

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



Cameron's negotiations will leave us with both 'yes' and 'no' camps banging the chauvinist drum

- Aravindan Balakrishnan
- Left Unity NC report
- Parenting classes
- Torab Haghshenas

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Moshé Machover examines the colonial question in Lenin's wake

LETTERS



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

Learn fast

I'd like to respond to two letters. First that of Jara Handala (January 14) concerning the ever lower turnouts in union elections for senior full-time officers, such as general secretaries. Jara has done a much needed job in getting voter turnout figures that unions seem reluctant to publish, but which reveal much.

The same could be said concerning the varying support for industrial action. Activists like me see our union publications state how well supported their industrial action was, with pictures of happy picket lines, but never give any figures or say how membership support for one strike compares to a previous one. The Public and Commercial Services union could easily do this, given the number of national strikes it has called, whereas unions who only call a sector or regional strike would find it harder to do a direct comparison.

The union tops may consider such comparisons to be giving information to the enemy and demoralising members. To that I'd express my surprise that any employer does not know exactly how well (or not) industrial action was supported, as they always request workplace reports from managers. I would bet that even trade union NECs are not given that information! How does it help activists judge what we should do next if the employer has better information on the levels of support for strikes than what unions provide to their activists (let alone the ordinary members)?

Jara mentions my union, PCS, and how our general secretary, Mark Serwotka, has held that post for 15 years and was unopposed twice (2005 and 2014). This is not due to a complacent left in PCS. The Independent Left do mount a challenge for the NEC each year and they have narrowed the gap last year between themselves and the ruling Democracy Alliance long-running pact (between the PCS Left Unity and PCS Democrats factions). Jara implies the minimum number of branch nominations required (25, actually, if memory serves me correctly) is a blocking tactic. Well, that was a lot less than when the right controlled the CPSA (then PCS) on its creation.

Either the Independent Left have so little support, they cannot get more than 25 branches to support a challenge and/or most activists do not see anyone able to do the job better than Mark. Mark's workload is incredible and he does a huge number of public meetings (perhaps limited now due to his heart problems?) and addressing rallies and protests. Mark also does branch AGMs and turns up without an entourage.

I suspect support for industrial action has been dropping. 'Day here' and 'day there' one-day national strikes can only be a protest - not effective action hitting the employer. However, most members are not (yet) prepared to take the serious (unpaid) longer action that will cripple the employer. Unlike other unions, PCS has to take on the most powerful employer of all - the government. Much is made of the National Gallery dispute by some on the left. However, that was a single workplace, not a nationwide department, and it took 111 days of partially paid action to win some

concessions.

As someone who was amongst the first to support Mark Serwotka for general secretary (and every time since), I am concerned by the fact that PCS does now hide his earnings and pension from the membership, as Jara reports. He stood on a platform of not taking the full salary and when that was challenged by the right, declared he would donate substantial sums back to PCS and its fighting fund. We saw the declared amounts in the beginning, which grew smaller and smaller until no mention is made at all now.

Should a minimum number of branch nominations no longer be required? Should a rightwing opportunist, with the support of the media, but no support from branches, be able to topple Mark? Would that be democracy? Would that be in the best interests of the members? PCS regularly gets a turnout of 10% for NEC elections - better than most unions, but still pathetic and worrying for a left-controlled, fighting union.

Most members will not read election statements, as they do not know most of the candidates. Most of those voting do so for a faction recommended to them by trusted local reps. However, a contest for just general secretary would be able to be influenced by the media.

Jara is right to state that the reliance of unions on check-off (employers taking union subscriptions from members' wages and sending it on to the union) indicates complacency. However, we do not have the lay reps to go back to activists having to collect money from members in offices every month, so PCS has had to approach members to get them to switch to direct debit.

To have an average 80% switch rate is fantastic compared to the government's aim to bankrupt PCS, but to also lose 20% of members shows how some are so disconnected from their union, they have decided not to retain their membership. Some activists report that many members wanted to stay in the union, but just didn't get around to it and will soon come back. We'll see.

Now the restrictions on facility time (paid time off work to do union duties) and withdrawal of check-off are to be extended across the public sector, it will be interesting to see how some of the other much larger unions respond, which have relied on a 'servicing approach' to their members rather than the PCS's 'organising approach'. Nevertheless, the past year or two has seen PCS full-time officers having to concentrate on getting members to switch to DD to make up for where we do not have active lay reps. PCS has reduced its staffing levels, as job cuts have reduced membership levels.

Many members will not read anything their union publishes and, again, we do not have the numbers of lay reps to have workplace meetings in members' own time. Members have shown they are not willing to give up their lunch breaks or time after work to hear their union reps address them - unless there is a specific workplace issue, such as an office closure or job losses, affecting them personally.

I now turn to another superb letter, this time Paul B Smith's concerning the death of Labourism (January 7). Paul cites the backtracking of Corbyn and McDonnell on a range of issues and I have noticed this myself with growing concern.

I had registered as a Labour

supporter to vote for Corbyn and his values, but was and am wary of the Labour Party still under the control of the PLP. David Callaghan wrote a similar letter urging caution and drawing parallels between Corbyn and Foot (January 21). There have been excellent articles and letters in the *Weekly Worker* about the setting up of Momentum and what its purpose and organisation should be, whereas other left organisations have either been sniffy about the Corbyn surge or have overly bigged up Momentum, urging everyone to join Labour and 'pull it left' (good luck with that 'never tried before' strategy).

I am a longstanding activist in PCS. I have attended every CPSA and PCS conference since the mid-1980s and now speak in the main conference debates, as I have previously reported. I buy *The Socialist*, *Socialist Worker* and other left publications where I see them, sometimes the *Morning Star* (but only the *Weekly Worker* on subscription), and am on the side of revolutionary politics compared to Labourism. PCS is one of the few unions not affiliated to the Labour Party. I note that the Fire Brigades Union has decided to reaffiliate.

I am certain that some branches will be urging PCS to affiliate to the Labour Party at our annual delegate conference in May. We have not debated affiliating to Labour since the creation of PCS in 1999. I hear Mark Serwotka and the majority of the NEC are not in favour of this for now (but the left ruling the NEC are mostly Socialist Party in England and Wales). I also know a number of SPEW members in Manchester have left to join the Labour Party. Although PCS has a political fund allowing it to support candidates who back PCS policies (such as anti-Trident, anti-austerity, anti-war, anti-privatisation, etc), PCS has yet to do so despite my annual motions at conference calling for this. They have not even gone for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, let alone support that very good friend of the PCS, John McDonnell, who is always invited to address conference and goes down a storm.

If that debate takes place, it will be historic. I don't think it will even be close, though, as many will defend civil service neutrality against those who want to support Corbyn and there will be those who will cite examples of how Labour governments have done PCS no favours - especially Blair/Brown.

I do not wish to see my left, progressive union dominated by becoming a conveyor belt for full-time officers to become Labour MPs, like Unison and Unite, and every conference motion being scrutinised as to whether it will help or hinder Labour getting elected - as is the case nowadays with the major unions affiliated.

It is crystal-clear that unions bankroll the Labour Party for no obvious benefit, but are pulled to the right due to Labour's electoral considerations rather than seek to pull Labour left. The urge to be part of the Corbyn surge and jump on his bandwagon is strong. Many on the far left have got fed up with standing outside in the cold - they have poorly attended meetings, yet they look at packed Corbyn meetings that seem lovely, warm and friendly.

For me, I have received a letter inviting me to donate to the Labour Party in readiness for the May elections. It is all about getting Labour representatives in and the Tories out. Not a word about unions,

or about Labour, even under Corbyn pledging to oppose council cuts. I understand Corbyn is now full of understanding on how Labour councillors should not be opposing cuts and should set legal budgets. The whole 'donate to Labour' letter is based on the unquestioned assumption that 'Labour are better than the Tories' without a word about how Labour are different. I think Momentum should be about encouraging CLPs to go for the deselection of the 66 warmongers and any MPs who have not fought austerity cuts. It already seems that it will not do that; rather, it will resist such accountability.

