminism sees *first-wave* feminism in the legal equality and suffrage campaigners of the late 19th and early 20th century; *second-wave* feminism means the 'women's liberation movement' of the late 1960s-1970s; and *third wave* refers to the 1990s/early 2000s. There has even been a suggestion that there is a 'fourth wave', emerging from 2008 or thereabouts.⁸ Comrade Dunn's usage is thus very muddled.

Leaving aside this confusion, there are two problems with this terminology of 'waves' of feminism. The first is that it constructs a teleology (in the bad sense), in which each 'wave' is better than its predecessor. The second is that it - probably intentionally - effaces both political differences among feminists and continuities with non-feminist political ideas. Comrade Dunn's confused chronology precisely illustrates the point. His argument misses out that that 'radical feminism' began around 1970. It confuses 'second wave' and 'third wave'. And it confuses late 60s-70s 'Marxist feminism' (arguing that the oppression of women is grounded in the same developments as class society) with 1980s and later Eurocommunist 'socialist feminism' (arguing that there are "dual systems" of class, on the one hand, demanding a workers' trade union and socialist movement; and patriarchy, on the other hand, demanding a women's feminist movement). This is understandable, given that most of the Trots came to tail the Euros on this front, but severely problematic.

Equally, the 'first-wave feminists' were sharply divided between 'bourgeois feminists', meaning liberals, and socialist women's equality/rights campaigners. Calling them the 'first wave' ignores the connections between the 'bourgeois feminists' of this 'wave' and the 'Whig feminism' and French revolutionary feminism of the 18th century, downplaying the people involved to a few individuals.⁹ Conservative feminism - like that of Hannah More around 1800, of feminist purity campaigners in late 19th and early 20th century - also gets erased. With this erasure, conservative appropriation of feminist arguments, like that satirised by Atwood (but equally, young women's Islamism), becomes hard to understand.

These forms of flattening differences among feminist politics, and dissociating 'second-wave' and 'third-wave' feminism from its pre-1880s Whig and Liberal antecedents, serve the people's frontist and intersectionalist agenda by imagining a *single* feminist movement not divided by politics.

Transgenderism

Comrade Dunn's discussion of the transgender issue is, to be blunt, seriously underdeveloped. He says:

The problem with political correctness is that it has an unstable foundation. Given the 'logics of disintegration', in both theory and practice, the fight against sexism and racism is based on the notion of the fluidity of forms, whereby ultimately you can become a transgender (for the small minority who undertake full sexual reassignment, this is a long and difficult process, which is irreversible), or you can become a 'sexless third gender'. The latter is contrary to Marx's notion of the essence of things, whereby an entity or form is the basis of the characteristics which make it what it is; hence we can talk about how it functions. Similarly poststructuralism's logic of disintegration produces the notion

of the fluidity of the gender form, which aggregates temporarily within identity politics as a political form, in order to represent the interests of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups, only to disintegrate yet again, following the rise of intersectionality.

And:

what we now call the LGBT movement fails to develop a level of consciousness which would allow it to identify with the working class. But it is prevented from doing so by its adherence to poststructuralist theory.

He adds:

In the real world, the working class sticks to the old ways, even though these are distorted by sexual stereotypes. Therefore it does not take kindly to political correctness, associated with the idea of policing what should be a private matter between individuals. Atomised though they may be, the masses stubbornly adhere to the idea of binary opposites within nature or the biological basis of human sexuality. This does not mean that men should not adopt feminine roles within sex and vice versa, although the principle of binary opposites still holds (even within LGBT relationships). On the other hand, as I have shown, the idea of fluidity of gender forms sprang from the intelligentsia - ie, poststructuralism - with the broad support of the middle classes. Hence the biological basis of sex is denied: everything, including sexuality, is a 'social construct'! Yet without advances in medical technology, this would not be possible. For most trans people, this is also a lifestyle choice, despite the fact that a high proportion of them suffer from physical and psychological side effects.

And so on.

The paradox of these arguments is that in their present form they are simultaneously biological-determinist and idealist. It is biological-determinist when we are told: "Atomised though they may be, the masses stubbornly adhere to the idea of binary opposites within nature or the biological basis of human sexuality." It is idealist when we are told: "what we now call the LGBT movement fails to develop a level of consciousness which would allow it to identify with the working class. But it is prevented from doing so by its adherence to poststructuralist theory."

The second of these points is much easier to deal with. Marxist class politics is right because the proletariat, through its separation from the means of production, is driven to cooperate in trade unions, cooperatives, strikes and collectivist political parties. In contrast, women as such, black and ethnic minority people as such, LGBT people as such, and so on, are divided by class and hence by politics in ways which tend to fragment their movements. Hence, *when the working class goes on the offensive*, it will in practice draw in behind its collectivist project the various oppressed. This is *why* the late 1960s-70s women's liberation movement, emerging in the context of a powerful offensive of the working class, had a leftwing character.

It is also why - contrary to comrade Dunn's claims - the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85 produced Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners - identification with the working class - and with it a reversal of the traditional manual unions' opposition to lesbian and gay rights resolutions in the unions and in the Labour Party.

The defeats of the class movement have promoted poststructuralism and so on; these ideas have been extensively influential because they *served* Eurocommunist projects, and behind them the interests of the capitalist class - and the strategic turn of the US state to anti-discrimination and formal liberalism after its defeat in Vietnam. The actual poststructuralist, etc *ideas* are secondary.

One consequence of 1984-85 is that, as far as LGB is concerned, it is simply not true that "the working class sticks to the old ways, even though these are distorted by sexual stereotypes. Therefore it does not take kindly to political correctness." Prejudice there no doubt still is. But the real mass conservatism on these issues is largely gone, among people below their 70s.

The biological-determinist argument is trickier. In the first place, it is necessary to *note* that the biology is a good deal less clear than comrade Dunn makes it. The physical intersex 'biological defects' comrade Dunn mentions in note 1 as being "less than 0.01% the population" have been variably calculated, and comrade Dunn's figure is for those who are *visibly* not assignable to either gender *at birth* - not for those who are affected by one or another variety of intersex *genetics*, for which the figure is nearer to 1.7%.¹⁰

This is not directly relevant to 'transgenderism'. It is so relevant *only* because comrade Dunn in effect attempts to build an Aristotelian teleological argument on the basis of the biology. The imperfect consistency of the production of biological gender in nature casts doubt on the force of such an argument.

Further, the gender binary argument has to be - and in comrade Dunn's argument explicitly is - a claim about homosexual behaviour, as well as about transgenderism. In this context it is obvious rubbish (not all sexual conduct is penetrative in ways which could be argued to amount to a simulation of the biological gender binary). But, leaving that aside, it means that comrade Dunn's argument also should engage, but ignores, the copious biological evidence for homosexual behaviour among animals, collected in Bruce Bagemihl's *Biological exuberance* (New York 1998).

Getting closer to transgenderism as such, if the existence of forms of transgendered behaviours (etc) is to be considered as contrary to the human nature which we seek to emancipate, it is surprising that such forms should be found extensively in the anthropological evidence - 'berdaches' or 'two-spirit people' among native Americans, and analogous phenomena elsewhere; as well as, associated with religious practice, in classical antiquity (*Galli* priests of Cybele) and modern South Asia (*Hijras*). And there are various other examples.

My point here is not to support 'gender-fluidity' claims, or the claim that 'gender has no biological basis'. The problem is that comrade Dunn's argument is, explicitly, an argument from human nature; and the human nature which is to be the starting point has to be the human nature found in the biological evidence (Bagemihl) and the anthropological, historical and sociological evidence - thus to include 'berdaches' etc, *Galli*, *Hijras*, etc.

Thirdly and most fundamentally, the teleological argument from human nature (or from biological evolution), while in itself not necessarily invalid, has to be used with considerable caution. Our biological natures are heavily modified by tech. For example, I have myself worn spectacles to correct

my eyesight since the age of seven, and would not have lived to my present age without the use of antibiotics. These are trivial compared to the tech used by people who need artificial limbs, or whatever.

Closer to sex, women routinely use mechanical or hormonal technology to prevent conception; it is necessary to society that they should do so, because the massive fall in infant mortality would otherwise require routine infanticide (as practised in classical antiquity) or result in severe overpopulation and widespread starvation. But it carries the implication that any argument for the naturalness of the gender binary in terms of its *reproductive* function - a variety of argument which Marx and Engels did in places make - could not be defended at any point from the later 20th century, due to the development of the forces of production.

Humans evolved as hunter-gatherers. There are aspects of our nature that are products of this evolution, which we need to emancipate: our social character, and our relative egalitarianism (compared to common chimps, etc). But at the same time, our hands may as legitimately be used for making music or art or writing articles as for hunting or gathering (for most of us, long since replaced by other jobs).

Similarly, we have sexual capacities (capacities for arousal, and so on), which can be and are used for reproductive purposes; but they can be and also are used for purposes of social solidarity and of mere enjoyment.

The problem with comrade Dunn's argument about transgender is thus that it is theoretical overkill on a radically underdeveloped empirical foundation. And it is then introduced into a political moment at which the Conservative press is making this the latest 'PC scandal'. That is a very bad idea ●

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Notes

1. 'Majority of white Americans say they believe whites face discrimination': www.npr.org/2017/10/24/559604836/majority-of-white-americans-think-theyre-discriminated-against.
2. Wikipedia's 'Antipornography Civil Rights Ordinance' provides a convenient if very limited summary: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antipornography_Civil_Rights_Ordinance.
3. References can be found in Wikipedia's 'Political correctness' under the subheads, 'Early-to-mid 20th century' and '1970s': https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_correctness.
4. 'Lessons of May 68' *Weekly Worker* June 6 2013. See also my review of B's memoir, 'Daniel Bensaïd: Repeated disappointments' *Weekly Worker* July 31 2014.
5. Simon Clarke's *Foundations of structuralism* (1983) is available at <https://files.warwick.ac.uk/simonclarke/files/pubs/FoundationsofStructuralism.pdf> - or for 99p for the Amazon Kindle. Very much worth reading on this front.
6. M Macnair, 'A useless product of 1970s radicalism' *Weekly Worker* April 11 2013; Y Mather, 'Out of the mainstream, into the revolution', April 18 2013. Compare also 'Attempt to outlaw justified anger' (*Weekly Worker* October 20 2016) on the popular-frontist character of intersectionality.
7. 'Paglia poststructuralism' produces about 11K hits on Google - the first few pages mostly of soundbites and interviews. There is slightly more substance in her review essay, 'Scholars in bondage' (*Chronicle of Higher Education* May 20 2013). On 'transgenderism' see, for example, the interview, 'Camille Paglia: On Trump, Democrats, transgenderism and Islamist terror' *Weekly Standard* June 15 2017: www.weeklystandard.com/camille-paglia-on-trump-democrats-transgenderism-and-islamist-terror/article/2008464.
8. M Rampton, 'Four waves of feminism': www.pacificu.edu/about/media/four-waves-feminism.
9. See, for example, K O'Brien *Women and enlightenment in eighteenth-century Britain* Cambridge 2009, chapter 1: 'Anglican Whig feminism in England, 1690-1760'; also C Desan *The family on trial in revolutionary France* Berkeley 2004.
10. This point is conceded by L Sax, 'How common is intersex?' *Journal of Sex Research* No39, pp174-78, polemicalising for the narrow figure.

USSR

Soviet Russia and women's emancipation

Just how much progress was made in the fight for equality?
Anne McShane focuses in particular on central Asia

The early Soviet republic is well known for introducing wide-ranging and unprecedented equality for women. However, far less is known about the efforts made to realise this equality. My own understanding until relatively recently was that actually not a great deal had been achieved in material terms. It was not until I began to study the Zhenotdel, the women's bureau of the Communist Party, that I became aware of how wrong I had been.

Discovering the Zhenotdel's journal *Kommunistka* was like finding buried treasure. It opened a unique window on the Soviet experience and the challenges facing it. For the first time I saw that the fight for women's emancipation had been a real and living experience. The debates on women's rights in the Soviet republic are hardly known outside academia, unlike those on the Workers Opposition and the Left Opposition. This gap in our knowledge means that we have an incomplete understanding of the revolution and the society which followed. It leaves this extraordinary experience - the apex of the struggle for women's rights within revolutionary history - to feminist academics. That needs to be rectified.

Formation of the Zhenotdel

I have written already this year about the women's movement in 1917.¹ Firstly I want to repeat that, contrary to the claims of some academics, the Bolshevik Party did have mass support among the female working class. And in the heady days after the revolution these women looked to the Soviet government for radical transformation in their lives.

By summer 1918 it was evident that in reality little had changed. The burden of domestic labour and childcare had not shifted and discrimination in the workplace was endemic. In response, a conference of working and peasant women was convened in November 1918 under the leadership of Inessa Armand, Alexandra Kollontai and Konkordiia Samoilova. At a similar event the previous year a proposal from Kollontai to set up a special women's organisation had been rejected. It was argued at that time that such an initiative was superfluous and would become a feminist deviation. By 1918 this view had changed and leaders of the movement recognised that there would be little progress unless action was taken by those with a vested interest. Special commissions were created to represent working class and peasant women. These commissions began immediately to set up crèches and public canteens, and to agitate for maternity and other rights. Their existence led to the central committee taking a decision to set up the Zhenotdel in August 1919.

With the exception of Kollontai, the leaders of the Zhenotdel were all long-term Bolsheviks. Nadia Krupskaya was appointed editor of

Kommunistka and Inessa Armand the first national secretary. These women were united by a view that revolutionary change necessitated action to transform traditional relations within the family. Important influences on this layer included the writing of Frederick Engels and August Bebel on the family under primitive communism. Klara Zetkin - trailblazer for women's rights both in the Social Democratic Party of Germany and the Second International - was a major inspiration, friend of the bureau and contributor to *Kommunistka*. As editor of *Die Gleichheit*, the women's journal of the SDP, and one of the leaders of Frauenbewegung, the women's movement, Zetkin believed that all communist parties needed a special women's section. She drafted theses for the Second Congress of the Third International in 1921 to commit all parties to create their own Zhenotdel.²

The immediate question for the Zhenotdel was the socialisation of domestic labour and childcare. This had been put forward by Engels and Bebel as a necessary step for a workers' state and was therefore an accepted part of Bolshevik orthodoxy. However, the stumbling block was whether immediate measures should be taken or whether socialisation would develop at a later, more productive, stage of socialism.

The leaders of the Zhenotdel very much supported the former view. They believed that, unless women were drawn into the project at the beginning, an extremely distorted form of socialism would result. Armand, Samoilova and Krupskaya had been involved for many years in pursuing women's rights: in the Bolshevik women's journal *Rabotnitsa* (*Woman Worker*) of 1914 and 1917, in writing pamphlets and in organising among the working class in St Petersburg and Moscow. Kollontai worked closely with Klara Zetkin in the SDP and the women's secretariat of the Second International. She was known as a leading advocate and had written a number of pamphlets and books, many of which were republished after the revolution.

For them feminism was a bourgeois ideology, which did not deal with the need to transcend the oppression implicit in class society - Kollontai in particular had been a fierce opponent of the reformist women's movement in Russia. They shared the belief that women's emancipation would be realised in a successful transition to a stateless society. However, this did not imply passivity. It meant ensuring that women's rights were closely interconnected with all aspects of building socialism. The journal featured articles from the international struggle for women's rights and sought to organise these struggles within Comintern.

The Zhenotdel was a bureau of the central committee and considered

itself a loyal and committed part of the Russian party. Delegates from factories, government workplaces and collectives attended meetings several times a month, where they "heard reports by Zhenotdel instructors on political issues, on the work of local soviets and on practical issues, such as establishing crèches in factories where women worked".³ The aim was to facilitate women's full involvement in the civil war effort by setting up support systems. Delegates divided up the tasks of approaching organisations to seek help in setting up canteens and nurseries.

Also an internship scheme was connected to the delegate meetings, and women would be sent to various government departments, soviets, trade unions and party organisations to train for a period of three-six months in administration. The interns would then report back and replacements would be chosen. There was a particular emphasis within this model on being flexible and accountable and on working closely with other Soviet organisations.

Problems with acceptance

There are many reports that delegates found it impossible to convince male comrades and trade unionists of the benefits of their work. Interns were often treated as a nuisance or made to carry out menial duties. Samoilova complained that male comrades "still exhibited a lot of prejudice towards the Zhenotdel", most feeling that "it was beneath their dignity" to associate with it.⁴ This was despite the bureau being a department of the central committee.

Lenin admitted in an interview with Zetkin in 1920 that "unfortunately we may still say of many of our comrades, 'Scratch the communist and a philistine appears'. To be sure, you have to scratch their sensitive spots - such as their mentality regarding women", which was that of the "slave-owners".⁵ Despite formal commitment to women's emancipation, many Bolshevik men, including leading members, still saw women as inferior and women's issues as trivial or irrelevant.

The introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1921 exacerbated the difficulties of the Zhenotdel and profoundly weakened the organisation. It also lost two of its leading members within a year, with Armand falling victim to the cholera epidemic in September 1920 and Samoilova following her in June 1921. Kollontai succeeded Armand as national secretary and began a struggle against the negative impact of NEP on working class women.

Female unemployment spiralled in this period, as men returned from the civil war and reactionary attitudes on the role of women re-emerged with a vengeance - Kollontai's novel *Love of worker bees* captures well the deep

alienation felt by revolutionary women at that time. The Zhenotdel launched a campaign to form collectives and artels (cooperatives) among working women and to fight the mass redundancies taking place. Kollontai herself was immersed in the struggle of the Workers Opposition against the NEP throughout 1921.

In February 1922, following its defeat and the controversy which surrounded her attempts to bring the issue before Comintern, Kollontai narrowly escaped expulsion from the party. Instead her punishment was to be removed from her position as leader of the Zhenotdel and sent abroad in disgrace. This was a huge blow for her and for the bureau itself. It continued under the more conservative leadership of Sofia Smidovich, then Klavdiia Nikolaeva and Anna Artiukhina. All three had been active Bolsheviks and would never have considered themselves feminists in any way, despite being described as such by academics today. Their commitment lay in facilitating women's emancipation as part of building socialism.

In March 1930 the bureau was closed down on the orders of Stalin. He claimed at the time that the woman's question had been solved and that they would be liberated through the five-year plan. Instead of a special organisation, all comrades would fight for women's equality. Of course, the opposite proved to be the case. Divorce, which had been made freely available in 1918, became virtually impossible under a 1936 decree. Abortion, which had also been legalised after the revolution, was banned, also in 1936. Homosexuality, which had been decriminalised, was re-criminalised in 1933. Stalin's project of Mother Russia pushed women back into forced childbirth and domestic drudgery, while not relieving them of their place in the Soviet industrial machine. The history of the rise and fall of the Zhenotdel is therefore crucial to an understanding of the character of the revolution and its demise.

My study of the Zhenotdel is focused on its work in central Asia in the 1920s. This experience throws light in particular on its attitude to working with veiled women within a traditional Muslim society. In contrast to the working class women of Moscow and Petrograd, the lives of their central Asian counterparts had remained largely untouched by events of 1917.

The Zhenotdel directed its main focus of work in the Uzbek region, where women remained largely secluded from the outside world. Here the entire strategy of the bureau was dictated by a belief that it was necessary to work with indigenous women in a safe and non-confrontational way. At the All-Russian Conference of Organisers among Women of the East in April 1921 Alexandra Kollontai put forward a resolution stating that the "best way to gather the isolated mass is through the creation of women's clubs. Women's clubs must act as models of how Soviet power can emancipate women in all aspects of their lives, once they engage with it". They "should be schools where women are drawn to the Soviet project through their own self-activity and begin to cultivate the spirit of communism within themselves".⁶

Women's clubs

Women's clubs in central Asia could not by their very nature have the same direct relationship with Soviet organs as delegate meetings. There could not be internship schemes, at least initially, because of seclusion and the cultural barriers that prevented men and women working together. Instead women would become involved in economic activity, education and cultural activities through the club.

The April 1921 conference stated that the bureau itself would provide the link to the soviets. It pledged to lead a campaign within

the party "to strengthen the struggle against prejudice toward women, which has deep roots among men in the population". The Zhenotdel committed itself to "assist the party to educate the male proletariat and peasantry in the spirit of communism and an acknowledgement of the shared interests of men and women".

With the crisis in the bureau following Kollontai's removal and the slashing of funds to it resulting from the NEP, work in central Asia virtually collapsed. Then in 1923 Serafima Liubimova, a supporter of Kollontai, was appointed regional secretary and relaunched the organisation at a conference in March of that year. Delegates agreed to "organise women's clubs within which there will be artels, trade schools, elementary schools, libraries, crèches and other facilities to support women". The model put forward was the Ali Bairamova club in Baku. According to a report from June 1922, this establishment provided a wide range of facilities for indigenous women, including medical consultations with a female doctor, a canteen, a crèche and kindergarten. Women were employed as trainees in book binding, weaving, sewing, shoe making and wool spinning artels on site. A school within the club offered classes in literacy and elementary education, as well as political propaganda. Finally there were social activities, including a drama group, a choir and dance classes.

Progress in central Asia began to be made in 1924 with the opening of a club in Tashkent by Nadia Krupskaya. The club, named after her, had an initial membership of 500 and was claimed to be popular with indigenous women - "every day hundreds of Muslim women stream into the club, to attend the medical consultations, the schools, the reading library and the children's nursery". Similar clubs were opened in Samarkand and Bukhara in August of that year. Writers in *Kommunistka* argued that "the creation of Muslim women's clubs needs to be a core aspect of work to liberate the women of the east".