The Labour right has made no concessions to the left. As other *Weekly Worker* writers have said, Labour Party unity is always on the terms of the right, not the left. Corbyn increasingly seems to me to be out of his depth. At his age, he well knows how the media treat the left. He saw how Livingstone was treated in the 1980s. He also knows about the PLP and the battles in the Labour Party. He has seen the constant undermining of himself by his party. However, he acts like he is new to all this. His trying to be a peacemaker is dangerously naive.

He will increasingly dismay all those who joined to support his values and - again, as other writers have said - they will be no match for the Labour right, who are organising against the new influx and will stifle any calls for greater democracy in the Labour Party (as Momentum also seem to be doing). I will wait and see what the 2016 Labour Party conference is like and the decisions it makes. Labour exists to win elections over and above standing up for any socialist principles if they are seen to be vote losers. It will again be 'Vote Labour, no matter how bad'.

At the moment, I'm inclined to oppose the affiliation of PCS to the Labour Party unless substantial changes are evident to their internal democracy and their actual policies. I see Corbyn as continually backtracking so soon, no doubt panicking about the May council elections. He should play the long game, look to 2020 and build a massive movement. On Trident, to a hostile soundbite media, he should have simply said: 'What do the public want - decent public services and no Trident or Trident and decimated public services?' Dead easy to understand and win millions over.

Instead, his laughable compromise angered Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Stop the War supporters on one side, but also had the right laughing at him. He cannot afford to keep making massive mistakes like this. He either has picked poor advisors or has good advisors, but appalling judgment. Either explanation makes him a liability.

I never forgot how 'Red Ken' Livingstone and his 'loony lefties' on the Greater London Council were pilloried by *The Sun* and mainstream media. I remember him appearing on BBC *Question time* with Robin Day ready to pounce on him (which he did) and yet Ken answered all the loaded questions with calm, 'common sense' advocacy. At that time I was a rightwing *Sun* reader ready for him to be slaughtered publicly. He won me and, I suspect, many others over. He didn't seem loony to me, once I heard him explain his stances. He went on to be kicked out of the Labour Party, ran for mayor of London against Blairite Labour and won (but sadly went back in to Labour). He knows

how to beat the vicious media.

Jeremy needs to learn and learn fast.

Dave Vincent
email

New Bum Blockade

"Not individuals working wherever they want, but the masses democratically controlling their collective future. Distinct national-territorial groupings determined by collective, not individual, decision-making", wrote Stephen Diamond (Letters, January 28).

I wonder if Stephen Diamond's Big Central Plan would have denied workers "freedom to work wherever the wage slave 'chooses' in a labour market" and halted the mass migration westwards during the dustbowl years? Between 1930 and 1940, approximately three million people moved out of the plains states. An estimated 300,000-400,000 (the 'Okies', 'Arkies' or 'Texies') moved to California and settled there during the 1930s. In just over a year, 86,000 people migrated to California. This number is more than the number who migrated during the 1849 gold rush. Today, about one-eighth of California's population is of Okie heritage.

Maybe all Americans should now require internal passports if they choose to travel from one state to another. California's Indigent Act, passed in 1933, made it a crime to bring indigent persons into the state. In 1936, the Los Angeles police established a border patrol, dubbed the 'Bum Blockade', at major road and rail crossings for the purpose of turning back those who lacked obvious means of support. Would Stephen have opposed Edwards v California (1941), which ruled that states had no right to restrict interstate migration by poor people or any other Americans.

Whites comprised roughly 95% of those moving and their white skins and Anglo-Saxon pedigree won the attention and sympathy that is not so readily given to other migrants who struggle for a livelihood. I wonder if Stephen would find advantages in the Chinese government's practice (I believe it has now been relaxed to a degree) of depriving Chinese citizens of welfare rights, when they move from the undeveloped, rural interior to where the jobs are.

Maybe it takes Woody Guthrie to remind us what immigration law means to people:

Some of us are illegal, and some are not wanted.

Our work contracts out and we have to move on.

Six hundred miles to that Mexican border.

They chase us like outlaws, like rustlers, like thieves.

We died in your hills, we died in your deserts,

We died in your valleys and died on your plains.

We died 'neath your trees and we died in your bushes,

Both sides of the river, we died just the same.

Woody Guthrie, 'Deportee'

Alan Johnstone
SPGB

Leveller

The next meeting of Wakefield Socialist History Group, focusing on the Levellers and the Diggers, will be held on Saturday February 13 at 1pm in the Red Shed, Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1.

One of the most prominent Levellers, John Lilburne, was born in Sunderland, the third son of Richard Lilburne, a minor country gentleman. His mother was daughter of Thomas Hixon, master of the King's Wardrobe

at Greenwich Palace. In the 1630s he was apprenticed in London to Thomas Hewson, a wholesale clothier and puritan. Through him he got to know John Bostwick, a campaigner against episcopacy.

Soon Lilburne was himself involved in the printing and distribution of unlicensed puritan books and pamphlets. It led to him being arrested in December 1637 and being taken before the Court of Star Chamber. In addition to being fined £500, he was also to be whipped at cart-tail from Fleet Prison to New Palace Yard, Westminster. There he was to stand in pillory. Then he would be imprisoned until he "conformed and admitted his guilt". Languishing in prison, he wrote the first of many pamphlets publicising the injustices against him. And when King Charles reluctantly summoned the Long Parliament in 1640, Oliver Cromwell MP seized the opportunity to highlight Lilburne's case. Parliament duly ordered his release.

When the first civil war broke out, Lilburne enlisted as captain in Lord Brooke's regiment and fought at the battle of Edgehill. He resigned his commission in April 1645, however, and was imprisoned that summer for having denounced MPs who lived in comfort, whilst common soldiers fought and died for parliament. In July 1646 he was in trouble again. He was sent to the Tower for having denounced his former commander, the Earl of Manchester, as a traitor and royalist sympathiser. There he continued to write pamphlets - smuggled out and published by friends and supporters - that drew attention to examples of hypocrisy, corruption and profiteering in high places. Lilburne wanted a new form of accountable government and whilst still in prison was associated with the drafting of the *Leveller manifesto: an agreement of the people*.

Released on bail, he hurried to support Leveller mutineers at Corkbush field and then went to London to try to build up Leveller organisation. However, he and other Leveller leaders were arrested in March 1649. He'd already attacked the new republican government in *England's new chains discovered*. But he was still found not guilty of high treason and inciting mutinies.

Lilburne died in 1657. As highlighted, Lilburne had faced a long series of trials throughout his life and became known as 'Freeborn John' because of his defence of rights, such as that to hear the accusation, face one's accusers and not to incriminate oneself. Indeed he is seen as having inspired the fifth amendment to the US constitution and is cited by many constitutional jurists and scholars.

Alan Stewart
Wakefield Socialist History Group

Defamation

The National Union of Mineworkers is disturbed by the smears against our union regarding our approach to the conflict in Ukraine. These smears have been promoted mainly by elements on the outskirts of the labour movement. Sadly, some who should know better have been willing to give air to such defamation. We at the NUM have long experience of those who would seek to sow divisions and discredit us and we have a proven record of defending ourselves when necessary.

It is shamefully claimed the NUM has joined the camp of our enemies and abandoned our history of working class internationalism. Some even asserting we have crossed into the same camp as fascists and taken the line of Nato. Let us set the record straight.

The NUM has not based its response to the Ukraine crisis on what the British or Russian media

tell us. We have not been charmed by the opportunity to sit in their TV studios and accept without question their government's line. Instead we naturally turned to our fellow miners' unions, with whom we have a friendship stretching back decades: the Trade Union of the Coal Mining Industry (PRUP) and the Independent Trade Union of Miners of Ukraine (NPGU). The very first statement issued by the NUM executive committee was clear: "The NUM supports the international principle of self-determination and expresses its support to our brothers and sisters in the miners' union, PRUP, who are calling for all interference from outside Ukraine to stop. The NUM calls for a peaceful resolution to the current issues facing the people of Ukraine and our thoughts are with all the miners in the Ukraine, who we regard as our friends."