By April 1925 the reported number of clubs in central Asia had increased to 13 and by September to 15, with the vast majority in the settled region of Uzbekistan. They were supplemented by women-only 'red corners' and 'Lenin corners', where there were insufficient resources to set up a special club. By 1926 it was reported that the number of clubs in central Asia had risen to 34 and the number of red corners in Uzbekistan to 90 - there were far fewer in the nomadic region of Turkmenistan. Club work also brought about major improvements in the health of women and children - a report noted that 71,000 women had attended medical consultations with a female doctor in Uzbekistan over a six-month period in 1925.

The centrality of clubs for secluded women was stressed very often in articles up to 1927. They "allowed women to move from an enclosed way of life into social and economic life within the club and then through links between the club and cooperatives, trade unions and soviets" into a role within society. Clubs "responded to the aspiration of the eastern woman awakening to revolution by allowing her to be involved in education, economic work and social activities while at the same time not putting her on a collision course with the local customs and way of life". In November 1926 Liubimova was adamant that "it is beyond question that women's clubs are an essential and unique form of party work among women", being

distinct above all in that they organise eastern women through providing practical assistance to them and by closing entry to men. Therefore they provide the possibility for secluded women to go freely to the club, to uncover her face and to feel

as comfortable as she would in the women's quarter.

It was essential for indigenous women to be in a safe environment. Unfortunately there was little real support from the central committee and "the majority of clubs huddle in old buildings needing repairs, with others only half built". For Liubimova it was very clear that "the only reason the clubs are not better is lack of finance".

Cooperatives

Economic independence was agreed to be a central issue. In a resolution to the women's secretariat of Comintern in 1921 on work among eastern women it was asserted that a woman must "be convinced through her own experience that the household economy and the old form of the family enslaves her, whereas work in the social sphere liberates her". The April 1921 Eastern Conference adopted a strategy of setting up artels among women who had previously been producing handicrafts within the home. These artels would be based in clubs or be closely connected to them. Other women would be drawn into the clubs and given the possibility of becoming economically independent of their families.

Liubimova wrote in 1923 that initial efforts to set up artels had met with success, with a reported 4,000 handicraft women organised in Tashkent in 1921. However, the introduction of the NEP had resulted in "a loss of working capital and raw materials, which led to the frequent collapse of existing artels". She claimed that, "while there has been a reduction in the number of women involved in production in Russia, in countries of the Soviet east the thin layer of proletarian women which had been present is now virtually non-existent". She argued that from "the government's point of view women's artels do not justify themselves, as they need financing". However, this narrow and short-termist view did not recognise the long-term benefits of involving women in the economy.

Despite problems of funding and opposition from local party members, the Zhenotdel fought to push forward and at a conference in 1924 delegates pledged "to set up an artel in every *uyezd* (district) over the summer period". Plans were made to focus on carpet-making in Turkmenistan, cattle-herding in Kazakhstan, silk production and market gardening in Uzbekistan. There were also efforts to set up farming cooperatives in 1925. One fundamental, continuing problem was isolation, and the bureau tried to set up links with the General Cooperative Bank, the department of trade and trade unions. In an article for Women's Day 1927, Liubimova demanded that "questions of 'results and tasks' of work among women be placed before all party cells and meetings, the Komsomol, trade unions and peasant meetings". This would facilitate the "cooperation of women in silk-weaving, dairy farming and market gardening, with which women are already familiar". However, by May of that year a comrade Bolshakov complained that "there has been no real attempt by the general cooperatives to do work with women. The situation is very bad despite there being a clear foundation on which to develop this work".

All responsibility for work was left to the Zhenotdel, which was handicapped by underfunding, disorganisation and a lack of skilled workers. The inability of the artels to become financially viable meant that women were less likely to become involved. The perception of handicraft work as an inferior form of production also plagued artels. There was "a view that this is not equal to men's work, as it is considered to be women's work in the home. And women then do not have the ability to go to the market and



sell their goods". This last issue was, of course, a key obstacle to the project. Without an income from sales, both the women themselves and the artels remained penniless.

In the context of this extraordinarily difficult battle to make progress, the launch in late 1925 of the first women-only shop in Uzbekistan was an important breakthrough. Opened in Tashkent, it reportedly drew in 400 Uzbek women in its first weeks of operation, with a further eight shops being opened in the Tashkent district in the following weeks. Liubimova contended that the crucial reason behind the success of the initiative lay in the exclusion of men from the shops - "The absence of men means that a woman can remove her veil and talk with the staff, while at the same time selecting the goods she needs." Formally part of the general consumer cooperative, the Zhenotdel was able to announce that there were 1,500 Uzbek women organised in cooperatives as of June 1926. By May 1927 there were 27 shops in Uzbekistan. The shops provided credit facilities to peasant women on favourable terms, with long-term instalment repayment schemes.

A conference of women's shop managers was held and there were regular meetings in the shops to develop the cooperatives around them, together with 'mother and baby corners'. The shops were successful in a way that clubs and artels had not been, because a real connection had been established with indigenous women. Women could now shop, sell their own goods and socialise in a comfortable and safe environment.

A comrade Butusova described in September 1927 how

Uzbek men look on the women's shops with approval. They can freely allow their wives to go there, as it does not disrupt their traditional ways and they are not afraid that their wives will meet men. A woman can buy the goods she wants by viewing them unhindered by the veil. Thus women's shops are the only public place where Uzbek men can freely allow their wives to visit.

In July 1926 Liubimova described a visit to a Tashkent shop where "women freely removed their veils, sold their own produce and selected the good they wanted to buy". Also "there are readings and discussions of the journal *Yangi Yol*" - the Turkic-language journal of the Zhenotdel. She argued that the project should be extended to Turkmenistan: "women-only markets could be held, where women can bring their produce to sell and buy the goods they want for themselves". Staff were either indigenous women or Russians who spoke the native languages.

The Hujum

In late 1926 the Central Asian Bureau of the Communist Party made a decision to launch a mass unveiling campaign, beginning on March 8 the following year. There are various analyses of the reasoning behind this campaign, known as the *Hujum*, meaning 'Attack'. There is no doubt that it was in many ways a precursor to the five-year plan launched by Stalin. It aimed to eliminate the cultural norms of traditional peasant society, including religion and the seclusion of women ... at a stroke. Meetings of central Asian party members were held from December 1926 to unveil their wives. On March 8 1927 thousands of women took part in mass unveilings and demonstrations in cities and towns all over Uzbekistan. But despite promises of a new revolution led by women, it soon became clear that a deep wave of reaction had been provoked. The male indigenous population, led by the Muslim clergy, attacked, raped and killed thousands of unveiled women in the following weeks - and then again after a second campaign to coincide with May 1.

It is noteworthy that the first mention of the *Hujum* in *Kommunistka* was an article in August, which took the bureau to task for failing to respond adequately. Klavdiia Nikolaeva, an erstwhile supporter of Kollontai and by then a member of the Central Asian Bureau, argued that the Zhenotdel had "failed to act immediately to consolidate work with unveiled women and to draw them into its orbit". Of course, the Zhenotdel's strategy up to 1927 had not been focused on unveiling women. It also seems, based on Nikolaeva's criticism and the lack of coverage of the *Hujum* in *Kommunistka*, that members had done little more than take part in the demonstrations on March 8 and May 1. And even these were not reported in the journal. In January 1928, Anna Artiukhina, national secretary of the Zhenotdel, admitted that the *Hujum* had not succeeded - "although more than 90,000 women removed their veils from March to May 1927, now between 80% and 90% of those women have revealed". She criticised not the Zhenotdel, but the Central Asian Bureau, for "treating the fight with the vestiges of patriarchy as a short-term project, within which it was only necessary to direct the energies of the party to March 8 and May 1". Its effect had been to destroy the existing work of the Zhenotdel. Now "every club is empty and neglected, with no attendance at meetings".

The most serious harm had been inflicted by the closure of the women's shops. Artiukhina reported that "without the knowledge of the Zhenotdel leadership they were changed into general shops, allowing the involvement and entry of men on

Ideal version of 1930s central Asia

the orders of the cooperative organs". They had given these orders using the excuse that there was no longer any need for separate shops, as women no longer wore a veil. In reality "the liquidation of women-only shops took place during the period of revealing after May 1927". The collapse of the clubs and the closure of the shops were major losses for the bureau and for the indigenous women who had gone to them. Artiukhina pointed out that many women were no longer able to go out for fear of attack and many previous supporters now harboured a deep distrust of the Soviet authorities.

A debate was launched by Krupskaya in the pages of *Kommunistka* in the run-up to the December 1928 all-union Conference of Workers among Women of the East. This was an unprecedented move, with meetings and conferences organised across Turkestan. There were plenty of criticisms of the way in which the campaign had been run. Liubimova was one of the leading voices pressing the Soviet government to pass a decree banning the veil. She believed that a decree would give women the confidence of knowing that the Soviet government defended them. It was

an urgent necessity, so that the eastern woman knows that she is not alone in the struggle against the vestiges of past slavery. It would provide her with all the support and benefits which came with Soviet power.

Conversely if there was no legal ban, Islamic law would be used to direct women to veil and to direct that their husbands take action to force them to do so. While this view can be criticised, it must be understood as emanating from a perspective that saw the safety of indigenous women as the key priority.

The most significant contribution to the debate was a speech given by Nadia Krupskaya at the December conference. She criticised the ghettoisation of the woman question and the fact that it had become seen as the responsibility of the Zhenotdel alone. Male education was essential, so that there would be a united, "fully conscious struggle, aimed at the tasks on the way to full liberation". She made clear that she was completely opposed to the *Hujum* - "I, of course, want the veil to go to hell like everybody else. But we don't always get what we decree". There must be no extreme actions like "imposing bans on christenings or religious weddings". She argued that confronting religion in this way "would not produce anything good" and would only result in a backlash. We cannot "simply be anti-religious". We need to see that "the church is very

influential". Direct "confrontation with it will produce no positive results". If we see this struggle as a war then we should conduct a "step-by-step battle, rather than an all-out fight with the forces of reaction".

Thus Krupskaya set out her opposition to change forced from above. In careful yet clear terms she argued against all simplistic notions. She made clear that there could not be a dead level applied to the peoples of the east. Conditions varied and so should tactics. Fundamentally tactics should be applied on the basis of winning over the population rather than alienating it or forcing it into submission. This, as she argued, could only produce negative results.

A new pressure on the Zhenotdel from 1928 was the first five-year plan, announced by Stalin at the 15th Party Congress in December 1927. Anna Nukrat, who had taken over the leadership of the Central Asian Bureau from 1926, was a Stalin loyalist. She demanded that all conservative attitudes had to be overcome forthwith. For Nukrat the failure of the *Hujum* could all be put down to the "enemies of the revolution" and a lazy response from the Zhenotdel. Now, however, there would be no more slackness. Nukrat argued that the seclusion of women was "the main obstacle to women applying to the labour exchange to look for work. It means that they are unable to work in the factories or workshops, be part of collectives or undertake technical courses".