During some of the worst fighting in Ukraine, we hosted a delegation of miners at the Durham Miners Gala in 2014 that were warmly received, yet our hospitality is now denigrated by assertions they were not miners, but national union officials from Kiev. This is untrue. The delegation was from Donbas and the speaker that addressed the gala was chairman of the Dnipropetrovsk branch of PRUP.

The NUM has sent two delegations to Ukraine; we have visited industrial areas, met national union officials, local branches and rank-and-file miners. We have also met with activists of the wider labour movement. The NUM attended and addressed the joint union congress of Miners of Ukraine on April 21. We are proud to have taken part in a protest by thousands of miners in defiance of riot police at the parliament in Kiev against pit closures.

Those attacking the NUM seek to question the legitimacy of the Ukrainian trade unions. Yet we have seen with our own eyes that the miners' unions are not slavishly following the oligarchs and the government. They are resisting as best they can pit closures, austerity and anti-union laws. The NUM is being attacked because we support fellow trade unions that appeal for solidarity instead of the armed forces that hold a third of the territory in Donbas. Despite the wishful thinking of some, Putin's Russia is not sponsoring a revived 1917-style soviet republic or a Spain of 1936. It is clear the takeover in parts of Donetsk and Luhansk area was initiated by rival oligarchs and Russia out of their own vested interests. In those areas the existing labour movement has been suppressed, trade unionists have been kidnapped, tortured and even murdered. This is common knowledge and has been reported to the international trade union movement repeatedly.

We have given our support to the Ukrainian labour movement in supporting the unity of Ukraine and of the working people of Ukraine, opposing the undemocratic division of Ukraine by force, which has been a humanitarian and economic catastrophe; it has divided working people and their labour movement.

At no time has the NUM given support to either Russian or Ukrainian far-right forces active in Ukraine - our solidarity is first and foremost with the labour movement. The NUM endorses the calls by the Ukrainian trade unions for justice for victims of the attacks on both the Kiev and Odessa trade union buildings, and of those killed on the Malaysian airline.

The situation was summed up in an address by the Union of Railway Workers of Ukraine to the

conference of its sister union, Aslef, that "Ukraine has been squeezed between an aggressive power in our east and neoliberal economic policies from the west. The working people of Ukraine are suffering from both the terrible cost of war and of austerity." NUM shares the view that it is for the Ukrainian people to determine their own future, free from external intervention from Russian or western imperialism. That is, we support the achievement of peace through self-determination, solidarity and social justice.

National Union of Mineworkers

Barnsley

Despair

Drugs, dole and despair is a description that can be applied to my home town in Cambridgeshire. The 50% of school leavers who don't have the ability or aptitude to go to university face years of unemployment or, if they are lucky, employment in low-paid, dead-end jobs.

I have a 21-year-old relative who has never worked since he left school at 16, and is currently in receipt of employment and support allowance. He's also spent time in prison for assault and not doing his community service. All his friends are either unemployed or in low-paid, dead-end jobs. Many of them take illegal drugs, particularly cannabis.

What is to be done? First, cannabis should be legalised and made available from licensed outlets. This would, as the experience of Colorado in the US shows, put most illegal drug-dealers out of business, and lead to a dramatic fall in the number of people taking heroin and other hard drugs.

Second, Jeremy Corbyn should come out and openly call for the building of one million council houses each year. This would create hundreds of thousands of jobs in the building industry, which would help to mop up youth unemployment.

Finally, I would like to point out something about my relative and his friends. None of them have any fear of the police or the prison system.

This will be of great significance in a future revolutionary situation in Britain.

John Smithee
Cambridgeshire

Enough

In the early 1990s, the Conservative government introduced the community charge, which penalised millions of hardworking families through unprecedented poll tax bills. It was abolished after much opposition and replaced with the council tax.

It is now time for the council tax to be abolished, because it is actually a poll tax imposed upon those who have contributed a lifetime to the country and who should not be taxed any further once they retire. Council tax bills are dreaded by the elderly couple who have scrimped and saved for decades and who are now compelled, when their contributions should be honoured, to pay even more in taxation, even though their income has been cut.

The average family is paying £1,500 every year, regardless of the income that they earn. I believe that we should now abolish this new poll tax imposed without democratic consultation and without consideration for the financial circumstances of those who are forced to pay.

Working people are being hammered by this pernicious and intrusive tax and it is time it was abolished forthwith. The people of this country have had enough.

Oliver Healey
Leicester

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

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

London Communist Forum

Sunday February 7, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Study of Ralph Miliband's *Parliamentary socialism*. This meeting: chapter 2 ('World War I'), section 2: 'Junior partnership'. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday February 9, 6.45pm: Introduction to social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taverton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. 'Stories, myths and ways of knowing among Kalahari hunters and herders'. Speaker: Chris Low. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Red Africa

Thursday February 4 to Sunday April 3, Wednesdays to Sundays, 12 noon to 6pm: Art, film and talks. Calvert 22 Gallery, 22 Calvert Avenue, London E2. Part of the Red Africa season. Organised by Calvert 22 Foundation: www.calvert22.org.

Gaining Momentum

Thursday February 4, 6pm: Launch event for Momentum's Teesside branch, Middlesbrough town hall, council chamber, Albert Road, Middlesbrough TS1. Speaker: Jon Lansman. Organised by Momentum: www.facebook.com/events/881079148672425.

No to Islamophobia, racism and fascism

Saturday February 6, 9.30am to 4.30pm: Unite Against Fascism national conference, NUT headquarters, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Speakers include: Diane Abbott MP, Claude Moraes MEP, Anne Swift (NUT), Lee Jasper (Black Activists Rising Against Cuts), Lindsey German (Stop the War Coalition), Weyman Bennett (UAF). Organised by UAF: <http://uaf.org.uk>.

No war in my song

Sunday February 7, 1pm to 11pm: Concert, Railway Hotel, Clifftown Road, Southend-on-Sea. Featuring a variety of anti-war musical acts. Organised by Southend Stop the War:

www.facebook.com/events/1498472323816680. Defeat the Trade Union Bill

Monday February 8 to Sunday February 14: National week of action. Organised by the TUC. Details at <http://heartunions.org>.

Britain and Palestine

Saturday February 13, 10am to 5pm: Conference, Sarum College, 19 The Close, Salisbury SP1. £25 (£12 students). Debating Britain's past and future relations with Palestine. Lunch included. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

No to Zionism and racism

Sunday February 14, 2 pm: Public meeting, Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, London NW1. Speakers: Ian Donovan, Gerry Downing. Organised by Socialist Fight: <http://socialistfight.com>.

Rage against war

Saturday February 20, 12 noon: Rally, outside Leeds Art Gallery, the Headrow, Leeds LS1.

Organised by Leeds Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/LeedsCoalitionAgainsttheWar/timeline.

Labour Representation Committee

Saturday February 20, 10am to 5pm: Special conference, 'The tasks facing the Labour left and LRC'. Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Organised by Labour Representation Committee: <http://l-r-c.org.uk>.

Sink Trident renewal

Tuesday February 23, 7.30pm: Public meeting. Stantonbury theatre, Milton Keynes MK14.

Organised by Milton Keynes Stop the War Coalition: <http://mkstopwar.org.uk>.

Who is watching you?

Friday February 26, 7pm start: Public meeting, Chats Palace, 42-44 Brooksby's Walk, London E9. No to state infiltration of protest groups. Speakers include John McDonnell.

Organised by Undercover Research Group: <http://undercoverresearch.net>.

Revolutionary or dreamer?

Saturday February 27, 1pm: Public meeting, Red Shed, Vicarage Street, Wakefield. The life of William Morris.

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

Organise the unorganised

Saturday March 5, 10am start: Yorkshire conference of National Shop Stewards Network, Ebor Court, Skinner Street, Leeds LS1.

Organised by Yorkshire Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/Yorkshire-Shop-Stewards-Network-156443814473411.

Imperialism, war and the Middle East

Saturday March 5, 10.30am: Public meeting, Institute room, Liverpool Quaker Meeting House, 22 School Lane, Liverpool L1. Speaker: Yasmine Mather.

Organised by *Critique Journal*: www.critiquejournal.net.

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.

LEFT CULTURE

Devotion to dogma

Sadly, notes Eddie Ford, political madness is not confined to the Workers' Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought

Last week the 75-year-old Aravindan Balakrishnan (aka 'comrade Bala') was sentenced to 23 years in jail for a string of offences, including rape, sexual assault, child cruelty and false imprisonment - the last two charges relating to his daughter, Katy Morgan-Davies, who is now 33.

The court heard how the leader of the Workers' Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought - such as it was - operated a "dehumanising and degrading" domestic regime, terrifying his small coterie of female followers (or subjects) into thinking he could read their minds and had "god-like" powers. These powers involved mastery of 'Jackie' (Jehovah, Allah, Christ, Krishna, Immortal Easwaran), and an "electronic satellite warfare machine" built by the Communist Party of China/People's Liberation Army, which could strike them dead if they ever stepped out of line. Balakrishnan also claimed that it was a challenge to his leadership that had resulted in the 1986 space shuttle disaster.

All this is perhaps not quite so surprising when we discover that Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot and Saddam Hussein were - in the words of Morgan-Davies - his "his gods and his heroes" that he wished to "emulate": therefore you "couldn't criticise them". Indeed, according to her, her father was using the sect or collective as a "pilot unit" to learn how to control people before taking over the world - presumably appointing himself as global revolutionary dictator. But so great were his delusions, revealed Morgan-Davies, that at times he worried that Mao and the others might act as a "rival to him" - when instead they should be "secondary to him", as he wanted to be "bigger than all of them". We are also informed that he wished three million had died in the Tiananmen Square massacre.

Balakrishnan raped two women on the basis that he was "purifying them" of the "bourgeois culture" in the outside world, the jurors were told. He began sexually abusing his first victim when his wife, Chandra, was in a diabetic-induced coma. She met him at a demonstration when she was 23, saying he "had the air of an important man with authority" and quickly became entranced by him. The other victim was a Malaysian nurse who initially found Workers' Institute meetings "welcoming and friendly", but was repeatedly sexually assaulted over a 10-year period.

During the trial, Morgan-Davies detailed how she was regularly beaten and prohibited from going to school or making friends - she never played with another child and if visitors came to the house she was hidden away. Nor did she ever see a doctor or dentist. Balakrishnan told her that the front door had to be locked at all times to keep out the "fascist agents" planted amongst the neighbours and people living around them. Morgan-Davies was so lonely that she would talk to the taps in the bathroom, and tried to make friends with the rats and mice that scuttled into the kitchen. She felt like a "caged bird with clipped wings" and is still "terrified" of "saying the wrong thing", having spent her entire life feeling "small, stupid and inadequate".

Originally she was told she was a "waif", but later found out that she was actually the daughter of a Balakrishnanite, Sian Davies (aka 'comrade Sian'). The latter died under unknown circumstances in 1997, falling from a window on Christmas



Carrying pictures of Chairman Mao

Eve. Morgan-Davies recalls hearing screaming and shouting on that night, seeing Sian Davies lying in a pool of blood below the bathroom window and pleading with Balakrishnan to kill her (an open verdict was declared). Sian Davies was not allowed to hug or breastfeed her daughter because she was "collective property".

Morgan-Davies said she was forced to record everything she did in minute detail in her diaries, including exactly what she ate and her visits to the lavatory. She noted a daily percentage of how much her "lord and master" loved or hated her - ie, "Comrade Bala loves me 40%" or "hates me 60%" - and "Comrade Bala says I am 89% super-idiot". She became "number one criminal" for making up words, which only Balakrishnan had the right to do, because he was the "natural centre of all things". Another diary entry recounts how "Comrade Bala" took her into the garden and told members of his collective to "beat her" if she cuddled them.

In the end, Morgan-Davies managed to escape after memorising the number for an anti-slavery charity she saw on television. Encouragingly, she has now developed an interest in actual politics and joined the Labour Party.

Strange

Though obviously guilty of serious offences, it is open to doubt as to whether it was just or humane to give a 75-years-old man a 23-year jail term. Particularly when you take into account Morgan-Davies's opinion that Balakrishnan was a "narcissist and a psychopath" - an assessment essentially shared by the examining psychiatrist and mentioned by the judge in her summing up. His total lack of remorse or, seemingly, even any awareness that he was in trouble should be taken more as evidence of a serious personality disorder than as justification for an excessive punishment perhaps more appropriate for a multiple killer - surely

hospital treatment is what the situation called for.

Leaving that aside for now, there is no doubt that his Workers' Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought was a *very strange* organisation right from the very beginning - never mind where it eventually ended up. In fact, Steve Rayner, now the James Martin professor of science and civilisation at Oxford University, focused on the group as part of his doctoral research on the organisational dynamics of the British far left and their propensity to entertain millenarian ideas of social change.¹

In 1974 Balakrishnan was expelled from the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist) for "splittist activities" and "opposition to dialectical materialism". In return, he scornfully called them the "Communist Party of Elizabeth (Most-Loyal)" and set-up the rival 'institute' - also launching his own publication, the *South London Workers' Bulletin*, which never missed an opportunity to vehemently denounce his former comrades of the CPE(M-L), and just about everybody else, for being "fascists", "running dogs", "agents of imperialism" and so forth.²

After the death of the "beloved" Mao in 1976, the 'institute' opened the Mao Zedong Memorial Centre in Brixton and went out on demonstrations carrying placards of his successor, Chairman Hua Guofeng - until he fell out of favour with the majority faction in the bureaucracy after four short years and was ousted by the clique around Deng Xiaoping.³ Balakrishnan's group now regarded itself as a "component" of the Communist Party of China, arguing that the CPC and Mao were on the "verge of launching the final offensive" to "dismantle the old world of colonialism, imperialism and hegemonism and build the new world of socialism".⁴

The 'institute' started to produce spectacular leaflets predicting the overthrow of the "British fascist state"

and the beginnings of the "world revolution" led by the CPC/PLA. In fact, we learnt, the PLA would launch a "revolutionary invasion" of Britain by 1980 - the bridgehead being the liberated zone of Brixton. This was the "first stable base area in the imperialist heartlands", where whole families were free from "fascist rules and regulations" - a fact, Balakrishnan assured his followers, that has "driven the British bourgeoisie up the wall". Developing the theme, a 'perspectives' document from 1977 confidently stated that the British population was moving in a clear "revolutionary direction" - primarily thanks to the Workers' Institute "successfully" conducting "vigorous programmes to uphold Chairman Mao's revolutionary line amidst the mass upsurge in Britain". And if you went to certain pubs in Brixton at this time, occasionally someone might get on a table and wave the *Little Red Book* about.

Much to the mirth of the left, and showing the final descent into complete lunacy, Balakrishnan's group asserted that the "international dictatorship of the proletariat" had been "established covertly" in 1977 by "our party" - ie, the CPC. You are actually living under socialism: it's just that you don't know it yet. The fact that a diarist in *The Times* reprinted some of the group's material that year for the amusement of its readers only proved to Balakrishnan that the "hired scribes of the bourgeoisie" and "their masters" are "well aware of the danger of the rapid growth and development of the Workers' Institute in the past four years to their class interests". Maoists are, of course, renowned for their sense of humour.

Unsurprisingly, the Mao Zedong Memorial Centre was subject to constant police monitoring and a number of members were issued with deportation orders - their persistent refusal to recognise the legitimacy of the courts led to further harassment and imprisonment. Eventually, under circumstances that still have not been satisfactorily explained, the police raided the centre in March 1978 and it was closed down shortly afterwards. For a short period afterwards, meetings were held at the University College London Union, but by 1981 the 'institute' had effectively gone underground - apparently it moved some 15 times to different addresses in south London.

Insanity

On one level, Robert Griffiths, general secretary of the 'official' Communist Party of Britain, was quite right to say a few years ago that "if one were to be brutally honest" the Workers' Institute "were more of psychiatric interest than political interest", as they "had nothing to do with the mainstream leftwing and communist politics of the day".⁵ Balakrishnan himself clearly suffers from a severe mental health problem, and even in the 1970s most people on the far left considered him and his 'institute' to be totally nuts.