Women had to unveil and become part of the general workforce, rather than have special artels and shops created for them: "Komsomol members, party members, workers, pioneers and soviet members "all need to be drawn into the task of defending 'courageous' unveiled women". To assist with the safe transition of unveiled women to their workplaces, "special groups of men should be selected from the youth", who could supervise districts, factories and other establishments to prevent any attacks on these women. Indigenous women had to fit into this new society and no concessions would be made.

Conclusion

In this article I have attempted to provide a glimpse of the efforts made to take the emancipation of women forward in the Soviet republic. I believe that many of the issues involved in this struggle are extremely important for us today. The attitude to unveiling, the question of women-only organisation and the attitude of men to women's questions remain highly relevant in 2017.

Discussion of the experience of the revolution has to go beyond analysis of debates between Lenin, Trotsky and other male members of the central committee. Examining the efforts to make progress on the woman question and other cultural and social questions will provide valuable new insights into the nature of the Soviet state.

For those of us who see this revolution as the highpoint of human struggle this approach is essential ●

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Notes

1. 'The inferno erupts' *Weekly Worker* March 2 2017.
2. C Zetkin, 'Guidelines for the communist women's movement' (translation by Ben Lewis of 'Kunst und Proletariat') *Revolutionary History* No1, 2015, pp 42-61. For the theses adopted by the Third Congress see also 'Methods and forms of work among women' in A Holt and B Holland (translators) *Theses, resolutions and manifestos of the first four congresses of the Third International* London 1980.
3. RC Ellwood *Inessa Armand: revolutionary and feminist* Cambridge 1992, p247.
4. CE Hayden, 'The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party' *Russian History* Vol 3, No1, 1976.
5. C Zetkin, 'Lenin on the woman question': www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin/1920/lenin/zetkin1.htm.
6. This and all quotes that follow are from *Kommunistka*.

1917

Art of revolution

Chris Knight discusses the significance of Leon Trotsky's *Lessons of October* and the implications in the event of a Corbyn-led Labour government

In this centenary year of the October revolution, it does seem worthwhile looking back at the actual text that Trotsky wrote in 1924 shortly after the catastrophic defeat of the German revolution in 1923 - a really disastrous defeat, leading eventually, of course, to Hitler.

Trotsky attributed the German defeat largely to the crazy policies of the leadership of the German Communist Party, likening their errors to "having a funeral dirge at a wedding and a wedding march at a funeral". At the very moment when real revolutionary opportunities are opening up you hesitate and pull back; and then, when everything is going wrong and you are most unlikely to win, you choose that moment to launch your insurrection.

Trotsky's point is that you must get your timing right. You have to seize the moment, on pain of losing everything, should you lose your nerve. If you know your Shakespeare, these are the lines:

There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.

This is Brutus talking to Cassius in the civil war. He is saying, 'We will never be stronger than we are now: this is the moment to strike.'

Trotsky realised with horror that in Germany, each time there were promising prospects for launching an insurrection, the communists held back, but, whenever things looked utterly hopeless, they switched to insurrectionary tactics. Noting such mistakes, he was dismayed that nobody in the Communist International seemed to know how the Bolshevik insurrection had been won. It was as though all the real lessons had somehow got lost in translation. The details had not come across. At this point, Trotsky suddenly realised that it was his responsibility to explain just how the Bolshevik insurrection had been won. If nobody knew, it was his fault. What with founding the Red Army and winning the civil war, he been rather busy, and had never found time to write things down.

This was the backdrop to Trotsky's decision in 1924 to publish his short book about the insurrection. It had to be him because no one else could do it. Trotsky was the one who, during 1917, used all his experiences from 1905 to plan and organise what should happen in Petrograd to make an insurrection succeed. Without Lenin's support, none of this would have been possible. He was building on Lenin's April theses, which gave him the necessary authority among those who supported the Bolsheviks. But Trotsky believed he had to put on record the actual mechanics of the insurrection before he could hope that communist leaderships across the rest of the world might be able to learn from that experience. That is why he wrote *The lessons of October*.

Legal insurrection

In the past, when I have said that an insurrection must be 'legal', I have been accused of naivety. People say, 'Legitimate, yes: of course the insurrection has to have legitimacy. But legality? That is absurd. You can't have a legal insurrection.' Well, I am going to be arguing that you can have a legal insurrection *in a sense*.

Clearly, any insurrection has to speedily establish the new order as the legal power. But it cannot do that without some kind of mass base. And, since there can be no revolution without a dual-power situation building up to it, there will be complex structures of countervailing legalities. The two rival powers, together with their legal claims and frameworks, will be in conflict. And revolutionaries have to exploit the fact that at a certain point, as Trotsky often said, there will be 'their morality and ours', 'their legality and ours'. Even before the insurrection, there will be elements of legality that it would be foolish not to exploit.

In Russia, the insurrection culminated on October 25 with the convening of the 2nd Congress of Soviets. It was by defending the actual building in which the Congress was being held - deploying armed guards so that no-one could disperse it - that the revolution was consummated in a seemingly legal way. As Trotsky explains:

We were more or less able to synchronise the seizure of power with the opening of the Second Soviet Congress only because the peaceful - almost 'legal' - armed insurrection, at least in Petrograd, was already three-quarters, if not nine-tenths, achieved. Our reference to this insurrection as 'legal' is in the sense that it was an outgrowth of the 'normal' conditions of dual power. Even when the conciliationists dominated the Petrograd soviet, it frequently happened that the soviet revised or amended the decisions of the government.

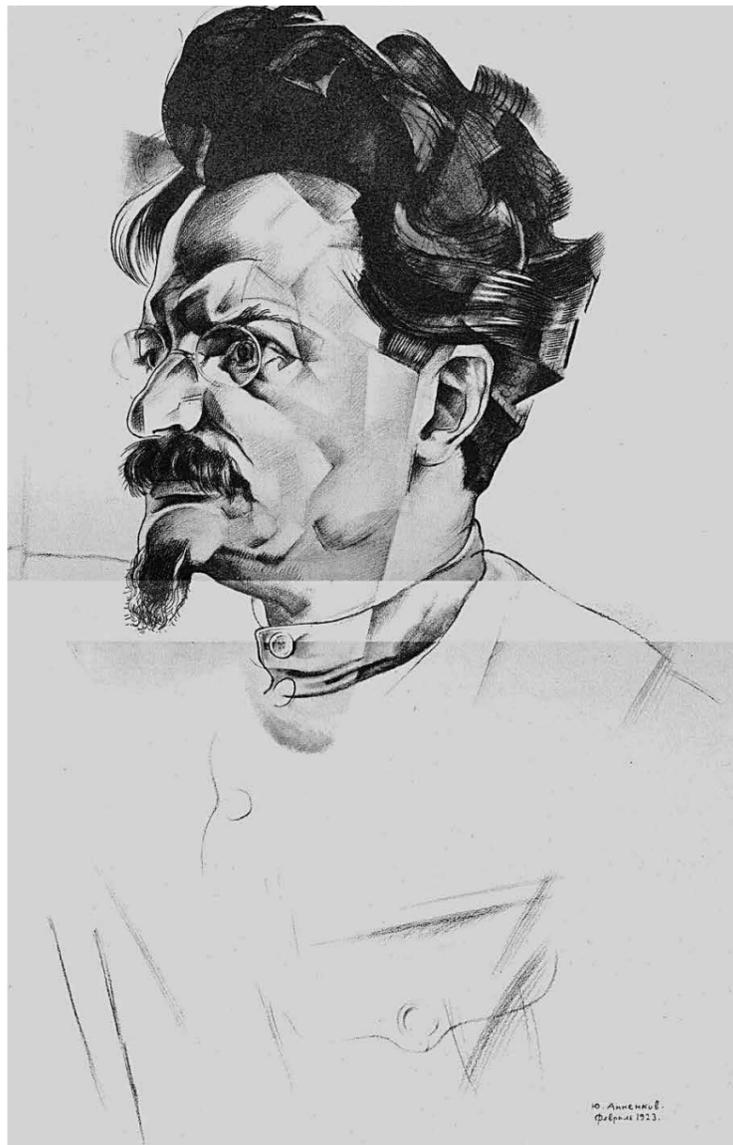
This was, so to speak, part of the constitution under the regime that has been inscribed in the annals of history as the 'Kerensky period'. When we Bolsheviks assumed power in the Petrograd Soviet, we only continued and deepened the methods of dual power. We took it upon ourselves to revise the order transferring the troops to the front.

"We took it upon ourselves to revise the order transferring the troops to the front," recalls Trotsky. Now, this had happened two weeks before the insurrection. Kerensky had been anxious about the presence of a garrison in Petrograd, about two thirds of whom were openly Bolshevik. That garrison represented an obvious threat to the provisional government. And so Kerensky thought the best way to get rid of those Bolsheviks was to send them to the front, where hopefully they would be slaughtered. So the troops were given their orders.

Thanks to the Military Revolutionary Committee, Trotsky and others built on the concept that no order from above - from the government or from the generals - was to be obeyed without the endorsement of the executive committee of the Petrograd soviet, and it was not too difficult for Trotsky to make sure that endorsement of those orders was not given.

Of course, the troops did not want to go anyway - that was absolutely clear. But the fact that the order to move was not endorsed by the soviet simply meant that in the eyes of the workers and soldiers it was not a legal order. So they just did not move - all those soldiers stayed put where they wanted to be: in Petrograd.

What Trotsky points out is that *that*



Leon Trotsky: the revolution took place two weeks before it happened

was the insurrection - an 'insurrection before the insurrection'. In other words, the key moment which decided the fate of Kerensky occurred two weeks before what is normally considered *the* insurrection. This was that "tide in the affairs" of humankind, which, taken at the flood, might lead to fortune. October 25 formalised what had already been achieved two weeks before:

By this very act we covered up the actual insurrection of the Petrograd garrison with the traditions and methods of legal dual power. Nor was that all. While formally adapting our agitation on the question of power to the opening of the Second Soviet Congress, we developed and deepened the already existing traditions of dual power, and prepared the framework of soviet legality for the Bolshevik insurrection on an all-Russian scale.²

Then Trotsky goes on to discuss how any revolutionary leadership will explore the contradictions within the state, but also the contradictions within the increasingly conflicting elements of legality:

We did not lull the masses with any soviet constitutional illusions, for under the slogan of a struggle for the Second Soviet Congress we won over to our side the bayonets of the

revolutionary army and consolidated our gains organisationally. And, in addition, we succeeded, far more than we expected, in luring our enemies, the conciliationists, into the trap of soviet legality.