Then again, on another level, Griffiths is quite wrong - mad politics drives you crazy, not the other way round. In certain respects, the Workers' Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and its devotion to dogma is a representative example of the British left - albeit in an extreme or concentrated form. Take Gerry Healey's Workers Revolutionary Party - not as mad as the Workers' Institute,

true, but not far off it and arguably more destructive. You can see obvious similarities not only with regards to sexual abuse and rape, but also when it comes to promoting a world view which is *patently false*. When the WRP first came out with its line that we were living under a Bonapartist dictatorship and on the edge of a military coup - so sleep with your boots on as the revolution is about to happen - you might have conceded generously that, whilst the comrades were wrong, it was worth having a *discussion* about it. But to repeat the same thing 20 or 30 years later is just madness. Healey and the then WRP leadership may not have been clinically insane, but they were definitely *socially* insane.

Not entirely dissimilarly, there is the Socialist Workers Party and its frighteningly bureaucratic internal regime. It may not have had a Gerry Healey or an Aravindan Balakrishnan, but it certainly had comrade Delta - and at first the apparatus automatically rallied around him, attempting to protect him from accusations of sexual abuse. Or how about when our SWP comrades told us that the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85 was an "extreme form of the downturn"? You could hardly make it up. Dogma run amok.

Then there is the Socialist Party in England and Wales - which after years of deep entryism, suddenly told us in 1991 that the Labour Party was now a bourgeois party pure and simple. Of course, that was totally wrong - but, in the circumstances when SPEW's predecessor, the Militant Tendency, was being driven out by the right, it was to a degree understandable. But not to say that they got it wrong *now*, when Labour has its most leftwing leadership ever under the Corbyn-McDonnell team, is another example of ideological and social 'madness'.

For that matter, what about the CPB itself? Its programme, *Britain's road to socialism*, would have us believe that "China's communists" have "placed greatest emphasis on economic and social development" - so "state power is being used to combine economic planning and public ownership with private capital and market mechanisms, with the aim of building a socialist society in its primary stage". *Sheer fantasy*. If Robert Griffiths *really* believes that, then he is only a few steps removed from the delusions of 'Comrade Bala'.

In other words, 'political madness' is not confined to the Workers' Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.

What the left desperately needs is theory that can be tested against reality. Theory that is open to criticism and open to change - and sometimes to *abandonment*. Getting things wrong is not a crime: the world is a very complex place, after all. But to keep repeating an established error is a crime - a crime against Marxism in any case ●

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Notes

1. 'The classification and dynamics of sectarian forms of organisation: grid/group perspectives on the far-left in Britain': <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1349448/1/D32160.pdf>.
2. The CPE(M-L) eventually mutated into the deeply weird and Enverist Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist).
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hua_Guofeng.
4. www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk/highide/wimlmzt.
5. www.channel4.com/news/slave-house-couple-lambeth-leaders-1970s-political-cult.

LEFT UNITY



Conceived in the image of Greece's Syriza

Missing the bigger picture

Saturday January 30 saw what should have been the final meeting of Left Unity's currently constituted national council before the internal elections open in March. Around 20 comrades attended the meeting in central London - a similar number to the last NC, but this represents a considerable depletion from those originally elected last year. The reason, of course, is blindingly obvious: to misquote Harold Macmillan, 'Events, dear readers, events' - particularly certain events relating to the Labour Party.

And, of course, those events have taken their toll on the LU membership, with scores resigning to join Labour. They were joined soon after the NC meeting by two more members of the LU leadership - membership organiser Simon Hardy and media officer Tom Walker.

After a brief financial report from national treasurer Andrew Burgin, we heard from comrade Hardy - his final act before quitting. LU is continuing to haemorrhage members, he said - most, like him, are joining Labour and/or Momentum. It is thought, however, that LU still has between 1,260 and 1,300 paying members. But branches are collapsing and merging across bigger and bigger geographical areas, with a few exceptions. Some comrades put this down to organisational matters - not enough contact work, etc - but, as Tom Walker (also attending his final LU meeting) correctly pointed out, this is clearly a political issue, not an organisational one. Jack Conrad from the Communist Platform agreed, commenting that, because of its nature, LU was always likely to suffer from an internal crisis triggered by external events, simply because there is very little agreement beyond the basics on most questions: Jeremy Corbyn's election had hastened and intensified the current crisis.

There was then a brief discussion on campaigning priorities led by national secretary Kate Hudson, where there was some contention over prioritising anti-Trident work. The usual list of worthy causes was reeled off: housing; austerity; migration, etc.

Next up, we had a motion from comrades Hardy and Burgin on Momentum and elections. This was contentious, mostly for the

wrong reasons. Points one through six amounted essentially to 'Keep Momentum open; support the left within it against the right' - where the assumption is that the left consists of groups like the Socialist Party in England and Wales. Additionally it implied uncritical and unconditional support for Corbyn. Point seven also committed LU not to stand against Labour while Corbyn remains leader. This was a problem for our comrades in Wigan, who were planning to stand in local elections and the debate brought out the confused (or, in the words of comrade Hudson, "fudged") nature of the conference decision on this question. As comrades may remember, conference voted to "suspend our national electoral work" for the time being in view of Corbyn's victory. This could be interpreted as applying to all electoral work nationally or only to national elections, depending on your preferred stance.

Comrade Conrad suggested that the nature and trajectory of Momentum will be decided next weekend at the first meeting of its national committee on February 6. Accepted wisdom is that it is pretty much a done deal and the meeting will agree that only Labour members can vote on Labour issues or stand for positions and that Momentum will seek to affiliate to the Labour Party. The comrade continued that, although unfortunately it seems that supporters of non-Labour groups will be barred from distributing their material at all Momentum meetings, the correct orientation was to join the fight within Labour, not 'turn outwards' towards 'the movements' - as many on the left, including within LU, advocate. This is not about cheerleading Corbyn, but about transforming the Labour Party into a vehicle to promote the interests of the working class - as Trotsky said, to transform it into a "united front of a special kind".

Jon Duveen said he did not understand this idea of transforming Labour into a united front, so we should just forget it (if that is comrade Duveen's general approach to politics, we will probably be forgetting quite a lot of things). Susan Pashkoff felt that Momentum had been "lost" and that we need to focus on campaigns and campaigning groups, while comrade Hudson asked whether the intention

of the motion was to help win a Corbyn victory in 2020 or to avoid jeopardising our relationship with Momentum. Comrade Walker felt that to stand against Labour was the most absurd sectarianism, which would prevent LU from engaging with the huge movement that had developed around the Corbyn campaign.

For my part, I argued that Corbynism outside the Labour Party did not make sense. However, we should encourage people to join the Labour Party in order to equip it with Marxist principles and a Marxist programme. Others, including Anna Bluston, thought that was mistaken - if people want to leave and join the Labour Party, then they should just go ahead, but she for one was staying in LU. One argument justifying not participating in Momentum was that comrades felt they would not be able to pursue existing campaigning work, such as against Trident, etc, if they took part. It seems odd that the campaigns mentioned were of the 'motherhood and apple pie' variety - who on the left is going to argue against them? The whole debate seemed to be missing the point.

In the end, points one to six were passed - but amended to tone down the unconditional support for Corbyn. Point seven was referred to the next NC, which has been brought forward to February 20 - the thinking being that by this time we will know to what degree Momentum will be open to those outside the Labour Party.

Referendum

After lunch there was a debate around a motion presented by Tom Walker on the European Union referendum. The comrade wanted LU to support the campaign for a progressive 'in' vote, Another Europe is Possible. He said that, while he did not have any illusions in the EU, there are progressive elements worth defending within it, such as the free movement of people, employment rights and so on. There was also the concern as to what would happen to non-British nationals living in the UK following a 'no' vote. To be honest, the general tone was of 'lesser evilism'.