Resorting to trickery in politics - all the more so in revolution - is always dangerous. You will most likely fail to dupe the enemy, but the masses who follow you may be duped instead. Our 'trickery' proved 100% successful - not because it was an artful scheme devised by wily strategists seeking to avoid a civil war, but because it derived naturally from the disintegration of the conciliationist regime with its glaring contradictions.

The Provisional government wanted to get rid of the garrison. The soldiers did not want to go to the front. We invested this natural unwillingness with a political expression; we gave it a revolutionary goal and a 'legal' cover. Thereby we secured unprecedented unanimity within the garrison, and bound it up closely with the Petrograd workers. Our opponents, on the contrary, because of their hopeless position and their muddle-headedness, were inclined to accept the soviet cover at its face value. They yearned to be deceived and we provided them with ample opportunity to gratify their desire.

Between the conciliationists and ourselves, there was a struggle for soviet legality. In the minds of the masses, the soviets were the source of all legitimate, but also all legal, power.³

In other words, anything that was a remnant of the tsarist regime was not only illegitimate, but in the eyes of the masses not even legal.

Labour and soviets

In 1969 I wrote a pamphlet, 'All power to the Labour government: the Russian Revolution and the tasks of socialists in the Labour Party today'. Republished two years ago in the *Weekly Worker*, the document tried to show how the British Labour Party and the Russian soviets are different in key respects, yet similar in others.⁴

I explained that the soviets, as they emerged out of the February 1917 revolution, were not particularly revolutionary. They had been much more directly revolutionary in 1905, when they were organs of a general strike. Once Lenin returned from exile in April 1917, he introduced his inflammatory April theses, insisting on the slogan, 'All power to the soviets'. Technically, the implication of this was that all power should be taken into the hands of the executive committee of the Petrograd soviet. Lenin and his allies were saying this not because they had any illusions about that executive committee. On the contrary, they realised the need to reveal to the masses that their leaders - the ones they had confidence in - were satisfied merely with office, as opposed to power. These Mensheviks and others who were technically in government were anxious *not* to translate office into power - in fact anxious to hand over all power as soon as possible to the bourgeoisie.

So it is very important, it seems to me, that we do not only demand power to people we approve of - that would be the wrong way round. It is the people we do *not* approve of, the people least likely to *take* power, but who still have support among the class - they are the people whom we must call on to 'take the power', because in a dual-power period this is the key question. Everything hinges on 'Do we or don't we take the power?'

Workers do not support their leaders just because they think those leaders have good ideas. Rather, it is because they hope there is going to be some action based on those ideas. They want revolutionary - or at least class - action. And, when it becomes clear to them that action is not going to follow, because their leaders are not interested in taking real power, that is when they look towards others - hopefully revolutionaries - for leadership to actually win that power.

So I am making an analogy between the Labour Party and the soviets *in that sense*.

Here is Trotsky's damning description of the executive committee of the soviets from *The history of the Russian Revolution*:

The educated petty bourgeois oriented himself upon the workers and peasants, but hobnobbed with the titled landlords and owners of sugar factories. While forming a part of the soviet system, through which the demands of the lower classes found their way up to the official state, the executive committee served at the same time as a political screen for the bourgeoisie. The possessing classes submitted to the executive committee so long as it pushed the power over to their side. The masses 'submitted'

to the executive committee in so far as they hoped it might become an instrument of the rule of workers and peasants.

Contradictory class tendencies were intersecting in the Tauride Palace and they both covered themselves with the name of the executive committee - the one through unconscious trustfulness, the other with cold-blooded calculation. The struggle was about nothing more or less than the question who was to rule the country - the bourgeoisie or the proletariat.⁵

So we should not have this romantic illusion that, whereas in this country we have been stuck with a wretched labour movement - bureaucratised, trade-unionised - and a reformist Labour Party, the Russians had these brilliant things called soviets.

The way I look at it is rather different. In Britain we had our bourgeois revolution early, in 1640, and eventually chopped the head off the king. Because we had such an early bourgeois revolution, compared with France, Germany or Russia, our bourgeoisie consolidated itself and its parliament became a very powerful instrument of class rule.

By the 19th century, despite the rise of the working class and working class representation, this parliament was very stable and powerful. Partly as a result of the privileges for the labour movement bureaucracy, and for sections of the working class as a result of the empire and colonialism, the labour movement in this country from the very beginning, including with the Chartist movement, increasingly found a place within this bourgeois parliament.

So, instead of replacing it, our labour movement found for itself a place within a pre-existing parliament. But the French, German and Russian bourgeois revolutions came later and, the later the bourgeois revolution, the weaker the bourgeoisie - and the greater the threat posed by the workers' organisations to the institutions of the bourgeoisie. Insofar as there was any real parliament in 1905 Russia, or in 1917 after February, it was formed by the workers' movement, taking the form of those soviets. So right from the outset there was nothing like a Labour Party within a parliament because the soviets were their own parliament. That is how I have always thought of the soviets.

The Labour Party has never been made up entirely of one particular ideological faction, any more than the soviets in Russia were. In Russia the soviets were a 'parliament' of the whole labour movement, within which various forces - Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, Bolsheviks and others - fought out their battles within this framework. And the reason why in this country we have not had soviets, but a Labour Party, is simply because the bourgeoisie has been so much more able to preserve its own privileges, wealth and stability by safely incorporating the labour movement within its bourgeois parliament.

Even though you can argue that the Labour Party and the soviets are opposites - and they are opposites in the sense I have just described - they have important points in common.

And the point in common, of course, is that in each case, to begin with at any rate, the leadership is straddling the classes, attempting to compromise - attempting to make life easier for the ruling class establishment, while at the same time attempting to lull the working class into a false sense of security, sow illusions and mobilise them into supporting what ultimately is a bourgeois government.

Our legality and theirs

Trotsky describes the situation in Russia following the February revolution as one of dual power. On the one hand,

the tsar had abdicated, giving way to a Provisional government. Meanwhile, on the other, all of the various working class factions - including those which in Britain would have become reformists and parliamentarians - found themselves with no opportunity for political activity except within the soviets. That is what made the slogan, 'All power to the soviets', at once clarifying, but in some ways confusing.

In effect, the slogan was a demand that all power should pass into the hands of the Mensheviks and SRs, because they were the leaders of the soviets and also part of the government. But Lenin and Trotsky were not worried about that. They were interested in establishing, in the eyes of the masses, who wanted to seize power and who did not.

And then there were the July days. Lenin and Trotsky always said that it would have been wrong to organise the insurrection in July despite the massive support the Bolsheviks enjoyed on the streets of Petrograd. The argument was that it would have been premature because the rest of the country was not yet with them. However, I feel very strongly, reading Lenin, that it was a traumatic experience for him. He was not going to let that happen twice. In some way an opportunity for an insurrection in Petrograd was missed in July, maybe necessarily. But it was obviously traumatic because the reaction after the crushing of the July upsurge was extremely severe, leading to Lenin being denounced as a German spy and having to go into hiding, leaving Trotsky much more in control of the situation on the ground.

What then happened was that Lenin felt - and you can understand why - that an emphasis on constitutional procedures would give those opposed to seizing power an excuse for delay, allowing the opportunity for insurrection to be missed. So when Lenin denounced the soviet after the July days and urged an insurrection in the name of the Bolsheviks alone, you can see why he was doing that: he did not want to miss the next opportunity, which was bound to come - and did come soon after the revolt of general Kornilov, commander-in-chief of the army, appointed by Kerensky.

Given the uselessness of the soviet leadership, Lenin after July urged the Bolsheviks to drop the slogan, 'All power to the soviets'. And you can understand why he wanted to drop it - all power to those compromisers, those wretches? He points out that the present soviets have failed, have suffered complete defeat, because they are dominated by the Socialist Revolutionary and Menshevik parties:

At the moment these soviets are like sheep brought to the slaughterhouse and bleating pitifully under the knife. The Soviets *at present* are powerless and helpless against the triumphant and triumphing counterrevolution. The slogan calling for the transfer of power to the soviets might be construed as a 'simple' appeal for the transfer of power to the present

soviets, and to say that, to appeal for it, would now mean deceiving the people.⁶

Similarly, sometimes I am confronted by people who imagine a Corbyn-led Labour government with a programme limited to nationalising gas, water, rail and so on. They ask, 'How can you call for all power to Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell? You must be joking.' Well, I understand that, but when you think about the alternatives and how we build on the lessons of October - its similarities and differences - it is not so simple.

Back to Lenin after the July days:

No-one, no force, can overthrow the bourgeois counterrevolutionaries except the revolutionary proletariat. Now, after the experience of July 1917, it is the revolutionary proletariat that must independently take over state power. Without that the victory of the revolution is impossible ... Soviets may appear in this new revolution, and indeed are bound to, but not the present soviets - not organs collaborating with the bourgeoisie, but organs of revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie. It is true that even then we shall be in favour of building the whole state on the model of the soviets. It is not a question of the present counterrevolution and the treachery of the present soviets.⁷

So that was Lenin's position. And you can understand why, after the July days when he was in hiding and not really on the ground, he was urging, 'Just seize the power, take the key buildings. We've got plenty of armed comrades in Petrograd. We can win an insurrection':

In order to treat insurrection in a Marxist way - ie, as an art - we must at the same time, without losing a single moment, organise a headquarters of the insurgent detachments, distribute our forces, move the reliable regiments to the most important points, surround the Alexandriusky Theatre, occupy the Peter and Paul Fortress, arrest the general staff and the government, and move against the officer cadets and the savage division those detachments which would rather die than allow the enemy to approach the strategic points of the city. We must mobilise the armed workers and call them to fight the last desperate fight, occupy the telegraph and the telephone exchange at once, move our insurrection headquarters to the central telephone exchange and connect it by telephone with all the factories, all the regiments, all the points of armed fighting, etc.⁸

So that was the prescription - don't worry about the Soviet congress. Trotsky, who was on the ground, knew, on the one hand, that this was a lot better than what other leading Bolsheviks were urging (Zinoviev, for example, was by no means keen to organise an insurrection). However, on the other hand, while there is no question that Trotsky is on Lenin's side and for an

insurrection, circumstances allowed a far better way of doing things. It was important to synchronise the insurrection with the convening of the Second Soviet Congress.

Having discussed Lenin's demands to just go for armed insurrection, Trotsky writes, giving full credence to Lenin's passion and instincts:

At the same time, however, it is quite clear that to prepare the insurrection and to carry it out under cover of preparing for the Second Soviet Congress, and under the slogan of defending it, was of inestimable advantage to us. From the moment when we, as the Petrograd soviet, invalidated Kerensky's order transferring two-thirds of the garrison to the front, we had actually entered a state of armed insurrection.