Dave Landau spoke against the motion and called for an "abstention" in the referendum campaign. He compared this approach to the 2002

French presidential election, where much of the left urged supporters to "hold their noses and vote Jacques Chirac" rather than let Jean-Marie Le Pen potentially win. Comrade Landau and others made the point that, while there may be free(ish) movement of people within the EU, there is still 'fortress Europe' - one only need look at those risking their lives to flee Syria to see the effects of European anti-immigration policies. I argued that, while I could see the motivation for such a motion - in stark contrast to the protectionist and xenophobic position of much of the left - it should not be supported. We should not be taking sides with David Cameron and whatever unpleasant negotiated deal he wangles: we should take an independent working class position - which means calling not for "abstention", but for a boycott.

Kate Hudson thought the Another

Europe is Possible campaign was broadly in line with the position adopted at conference and so, in the absence of anything better, we were duty-bound to accept the motion. Comrade Conrad argued against the motion and stated that, while the EU is reformable, it is not reformable into socialism. The motion was passed with 12 in favour, three against and three abstentions.

The last part of the meeting agreed to re-establish a working party on LU's constitution and on 'safe spaces'/code of conduct. We then went through a list of motions carried over from conference to be debated at future NCs. Those where the movers are either individuals who are no longer members, or branches that no longer exist will fall by default. I do not envy the next batch of comrades elected to the NC ●

Sarah McDonald

Fighting fund

Ever welcoming

Despite brilliant last-minute efforts from several comrades, we didn't quite manage to raise the £399 in four days we needed in order to reach our £1,750 fighting fund target for January.

Three comrades answered the appeal I made a week ago to click on that PayPal button! Thanks very much, comrades DB (£50), MD (£20) and TT (£12) - the last two coming up with donations on top of their usual subscriptions. Two others - comrades RK (£50) and BB (£40) - used that other speedy method of payment I urged last week: bank transfer. And, on top of that, PM came up with his usual £100 standing order.

The £282 received was a pretty impressive haul in just four days. But we were still a bit shy, our final total being £1,633 - leaving us with a shortfall of £117 that we really ought to make up in February, even though it's the shortest month (despite 2016 being a leap year!).

And we are off to a useful start, with £201 received in the first four days. That entire amount came in the form of start-of-the-month standing orders, by the way, with 18 contributions ranging from £5 to £30. There were two of the latter (thanks to TB and SW), plus a handy £20 from DL.

But nothing at all has come our way in the post since last week. So, now that we've started a new month, I don't mind getting my hands on those cheques and postal orders one little bit! And, of course, if you are an online reader - there were 3,260 of you over the last seven days - then that PayPal button is ever welcoming!

Let's smash right through that £1,750 barrier in February! ●

Robbie Rix

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

THEORY

New context, new focus

In the second of three articles, Moshé Machover examines the colonial question in Lenin's wake¹

Following World War I and the October revolution, most revolutionary Marxists who had not been swept in the patriotic maelstrom that wrecked the Second International regrouped in communist parties affiliated to the Communist International.

In this nascent communist movement, the pre-1918 debates on national self-determination had lost much of their topicality. Those old debates were primarily concerned with the subordinate and oppressed nationalities in the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires. However, the situation of most of these nationalities changed dramatically following the war.

On the one hand, the international bourgeoisie, now under increasingly confident American leadership, adopted the principle of national self-determination, urged by Woodrow Wilson:

National aspirations must be respected; peoples may now be dominated and governed only by their own consent. 'Self-determination' is not a mere phrase. It is an imperative principle of actions which statesmen will henceforth ignore at their peril.²

Colonial peoples had been explicitly excluded from self-determination a month earlier by Wilson himself, in his famous 14-point programme, and were offered a hypocritical fudge as consolation prize. Wilson's fifth point stated:

A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the [colonial] government whose title is to be determined.³

But in Europe the imperialist victors regarded the formation of bourgeois nation-states from the ruins of the old continental empires as serving their interests, and they applied national self-determination proactively to formerly subordinate nations of the now defunct Austro-Hungarian empire, as well as to those of the former Russian empire which were not included in the new Soviet state.

On the other hand, the first constitution of the Soviet state (1918) granted the "workers and peasants" of each of its peoples "the right to decide ... at their plenary sessions of their soviets ... whether or not they desire to participate, and on what basis, in the federal government and other federal soviet institutions."⁴ For the mainstream of the communist movement, this somewhat vague provision resolved the problem of these nationalities.⁵

One way or the other, most of the central- and east-European nationalities whose right to self-determination had been debated in the Second International were now either ensconced in their own independent bourgeois states or happily liberated by the October revolution. The question of these nationalities was upstaged in the Comintern by the colonial question.

Colonial allies

But the liberation struggle of colonial peoples was now felt to have immediate strategic importance. This had not been so in the time of the Second International, when even the left, resolutely opposed to colonialism,



Comintern: Leninist-Trotskyist tradition

tended to assume that the socialist revolution in the developed countries would herald the liberation of colonial and semi-colonial peoples. Now the liberation struggle of these peoples was assigned an active role in helping to bring down the world capitalist order and facilitating the victory of socialism.

This major political shift was underpinned by a combination of interrelated theoretical notions, promoted by Lenin and his co-thinkers, about the nature of the contemporary epoch and the state of the post-war world. First, there was the idea that imperialism was a new phase of capitalism. Second, that this phase was terminal. And third, that the Russian Revolution was but the inaugural act, ushering revolutionary upheaval on a global scale.

The belief that imperialism was a recent development, dating from the final decades of the 19th century, was shared by Lenin and other contemporary Marxists who wrote on the subject, including Parvus, Hilferding and Luxemburg; it can be traced back to Kautsky, the most influential Marxist theoretician of the Second International.⁶ But Lenin went further in regarding this phase as heralding capitalism's impending demise. His well-known pamphlet, written in 1916 and published in mid-1917, was entitled *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*. Was "highest" supposed to mean 'highest so far' or 'as high as it can get'? That Lenin had the latter meaning in mind is borne out by a remark he makes near the end of the pamphlet: "From all that has been said in this book on the economic essence of imperialism, it follows that we must define it as capitalism in transition, or, more precisely, as moribund capitalism."⁷

"Moribund" means 'about to die' or 'in terminal decline'. Moreover, in the immediate post-war years this looked quite plausible. It did not seem unreasonable to expect that the October revolution would be followed by socialist revolutionary upheavals in advanced capitalist countries.

In this new worldwide struggle, liberation movements in the colonies would be objectively important allies of the socialist revolution, because they were ranged against a common enemy: imperialism. Even where

these liberation movements are led by bourgeois or petty bourgeois elements and have 'bourgeois-democratic' nationalist aims, they would nevertheless undermine world imperialism and thereby help to bring about the demise of moribund capitalism.

A key document expressing these ideas is Lenin's *Draft theses on national and colonial questions for the second congress of the Communist International*, dated June 5 1920.⁸ In this document Lenin addresses briefly the question of national minorities and underprivileged nations in advanced capitalist countries - he mentions explicitly two examples: Ireland and the American negroes (!) - but his main focus is on the colonies:

The world political situation has now placed the dictatorship of the proletariat on the order of the day. World political developments are of necessity concentrated on a single focus - the struggle of the world bourgeoisie against the Soviet Russian Republic, around which are inevitably grouped, on the one hand, the Soviet movements of the advanced workers in all countries, and, on the other, all the national liberation movements in the colonies and among the oppressed nationalities, who are learning from bitter experience that their only salvation lies in the Soviet system's victory over world imperialism.

Consequently, one cannot at present confine oneself to a bare recognition or proclamation of the need for closer union between the working people of the various nations: a policy must be pursued that will achieve the closest alliance, with Soviet Russia, of all the national and colonial liberation movements. The form of this alliance should be determined by the degree of development of the communist movement in the proletariat of each country, or of the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement of the workers and peasants in backward countries or among backward nationalities.

Lenin makes it clear that the "closest alliance" he advocates is temporary and conditional, by no means amounting to merger; communists

should maintain their programmatic and organisational independence:

With regards to the more backward states and nations, in which feudal or patriarchal and patriarchal-peasant relations predominate, it is particularly important to bear in mind: ...

- the need for a struggle against the clergy and other influential reactionary and medieval elements in backward countries;
- the need to combat pan-Islamism and similar trends, which strive to combine the liberation movement against European and American imperialism with an attempt to strengthen the positions of the khans, landowners, mullahs, etc ...
- the need for a determined struggle against attempts to give a communist colouring to bourgeois-democratic liberation trends in the backward countries; the Communist International should support bourgeois-democratic national movements in colonial and backward countries only on condition that, in these countries, the elements of future proletarian parties, which will be communist not only in name, are brought together and trained to understand their special tasks: ie, those of the struggle against the bourgeois-democratic movements within their own nations. The Communist International must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement, even if it is in its most embryonic form.

Two early attempts of this kind were alliances formed by the Comintern with the Turkish and Chinese nationalist movements, led respectively by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Chiang Kai-shek. Neither Turkey nor China were colonies, but former imperial powers that had been defeated and assigned the status of semi-colonies. In both cases alliance with the Comintern was advantageous to the nationalists, but ended disastrously for the local communists. The world capitalist order was not nearly so frail as to be genuinely threatened by these nationalist movements, whose real aim was to accommodate their countries in this world order rather than to overthrow it, notwithstanding occasional protestations to the contrary.

Split of the Leninist tradition

At first it was possible to hope that the defeats of workers' revolutions outside the Soviet Union were temporary setbacks. But, as the 1920s wore on, such hopes could only be sustained by increasing doses of unrealistic faith. At that point Leninism - or, more correctly, the movement that claimed to uphold the Leninist tradition - underwent a major historical split.

The mainstream majority, led by Stalin, accepted in effect that a world socialist revolution was not a realistic prospect for some time to come. Indeed, while vocally professing socialism in name, it rejected it in essence by giving the old word a new perverted meaning. 'Socialism' was redefined to describe the tyrannical regime set up in the USSR, in which the working class was alienated, atomised, exploited and oppressed. The Stalinised 'official' communist parties, while professing to struggle for worldwide proletarian power, were in effect turned into obedient instruments of that 'socialist' state. In the colonies, national liberation was regarded as a first, separate 'bourgeois-democratic' stage. The second stage, that of 'socialism' (in the perverted sense), was deferred until eventual incorporation in the Soviet bloc. Nationalist movements, struggles for national liberation, were now judged according to how they related to the

USSR. Independence of the workers' movement was abandoned, where that suited Soviet foreign policy.

The dissident minority that split or was ejected from the Comintern coalesced for the most part under the leadership of Trotsky. It continued to adhere to the old Leninist creed, in spirit as well as in word. In particular, it continued to stand by the strategy of the *Draft theses*, which is substantially endorsed in the section on "backward countries" of Trotsky's 1938 *Transitional programme*, the founding document of the Fourth International.⁹

But this loyalty to 1920 Leninism came at a cost: denial of reality. The *Transitional programme* echoes and amplifies Lenin's 1916 and 1920 diagnosis and prognosis. In 1916 Lenin had described imperialism - the "highest" stage into which capitalism entered in the late 19th century - as "capitalism in transition". Trotsky's 1938 document echoes this description in its very title and repeatedly in the whole text: the entire current historical epoch was "transitional". Lenin had used a quasi-medical metaphor to clarify what he meant by this description: namely, capitalism was "moribund". Trotsky sharpens this diagnosis: the heading atop the title *Transitional programme* is: *The death agony of capitalism*. How much closer to death could it get?

Marx famously wrote that "no social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed".¹⁰ With this obviously in mind, Trotsky claims in the preamble to the *Transitional programme* that by the time of writing capitalism had indeed exhausted its potential for developing the productive forces, thus satisfying Marx's necessary condition for perishing:

The economic prerequisite for the proletarian revolution has already in general achieved the highest point of fruition that can be reached under capitalism. Mankind's productive forces stagnate. Already new inventions and improvements fail to raise the level of material wealth.

With hindsight we can see quite clearly that this claim is false. Since 1938 there have been at least two technological revolutions in industry - scientific-technical (1940-70), information and telecommunication (1985-2000) - and the start of a third one, exemplified by smart robots, such as the driverless car, and by nanotechnology. In agriculture there has been the green revolution of the 1970s and the current one, based on genetic modification. The level of material wealth today is very much greater than in 1938 - although, of course, it is very unequally spread.

Moreover, during the alleged "death agony" of capitalism, this mode of production has spread to vast new areas of the globe and encompassed huge numbers of human beings not previously engaged in it. (The capitalist system has long been globally hegemonic, but until relatively recently large areas of the world and a majority of humans, including a majority of direct producers, were not directly involved in capitalist relations of production.)

Trotsky goes on to imply that, while the material conditions for a proletarian revolution "have not only 'ripened' - they have begun to get somewhat rotten", the revolution has failed to materialise because of "the crisis of the revolutionary leadership". The working class is disastrously misled by social democrats and Stalinists.

This proposition is essentially counter-factual, and as such is impossible to conclusively refute (or indeed to prove). Had the international proletariat been better led, would it have been able successfully to achieve

political power? Was an absence of proper leadership all that stood between humanity and socialism? There is hardly any evidence for this. If it were true, then surely we would have witnessed major widespread working class revolutionary upheavals that were let down by deficient or treacherous leadership. However, the only major country in which something like this occurred after the early 1920s is Spain (which is duly mentioned by Trotsky). But in any case, from an orthodox Marxist point of view, if Trotsky was wrong about the maturity of the material conditions for the demise of capitalism - incapacity for further development of the productive forces - then an excellent leadership would not have availed for the proletariat to overthrow this social order.

In 1938, on the eve of World War II (which Trotsky correctly predicted), the unreality of the *Transitional programme* may not have been evident. But orthodox Trotskyists go on repeating the same claims even today, long after they have been refuted. This continued denial of reality is buttressed by an over-generous reinterpretation of the terms, "moribund", "death agony" and "transitional epoch".

As an aside, I must make an elementary philosophical point. Any strategy requires two sorts of input: a general theory about how the real world works; and data about the actual state of reality. But we live in an uncertain universe: no general theory is flawless, and no-one can have complete knowledge of the current state of the world. Any strategy we adopt, any decision we make, can only be based on a provisional theory and partial information. Therefore a judgment as to whether a past strategy or decision was correct or mistaken *at the time* must be relative to that past time and to what was known then. If a decision or strategy turns out *in retrospect* to have failed, it does not follow that it was faulty at the time it was devised, given the information available at that time. Hindsight makes all the difference: we are not entitled to use it to indict those who acted without its benefit. But it is a valuable asset, which it is unwise to waste by sticking to a strategy that may have seemed reasonable when formulated, but has since been confuted by subsequent events.

However, from the plain fact that capitalism has not been moribund since 1880 or thereabouts, and that it has not been undergoing a prolonged death agony since 1917 or 1938, but has *so far* been able to recover from major crises, develop the productive forces, globalise and spread to new domains, it does not follow that it will go on like this indefinitely. Although several cries of 'Wolf, wolf!' have proved to be spurious, it would be foolish to assume that the wolf will not materialise, perhaps pretty soon. Capitalism is certainly not eternal. It will eventually come up against a combination of internal contradictions and external constraints, and will then be ripe for overthrow. Indeed, there are currently some indications that the capitalist system may be going into a tailspin. Whether it will restabilise or crash to its doom will be known only in retrospect. The former seems more likely, but revolutionary socialists ought to be prepared for either eventuality.

Decolonisation

Between the two world wars hardly any colony became independent. Two partial but notable exceptions were Egypt and Iraq. Neither were colonies in the strict sense. Egypt was a British protectorate, which was granted independence in 1922, following a popular revolution. Iraq was ruled by Britain under a League of Nations mandate and was granted formal

independence in 1932.

Gravely weakened by World War I, Britain could no longer sustain direct political control of these countries. Instead, it relegated the task of safeguarding property rights, and especially British investments, to formally independent but compliant monarchies. British military presence was reduced to relatively small garrisons, left to secure the British-controlled Suez Canal (vital gateway to India) in Egypt, and oil assets in Iraq.

This mode of decolonisation, exceptional at the time, was followed on a grand scale after World War II. The main colonial powers, Britain and France, were totally exhausted and within four decades after that war gave up almost all of their colonial possessions. The same applied to the lesser colonial powers, Holland, Belgium and Portugal. Indirect imperialist ('neocolonial') control of formally independent countries was, of course, favoured and urged by the now undisputed capitalist hegemon, the USA.