Lenin, who was not in Petrograd, could not appraise the full significance of this fact. So far as I remember, there is not a mention of it in all his letters during this period. Yet the outcome of the insurrection of October 25 was at least three-quarters settled, if not more, the moment that we opposed the transfer of the Petrograd garrison; created the Revolutionary Military Committee (October 16); appointed our own commissars in all army divisions and institutions; and thereby completely isolated not only the general staff of the Petrograd zone, but also the government. As a matter of fact, we had here an armed insurrection - an armed, though bloodless, insurrection of the Petrograd regiments against the Provisional government - under the leadership of the Revolutionary Military Committee and under the slogan of preparing the defence of the Second Soviet Congress, which would decide the ultimate fate of the state power.

Lenin's counsel to begin the insurrection in Moscow, where, on his assumptions, we could gain a bloodless victory, flowed precisely from the fact that in his underground refuge he had no opportunity to assess the radical turn that took place - not only in mood, but also in organisational ties among the military rank and file, as well as the army hierarchy - after the 'peaceful' insurrection of the garrison of the capital in the middle of October. The moment that the regiments, upon the instructions of the Revolutionary Military Committee, refused to depart from the city, we had a victorious insurrection in the capital, only slightly screened at the top by the remnants of the bourgeois-democratic state forms.⁹

In Moscow it was very different. There was not the same structure of soviets and there was no congress planned: "It is plain enough that, had the insurrection begun in Moscow, prior to the overturn in Petrograd, it would have dragged on even longer, with the outcome very much in doubt."¹⁰

Urgent

One of the reasons why *The lessons of October* is so important is this: only once in all history has the proletariat, the organised working class, succeeded not just in taking office, but full state power, and so there are obvious lessons for us. It did not last very long - everything went pear-shaped rather rapidly with the failure of the German revolution. But it was the only time and, even if you are not a Bolshevik, even if you have all sorts of criticisms of Lenin or Trotsky, to succeed with any revolution you need to learn about how revolutions work and how to make them succeed.

I think this is an urgent question - we do not have all the time in the world. We may have only a short time before we have to not just learn the lessons of October, but actually act on those lessons. Everyone knows - even Owen Jones, etc are saying the same thing - not just the mass media, but the ruling class, the military,

the banks, the establishment as a whole will be screaming blue murder against even a Corbyn-led Labour government trying to nationalise one or two industries. I am not saying we are going to get bemedalled generals immediately organising manoeuvres and sending tanks to Heathrow airport. There will be a run on the pound and all sorts of other things happening first. But, on the other hand, if things drag on, the situation will become very difficult.

I do think there is such a thing as a premature attempt at revolution, and such a revolution cannot succeed without spreading quickly across Europe as a whole. So there may be some case for taking office and a certain amount of power in order to mobilise the movement across Europe, so that the abolition of capitalism takes place across the continent, rather than being locked into a single, isolated country.

But, on the other hand, as Trotsky said, we do not have all the time in the world and each opportunity lasts only for a while. So under circumstances where we might have a Labour government with a mandate, and the masses think it should be free to implement its programme, then that, if necessary, would provide legal cover for a hopefully bloodless insurrection.

How would we proceed? Ideally we would not allow Corbyn and McDonnell to operate in a bubble in Westminster. That would not work. 'Our' government has to be outside parliament. So ideally we would have an emergency Labour Party conference to deal with a crisis. If there are rumblings from generals and threats of mutiny, we would need to hold an emergency Labour Party conference in a large, defensible building. There should also be branches of our government in all the main metropolitan centres, so that it was not just confined to London, and all such conferences and branches would have to be defended. What is illegal about defending a building if we in the Labour Party have won the election and are the government? Surely we would have a right to hold our conferences and to decide on policy.

So, yes, 'All power to the *Labour government*' would be the logical slogan - I cannot think of a better one. If there is another way of translating 'All power to the soviets' into the conditions of the British working class and its history, please tell me.

At the very least 'Labour take the power' has to be the slogan - 'take the power' addressed to the leadership of the Labour Party. What else can we ask of them? 'Don't take the power' has been suggested in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*, but to me that makes no sense.

An armed insurrection cannot really be legal - in fact, few things can be more *illegal* than an armed insurrection. And yet, as Trotsky says, you have to quickly 'legalise' your insurrection, and in order to do that you have to build on elements of legality in the dual-power period leading up to that seizure of power.

If we can - in that limited sense - provide a legal basis for an insurrection, the coming revolution is far more likely to be popular, far more likely to be bloodless, and far more likely to spread quickly across Europe ●

Notes

1. L Trotsky *The lessons of October* Chicago 2017, pp81-82.
2. *Ibid* p82.
3. *Ibid* pp82-83.
4. For a discussion of Chris Knight's original 1969 document, see his article, 'If Labour wins in 2020' (*Weekly Worker* August 10 2015).
5. L Trotsky *The history of the Russian Revolution* London 1965, p578.
6. VI Lenin, 'On slogans' *CW* Vol 25, Moscow 1964, pp189-90.
7. *Ibid*.
8. VI Lenin, 'Marxism and insurrection' (September 13-14 1917) *CW* Vol 26, p27.
9. L Trotsky *The lessons of October* Chicago 2017, pp80-81.
10. *Ibid* p81.

Labour Against the Witchhunt

Organising meeting Saturday December 2, 12 noon to 3pm
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Progress report and campaign plans, plus update on suspensions and expulsions, including:

- Tony Greenstein - suspended
- Stan Keable (Labour Party Marxists) - expelled
- Marc Wadsworth (Grassroots Black Left) - suspended

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HISTORY

Zionism and holocaust

It is completely legitimate to draw comparisons with the Nazis, insists Tony Greenstein

“Write and record” were the last words of Jewish historian Simon Dubnow before he was murdered by the Nazis in the Riga ghetto on December 8 1941. It is an injunction we should take to heart - and add a third imperative: we should write, record and compare.

If there is one thing that Zionists hate, it is when analogies are made between Israel, Zionism and Nazism, including in relation to the holocaust. It is a cast-iron rule that *only* the Zionist movement is entitled to compare or equate its opponents with the Nazis.

This Zionist attitude is backed up by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of anti-Semitism, which was adopted by the governments of 31 countries, including the anti-Semitic governments of Poland and Hungary, in May 2016. According to the IHRA, anti-Semitism “could, taking into account the overall context, include ... drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis”. The IHRA definition is almost identical to that of the EU’s Fundamental Rights Agency, which was dropped in 2013.

Following the recommendation of the ‘Anti-Semitism in the UK’ report of the home affairs select committee in October 2016, Theresa May adopted this “non-legally-binding definition” of anti-Semitism in December 2016. Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party subsequently adopted the IHRA version - but without its 11 examples, as was confirmed in the party’s *Race and faith manifesto*.¹

The IHRA definition was severely criticised by Hugh Tomlinson QC for being “unclear and confusing”,² while Sir Stephen Sedley, a Jewish former court of appeal judge, was scathing about it in the *London Review of Books*: it “fails the first test of any definition: it is indefinite”. Sedley characterised the purpose of the IHRA as being to “permit perceptions of Jews which fall short of expressions of racial hostility to be stigmatised as anti-Semitic”.³

In the spring of 2016 Jeremy Corbyn commissioned a report by the former director of Liberty, Shami Chakrabarti. In the wake of Corbyn’s election as leader of the Labour Party *The Guardian*, the tabloids and various Zionist organisations had launched a campaign whose premise was that anti-Semitism was endemic within Labour.

The Chakrabarti report was published on June 30 2016. At its press conference Ruth Smeeth MP gave an excellent demonstration of how to manufacture a fake incident of anti-Semitism when she accused Marc Wadsworth, a black anti-racist activist, of anti-Semitism. He had accused her of colluding with the rightwing press by exchanging notes with a *Daily Telegraph* journalist and she stormed out of the meeting shrieking “How dare you?” Later she accused Marc, who did not even know she was Jewish, of espousing “vile conspiracy theories about Jewish people”. His primary offence was one of *lèse-majesté*, but it was a good example of how the media can create fake news - distorting and changing reality until it accords with an establishment narrative.

Chakrabarti was a mixed bag. Its sections dealing with Labour Party procedure, natural justice and the right of the accused to be accorded due process were good. But where the report fell down was on the question of racism. It substituted the subjective for the objective, the personal for the

political. Chakrabarti treated Zionism as a manifestation of Jewish identity rather than a racist and reactionary colonial ideology, which had led directly to the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.⁴ The Labour Party has now removed the report from its website, but I have restored it!⁵

Despite knowing nothing about Zionism or the holocaust, Chakrabarti proceeded to give her opinions on the use of holocaust comparisons or metaphors in a section entitled ‘Insensitive and incendiary language, metaphors, distortions and comparisons’. She wrote:

... it is always incendiary to compare the actions of Jewish people or institutions anywhere in the world to those of Hitler or the Nazis or to the perpetration of the holocaust. Indeed such remarks can only be intended to be incendiary rather than persuasive. Why? Because the Shoah is still in people’s living family experience and because, if every human rights atrocity is described as a holocaust, Hitler’s attempted obliteration of the Jewish people is diminished or derecognised in our history, as is the history of a global minority that has had cause to feel, at worst, persecuted and, at best, vulnerable for thousands of years.

Other hideous human rights atrocities, from African slavery to the killing fields of Cambodia, the Armenian and Rwandan genocides, are all, of course, to be remembered and described, but diluting their particularity or comparing degrees of victimhood and evil does no service to anyone.

Apart from conflating criticism of Israel with “the actions of Jewish people”, Chakrabarti was oblivious to the fact that it is the Israeli state and its supporters who routinely compare their opponents with the Nazis. Chakrabarti also assumed that the holocaust was a Jewish-only affair and she subscribed to the myth of the Jew as the eternal victim (“vulnerable for thousands of years”). This is a myth whose counterpart was Joseph Goebbels’ *Eternal Jew*.⁶

In service

The holocaust has been employed shamelessly by Zionism. The extermination of European Jewry is the principal argument that is used to justify the creation of the state of Israel. If it were not for the holocaust how would it be possible to justify a situation where Israel has ruled over five million Palestinians for half a century without according them either political or civil rights? In *Israel’s holocaust and the politics of nationhood* Idith Zertal wrote: “There has not been a war in Israel from 1948 till the present ongoing burst of violence, which began in October 2000, that has not been perceived, defined and conceptualised in terms of the holocaust.”⁷

In every war Israel imagines itself as the collective holocaust victim facing annihilation, even though it has always possessed a vast military superiority. Even in its *Blitzkrieg on Gaza* in 2014, with a kill ratio of 30-1, nearly all of whose victims were civilians, Israel portrayed itself as fighting a war of “self-defence”. The holocaust has enabled a nuclear state that is armed to the teeth to create an image of itself as the perpetual victim.

It is Israelis themselves who have compared their behaviour to that of the Nazis. In order to create a Jewish state, Zionist militias - the Haganah, and Palmach in particular - ethnically

cleansed Palestine of three quarters of a million inhabitants. This involved a series of massacres, the most infamous of which was Deir Yassin in April 1948.

In November 1948, Eliezer Peri, the editor of the leftwing paper *Al Hamishmar*, received a letter describing a massacre at al-Dawayima, in which Benny Morris has estimated that “hundreds” were killed. Agriculture minister Aharon Cisling referred to a letter he had received about the atrocities declaring: “I couldn’t sleep all night ... This is something that determines the character of the nation ... Jews too have committed Nazi acts.”⁸

Similar comments were made by Yosef Nahmani, a senior officer of Haganah. He was stunned by the cruelty of Israeli troops towards Arab villagers. He described how in Safsaf the villagers raised the white flag, but 60-70 men and women were massacred. He asked: “Where did they learn cruel conduct such as that of the Nazis?” According to one officer, “the most eager were those who had come from the [concentration] camps ...”⁹

Seventy years ago, at least some Zionists were capable of appreciating the depths to which they had sunk in their desire to achieve a racially pure state. Yet, when in 2016 an Israeli soldier shot in cold blood a severely wounded Palestinian,¹⁰ 57% of Israelis supported his actions, compared to just 20% who opposed them. At a large Tel Aviv demonstration in his support, which mobilised under a banner declaring ‘Kill them all’, the mob began chanting that favourite slogan of Israel’s right wing - ‘Death to the Arabs’ (*Mavei La’aravim*). There was also a poster declaring, ‘My honour is my loyalty’ - the slogan of the SS.

When thousands of settler youth ran rampage through the Arab section of Jerusalem in 2015, under the protection of the police, chanting ‘Death to the Arabs’, it was reminiscent of similar chants that were heard in Germany and Poland 80 years ago - except that then they were chanting ‘Death to the Jews’.

As Zertal has noted, whilst Zionism nationalised the holocaust, harnessing it to the chariot of racism, “it excluded the direct bearers of this memory - some quarter of a million holocaust survivors who had immigrated to Israel”¹¹ - from funding. The impoverishment of the actual holocaust survivors in Israel, despite the billions Israel received by way of reparations, is a scandal.¹²

Zionism assimilates the holocaust as part of its seamless narrative of victimisation, yet Chakrabarti held that if the critics or victims of Zionism respond in kind then that is anti-Semitic. For example, the term ‘kapos’ is wielded by Zionists against critics of Israel (not just anti-Zionists). It was popularised by Trump’s appointment of David Friedman as Ambassador to Israel, who used it against the liberal Zionists of J-Street.¹³ It is a particularly obnoxious accusation. Kapos were people who were themselves concentration camp prisoners. They had no choice but to act as the Nazis’ foremen. Their life expectancy was little more than those they supervised. Some behaved decently, whilst others were without doubt cruel, but no kapo had any choice about their role. To have refused it would have meant instant death.

Contrast this with the voluntary and willing collaboration of the Zionist movement with the Nazis. No-one forced the Jewish Agency to conclude Ha’avara - a trading agreement with the Nazi government, whose effect was to stave off a German economic crisis

that threatened to bring down the Nazi regime in its infancy. Edwin Black noted that “the Jewish-led, worldwide anti-Nazi boycott was indeed the one weapon that Hitler feared”.¹⁴ At the same time as Jews were enthusiastically building the boycott, the Zionists’ concern was that German Jewish “wealth had to be saved”.¹⁵ What mattered was the millions of frozen Reichmarks that belonged to Germany’s Jews. The result was that “the Nazi party and the Zionist Organisation shared a common stake in the recovery of Germany. If the Hitler economy fell, both sides would be ruined.”¹⁶

The examples of Zionist weaponisation of the holocaust are legion - prime minister Menachem Begin once compared Yasser Arafat in Beirut to Adolf Hitler in his bunker. As the newspaper *Ha’aretz* observed, “Calling your political rival a Nazi is a time-hallowed tradition in Israel.”¹⁷ In 2008 Israeli deputy defence minister Matan Vilnai warned Palestinians living in Gaza that they were bringing “a bigger Shoah” on themselves.¹⁸ And it was ‘moderate’ Zionist Abba Eban who talked of the 1967 Green Line as the “Auschwitz border”.

Within the Jewish community in Israel the holocaust and the Nazis function as a political metaphor. At times of conflict secular Jews daub swastikas on the walls of synagogues and defile prayer books, religious scrolls, etc. Orthodox Jews do likewise to their secular counterparts and religious fascists paint swastikas on Christian churches. Oriental Jews, for whom the holocaust was a European affair, paint slogans such as ‘Ashkenazim’ (‘Back to Auschwitz’) on the latter’s cars and buildings.

Self-reflection

It is not simply a question of our right to respond to the Zionists’ weaponisation of the holocaust. There are good reasons in themselves why we *should* compare Zionism to the Nazis. This is not in order to hurt or insult, but to enable self-reflection. It is precisely because Zionism uses the Nazis and the holocaust as the ultimate evil that we are duty-bound to point out the similarity between the Nazis’ methods and those of the Zionists.

What Chakrabarti was effectively saying was that the Nazi era should be isolated from history. Part of this is sheer ignorance. Hitler and the Nazis ruled for over 12 years, the last four of which, from June 1941 onwards, were the years of the holocaust. Chakrabarti conflated the holocaust and Nazi domination, whereas the Third Reich began in 1933 and the holocaust started with the invasion of Russia in June 1941.

It may be a terrible thing to have to point out the similarities between the Zionism and Nazism ideologically, but it was not ourselves, but the Zionists, who first drew such comparisons. On June 21 1933 the German Zionist Federation sent a long memo to Hitler “outlining those Zionist tenets that were consistent with National Socialist ideology”.¹⁹ The whole memo can be read in Lucy Dawidowicz’s *A holocaust reader*.²⁰

Chakrabarti is also wrong to suggest that comparisons between Israel and the Nazis minimise or obliterate Jewish people’s experience of the holocaust. On the contrary, they seek to draw lessons from that experience and to warn against any repetition. Holocaust analogies are the common currency of political debate in Israel - Zionism uses the slogan of ‘Never again’. But for

anti-racists and anti-fascists this means never again for *everyone*, not just Jews. Is the lesson of the holocaust going to be a racist or an anti-racist one?

If we are to do justice to the memory of the victims of the holocaust, Jewish and non-Jewish, then, far from refraining from drawing comparisons with the Nazis, we should be making them whenever Nazi-like behaviour surfaces. The Nazis were not an exception to, but very much a part of, history. They did not arise from nowhere.

Taunts of ‘appeasement’ have been repeatedly made against those who oppose imperialism’s attacks on third-world countries. Third-world dictators have consistently been equated with Hitler. Those who opposed the invasion of Iraq were said to be ‘appeasing’ a new Hitler. A generation before, opponents of the Suez war were equated to those who appeased Hitler. Nasser was the “Hitler on the Nile”.²¹

There are clearly similarities between Israel today and Nazi Germany. This is not to say the two states are identical or that Israel is fascist or planning to exterminate the Palestinians (although genocidal ideas are indeed common in Zionism today). Israel is a settler-colonial state, the most racist state in the world. Israel calls itself a ‘Jewish democratic state’, but in practice it is democratic for Jews and Jewish for Arabs.

A variety of legal devices, such as the Reception Committees Act, bars Arabs from 93% of Israeli land (Jews in Nazi Germany were also barred from ‘Aryan’ land). Israel boasts that it calculates the calorific value of food which it allows to enter Gaza,²² while Hans Frank, governor general of Poland, also strictly limited the number of calories allowed to the inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto. Granted, the Israeli level is higher than that in Warsaw, where over 80,000 Jews starved to death, but the principle is the same.

It is equally right to compare the sealing off of Gaza to the Warsaw Ghetto. In 2002, Marek Edelman, the last commander of the Jewish resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto, compared the Palestinian fighters to the Jewish resistance fighters,²³ bringing on his head a storm of Zionist outrage.

Ideologically there are many similarities between the attempt to make the German Reich *Judenrein* (free of Jews) and the repeated attempts by Israel to ethnically cleanse Palestine of its Arab and non-Jewish inhabitants. The Nazis pursued a goal of racial purification, of making Germany purely Aryan. It was blood-and-soil ethno-nationalism. How is this different from the Koenig Memorandum²⁴ aimed at Judaifying Galilee, or the Prawer Plan²⁵ to Judaify the Negev? How is Zionism’s concern with the “demographic problem”²⁶ - ie, too many non-Jews in the Jewish state - different from Nazi racial ideas?

Zionism from its inception debated and pursued the ‘transfer’ of the Palestinians and non-Jews from Palestine and then Israel. Transfer did not begin in 1947-48: it was inherent in the very concept of a Jewish settler state in a land occupied by non-Jews.

In 1919 the King Crane Commission, which was appointed by Woodrow Wilson, reported: “The fact came out repeatedly in the commission’s conference with Jewish representatives that the Zionists looked forward to a practically complete dispossession of the present non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine.”²⁷ Transfer is still as relevant today as it was a hundred

abuse

years ago. Transfer is Zionism's 'ideal' solution to the 'problem' of four million Palestinians living in the West Bank. How is this different to the Nazi plans to settle ethnic Germans in an 'empty' Wartheland (Warthegau)?

The holocaust

Henry Friedlander has argued that the holocaust began in 1939 in Hartheim Castle and the other five killing 'hospitals' of Germany.²⁸ Hitler's obsession with eugenics, the 'science' of selective breeding, resulted in the T-4 'euthanasia' programme, which murdered up to three quarters of a million disabled Germans. T-4 originally followed the example of the United States, where forced sterilisations of women considered to be unfit to breed was the policy of many states. Hitler told his fellow Nazis: "I have studied with interest the laws of several American states concerning prevention of reproduction by people whose progeny would, in all probability, be of no value or be injurious to the racial stock."²⁹

During the Reich's first 10 years, eugenicists in America welcomed Hitler's plans. Indeed

... they were envious, as Hitler rapidly began sterilising hundreds of thousands and systematically eliminating non-Aryans from German society ... Ten years after Virginia passed its 1924 sterilisation act, Joseph DeJarnette, superintendent of Virginia's Western State Hospital, complained in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*: "The Germans are beating us at our own game."³⁰

The Nazis' forced sterilisation programme was partly inspired by that of California. In 1927, the US supreme court had permitted the compulsory sterilisation of handicapped patients. Oliver Wendell Holmes, speaking for the 8-1 supreme court majority, "presaged the arguments used later to justify eugenic killings in Nazi Germany"³¹ But, according to Chakrabarti's 'logic', it would be "incendiary" and cause offence to criticise supporters of eugenics and selective breeding by reference to the Nazis.

Professor Amos Funkenstein, former head of the faculty of history at Tel Aviv University, when referring to the controversy over the refusal of soldiers to serve in the occupied territories, compared them with soldiers in the German army who refused to serve in concentration or extermination camps. To those who asked how it was possible to compare the actions of Nazi soldiers with Israelis, Funkenstein replied:

As a historian I know that every comparison is limited. On the other hand, without comparisons, no historiography is possible. Understanding a historical event is a kind of translation into the language of our time. If we would leave every phenomenon in its peculiarity, we could not make this translation. Every translation is an interpretation and every interpretation is also a comparison.³²

Funkenstein reminded his critics that the leaflets and publications of the Zionist terror groups, Etzel, Lehi and Haganah, talked of the Nazi-British occupation.

The holocaust was the tipping point in the international Jewish community. Before World War II Zionism was in a minority amongst Jews worldwide. The Zionist idea that Jews did not belong in the countries of their birth, that they formed a nation separate from those they lived amongst, was rejected by Jews as a *form of anti-Semitism*. Lucien



In January 1933 the Nazis acted against Jewish-owned businesses. In the same year the Zionist Federation of Germany signed the Haavara agreement

Wolfe, one of the leaders of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, declared:

I have spent most of my life in combating these very doctrines, when presented to me in the form of anti-Semitism, and I can only regard them as the more dangerous when they come to me in the guise of Zionism. They constitute a capitulation to our enemies.³³

It was Hitler who rescued the Zionist movement from obscurity. It was the murder of six million Jews and the refusal of the western powers to take in the Jewish refugees that made the Zionist argument, that Jews could only rely on Jews, seem plausible. In that sense the creation of the Israeli state represented the posthumous triumph of the Nazis.

The leadership of the Jewish Agency understood this very well. From the outset of the war the Zionists took a conscious decision that their priority was the building of a Jewish state, *not* the rescue of Jews from Europe. They actively opposed Jews going anywhere but Palestine. When Britain agreed to the Kindertransport - the admission of 10,000 Jewish children from Germany after the Krystallnacht pogrom - David Ben Gurion was furious:

If I knew that it would be possible to save all the children in Germany by bringing them over to England, and only half of them by transporting them to Eretz Yisrael, then I would opt for the second alternative. For we must weigh not only the life of these children, but also the history of the people of Israel.³⁴

Christopher Sykes, a pro-Zionist historian wrote: "From the very beginning of the Nazi disaster, the Zionist leadership determined to wrest political advantage from the tragedy."³⁵ Even Shabtai Tevet, David Ben-Gurion's official biographer, concluded: "If there was a line in Ben-Gurion's mind between the beneficial disaster and an all-destroying catastrophe, it must have been a very fine one."³⁶

The chapter in Ben-Gurion's biography on the holocaust was titled 'Disaster means strength'. Tevet described how

In spite of the certainty that genocide was being carried out, the Jewish

Agency executive did not deviate appreciably from its routine ... Two facts can be definitively stated: Ben-Gurion did not put the rescue effort above Zionist politics and he did not regard it as a principle task demanding his personal leadership.³⁷

Ben-Gurion was clear that in the event of "a conflict of interest between saving individual Jews and the good of the Zionist enterprise, we shall say the enterprise comes first"³⁸

The Zionist movement understood how the holocaust could be exploited to serve Zionist purposes. As early as September 1942, when most of Europe's Jews were still alive, the Zionists were thinking of creating a memorial to them. The creation of Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, was proposed. This was seen as "the very last opportunity to score any financial success"³⁹ At this time the Jewish Agency had not even acknowledged that there *was* a holocaust. Tom Segev comments:

There was no clearer, more grotesque, even macabre expression of the tendency to think of the holocaust in the past tense: while the Yishuv discussed the most appropriate way to memorialise them, most of the victims were still alive.⁴⁰

Gerhard Riegner, the World Jewish Congress representative in Geneva during the war, articulated how the Zionist movement saw the holocaust. He believed that

Auschwitz was not only a national memory belonging to the Jewish people ... it was also an important political asset. Among other things it served the diplomatic efforts of both the WJC and Israel.⁴¹

For Zionism the proposed Jewish state was eternal. The Jews who died in the holocaust would have died anyway. This is not dissimilar to the fascist idea that the state is everything, the individual is nothing.

When they tell us we should not compare Zionism and Israel with the holocaust, we should ask, 'Why not? What have they got to fear?' ●

Notes

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What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly worker

Accidentally
uniting all
Lebanese
factions

Descent into farce

Yassamine Mather reports on crown prince Salman's latest attempts to stoke up conflict

In the week when general Qasem Soleimani, the leader of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, declared Islamic State had been defeated, 40 gunmen associated with IS attacked the al-Rawda mosque in Sinai, Egypt, killing 309 worshippers and injuring many more. It was also the week when Saudi crown prince Mohammad bin Salman claimed that the Islamic Republic of Iran was now the main threat in the region and that supreme leader Ali Khamenei was "the new Hitler of the Middle East".

The attackers in Sinai were from a group that has been associated with IS since 2014, but both the number of victims and the fact that they were worshippers in a mosque marks out this particular attack. Unlike many other IS operations, this one was carried out by local volunteers. In Sinai only 10% of IS fighters are believed to be foreign jihadists. The vast majority are locals, reacting to the repression imposed by the military government of general Abdel Fattah el-Sissi - Egypt, of course, being one of the main regional allies of Saudi Arabia. And let us not forget that Saudi clerics were amongst the original and the most persistent backers of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. One could say that without Saudi funding, the jihadists would not have lasted as long as they have.

Prince Salman has claimed that three events in 1979 fermented Islamic extremism: the attack on the Grand Mosque in Mecca by Saudi puritanical extremists; the Islamic revolution in Iran; and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. According to Salman, it all changed after Khomeini came to power. Clearly the Saudi prince's understanding of history is as flawed as that of his friends in Washington. First of all Iran's revolution did not start as an Islamic one: workers, intellectuals, soldiers and peasants of both sexes had been demonstrating and protesting for more than a year against a corrupt dynasty. Recent declassified papers show the extent of the US relationship with Ruhollah Khomeini, The Islamic regime's first supreme leader, after 1979. He was not the US administration's ideal choice to replace the shah, but, given the revolutionary situation in Iran, he clearly was the lesser of many evils, as far as they were concerned.

Furthermore, anyone with a bit more sense of regional politics would know that for all its efforts the Shia clergy has failed (and admits to have failed) in its attempts to change the cultural and social behaviour of the overwhelming majority of Iran's population - irrespective of their religious beliefs and despite successive government attempts to curtail freedom, they hold very liberal views by the standards of the region, when it comes to women's and gay rights, and even the consumption of alcohol. But the most serious mistake in Salman's assertion is that he forgets - or, as with so many other issues, is ignorant of the fact - that Khomeini's most reactionary ideas, despite the Shia gloss he gave them, were taken straight from Salafi scholars.



But that is not all. This week, just to remind us that we do live in a post-truth era, Saudi Arabia hosted an anti-terrorism conference. On November 26, the crown prince inaugurated what was labelled a "mega anti-terror meeting in Riyadh". Given the recent history of the Middle East, one could say the title was a contradiction in terms - an oxymoron. Bin Salman, who some believe will be declared king very soon (presumably with the support of Donald Trump), claimed his country "will not allow such elements to tarnish the image of Islam".

Ironically the conference was taking place not far from the Hyatt Regency where a number of Saudi princes and former ministers are held on corruption charges. In some cases these relate to 'financial support' for another enemy of Saudi Arabia, Qatar. Clearly some pro-Saudi figures in the region got a little carried away by the conference: for instance, Dubai's former police chief, Dhahi Khalafan Tamim, even called for the bombing of news broadcaster *Al Jazeera*: "The alliance must bomb the machine of terrorism ... the channel of Isil, al Qa'eda and the al-Nusra front - *Al Jazeera*, the terrorists." Khalafan seems to forget that it is precisely indiscriminate bombings in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere that have allowed IS and other offshoots of al Qa'eda to recruit so readily. In March Khalafan urged Arabs to ally with *Israel* against "enemies of the Middle East" - another (veiled) attack on Iran and the region's

Shia Muslims.

Surely the first lesson for anyone seeking to lead a new alliance is not to alienate your likely supporters, yet Salman managed to do just that. The conference opening ceremony, attended by 41 countries, showed a video that included a scene of a Palestinian, clearly depicted as a terrorist, fighting Israeli occupation forces. Whether this was just incompetence or down to the new Saudi-Israeli alliance I do not know, but the reaction to the video was overwhelmingly hostile.

Altogether then, the recent period has not been a good one for Salman. By all accounts his attempt at creating chaos - some would say civil war - in Lebanon, through organising prime minister Saad Hariri's 'resignation' yielded the exact opposite result. As one Arab paper put it, in one single move the crown prince has achieved what could only have been dreamed about previously - unity amongst all Lebanese factions!

US role

All this has raised new questions about the US role in the current fiasco in the Middle East. Mark Penny, a foreign policy analyst and a regular contributor to *The American Conservative*, claimed that "the drama has left the secretary of state seething" - not least over the Hariri affair.² Penny wonders if Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and senior advisor, had kept Rex Tillerson in the

Crown prince Mohammad bin Salman and US secretary of state Rex Tillerson

dark over the Saudi Lebanon move. Secretary of state Tillerson was apparently "completely blind-sided". While he would later be accused of being "totally disengaged" from the crisis, acting assistant secretary for near east affairs David Satterfield had been in discussions with Hariri's aides in Beirut. Apparently he told Christopher Henzel, the US *chargé d'affaires* in Saudi Arabia, to meet with Hariri in Riyadh. "In Beirut, meanwhile, US ambassador Elizabeth Richard was gathering information on the crisis from Lebanese officials and passing it back to Washington."³ Apparently Tillerson had also been fuming in June, when the Saudis broke off relations with Qatar and imposed economic sanctions - a move that led to a split in the Gulf Cooperation Council and shattered US efforts to build a united anti-Iran bloc.

As readers will know, the Hariri affair descended into pure farce when he retracted his resignation. But things do not seem to be getting much better. His latest policy statement declares that "Hezbollah must keep out of the politics of other countries" (I assume Syria). Given that there are dozens of political and military groups - associated with Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran, not to mention direct military intervention in

Syria from the United States and Russia - it is difficult to see why Hezbollah should be the only group singled out for 'intervening'.

As Iran and Saudi Arabia compete for regional dominance, one should also mention one particular similarity. Take those anti-corruption arrests in Saudi Arabia - members of the Saudi royal family are amongst those being held in Riyadh (some have now been released, including the son of prince Matab Ben Abdollah). Meanwhile, in Iran, however, a number of close relatives and advisors of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran's former president, have been on trial for corruption.

Ahmadinejad has reacted by threatening to reveal government secrets and by calling the judiciary corrupt, while senior clerics have retaliated by comparing the ex-president to a hooligan or common villain. Of course, the very same judiciary oversaw the arrest, imprisonment and torture of Iranian youth who dared to contest the results of the election that re-elected Ahmadinejad president in 2009 ●

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