The protection of property was left in reliable local hands. In some cases, local leaders who were not considered sufficiently safe for capital were assassinated, mysteriously disappeared or killed in suspicious accidents. Several such incidents occurred in former French colonies, where the victims included Ruben Um Nyobé and his successor, Félix-Roland Moumié (Cameroon); Barthélemy Boganda (Central African Republic); and Mehdi Ben-Barka (Morocco, assassinated with Israeli assistance). Victims in former Portuguese colonies included Eduardo Mondlane (Mozambique); and Amílcar Cabral (Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde). And in the very heart of darkness, Belgian colonialism (with American and British complicity) was guilty of the murder of Patrice Lumumba.

In many colonies - beginning with the greatest, India - decolonisation occurred without a war of liberation. But some colonial peoples had to wage bitter armed struggle before the old master let go of them. Britain's colonial wars included those in Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus and Aden; France fought for years before withdrawing from Indochina and Algeria; Holland waged a colonial war in Indonesia; and Portugal fought in its African colonies, until the blowback from these wars led to the Carnation Revolution in Portugal itself.

The Portuguese case is the only one that came even remotely close to Trotsky's scenario of permanent revolution, foreshadowed in Lenin's *Draft theses*: colonial liberation struggles lead without interruption to a movement towards a socialist revolution in both colonies and metropolis. But in the case of Portugal this movement was not actually consummated. In any case, as Trotskyists are the first to point out, a socialist revolution cannot come to fruition if it is confined to an underdeveloped ex-colony or even to a small European country, such as Portugal.

The Trotskyist permanent revolution strategy failed - and was bound to fail - in the decolonisation era following World War II, because the global situation that it presupposed did not materialise. The strategy envisaged a stagnant, moribund world capitalism in its death agony, fighting off a revolutionary upsurge of a working class that has shaken off its discredited social democratic and Stalinist leaderships.

Instead, global capitalism recovered remarkably quickly from the devastation of the war and enjoyed a period of prolonged vigour and growth. Under unchallenged US hegemony, it confronted not a worldwide proletarian upsurge, but a Stalinist bloc that split into three parts.

The context in which decolonisation took place in the post-war period turned out not to be transition from capitalism to socialism, but the cold war.

Viewed in this context, it is perhaps not surprising that - as one of the ironies that history so often insists on serving up - a Stalinist counterpart or caricature of the Trotskyist permanent revolution scenario did materialise in some important struggles against colonial or quasi-colonial oppression. A genuine liberation struggle led without interruption to establishing a Stalinoid state that joined the Soviet bloc - first in Yugoslavia, then in China (although these two subsequently split off from the bloc), later on in Cuba, and finally in Vietnam. In a parody of Lenin's *Draft theses*, several former colonies - such as India under Nehru, Indonesia under Sukarno and Egypt under Nasser - while not going beyond the 'bourgeois-democratic' stage, became useful allies of the Soviet bloc in the cold war.

Some general lessons

Looking back, it is clear that revolutionary socialists in the Leninist-Trotskyist tradition entertained exaggerated hopes that colonial liberation struggles would contribute to the overthrow of global capitalism or be capable of being transformed without interruption into revolutionary struggles for socialism. I have argued that the reason why these hopes could not be fulfilled is that they were premised on a mistaken assessment of the state of the world, the expectation that capitalism was terminally stagnant and moribund.

Of course, all this does not mean that it was an error to support the liberation struggle of colonial and other oppressed nations. It goes without saying that socialists have a duty to oppose all forms of social domination and oppression. But support for these struggles should have been tempered with the realisation that, given the actual state of the world, colonial liberation struggles were unlikely to seriously undermine the global capitalist system.

There may be a useful lesson here regarding current struggles against other forms of social domination and oppression, such as those on grounds of gender and race. Of course, socialists must support these struggles unconditionally. But we should do so without entertaining the illusion that under present conditions their main demands are incapable of being accommodated to a large extent within capitalism. Only in a revolutionary situation of intensive class struggle embracing large parts of the globe will there be a confluence of those other streams - which in normal times could be contained by reforms - into the main current that will breach the dams of the capitalist system.

However, the fact that the strategy of the Leninist-Trotskyist tradition on the colonial question has turned out to be mistaken should not lead revolutionary socialists to discard cardinal principles that were well understood by our movement in the past and have remained valid.

One such principle is that the working class must retain its political and organisational independence. This was stressed by both Lenin and Trotsky in the context of colonial liberation struggles, but it is by no means confined to the Leninist tradition, or to that context. It goes back to the *Communist manifesto*. This, of course, does not exclude temporary alliances for specific purposes with movements or parties based on other classes; but it does exclude long-term 'popular fronts', let alone mergers, with such forces as, for example, petty bourgeois green

parties.

Another principle that was upheld by revolutionary socialists before World War I and remains valid is opposition to nationalist secessionism. In the first article in the present series I observed that, although Lenin, Luxemburg, and others on the Marxist left disagreed on important aspects of the national question, they all subscribed to Luxemburg's dictum that "a general attempt to divide all existing states into national units and to re-tailor them on the model of national states and statelets is a completely hopeless and, historically speaking, reactionary undertaking."¹¹ Even for Lenin the default position was advocacy of non-secession; and positive support for separation was seen as an exception, a measure of last resort. The direct context of that old debate was the situation of the various nations in the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, some of which were severely oppressed. As I have pointed out, that context disappeared following the war and the Russian Revolution.

But the debate has re-emerged in our time in relation to nationalist separatist movements of groups that are not victims of severe national oppression, such as the Scots, Catalans and Québécois. Regrettably, some socialists have chosen to support these secessionist demands - not because they believe that separation and formation of a new statelet is needed for genuine national liberation, as the only escape from national oppression, but in an opportunistic use of nationalism as a response to what is essentially a class problem: the unpopularity of a rightwing central government. This is a betrayal of a valuable revolutionary socialist tradition.

In the third and last article in this series I will address the specific issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is exceptional in several ways - not least in being a complex conjunction of a two-sided national problem and a colonial-type problem ●

Notes

1. The first article ('Colonialism and the natives' *Weekly Worker* December 17 2015) outlined some of the debates on colonialism and the national question in the Second International. As further reading, I would like to recommend an important anthology that covers the topic and period addressed - all too briefly and sketchily - in that article. This work, *Discovering imperialism: social democracy to World War I* (Leiden 2011, reprinted Chicago 2012), is a massive collection of articles written between 1897 and 1916, many of them not hitherto available in English (some by authors unknown to most present-day readers). It is translated and edited by Richard B Day and Daniel Gaido, who have added a valuable 80-page introduction.
2. President Wilson's address to Congress, February 11 1918: www.gwpda.org/1918/wilpeace.html.
3. Speech to US Congress, January 8 1918: www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/content/wilson-14points-speech.html.
4. *Constitution of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic* July 10 1918, article 1, chapter 4, clause 8: www.marxists.org/history/ussr/government/constitution/1918/index.htm.
5. However, for the very different view of dissident Ukrainian communists, see C Ford, 'Outline history of the Ukrainian Communist Party (Independentists): an emancipatory communism 1918-1925' *Debate* Vol 17, No2, 2009, pp193-246.
6. The belief that imperialism was a late 19th century development has been criticised by Mike Macnair in his introduction to *K Kautsky Past and present colonial policy* (1898 - English translation by B Lewis and M Zurowski, November Publications, London 2013; available from <http://cpbg.org.uk/pages/books/32/karl-kautsky-on-colonialism-2013>).
7. *VI Lenin Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism: a popular outline* (1917): www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/index.htm.
8. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jun/05.htm.
9. L Trotsky *The death agony of capitalism and the tasks of the Fourth International: the mobilisation of the masses around transitional demands to prepare the conquest of power: the Transitional Programme* 1938: www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/index.htm.
10. K Marx, preface to *A contribution to the critique of political economy* (1859).
11. R Luxemburg, 'The national question' (1909): www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1909/national-question/index.htm.

EUROPE**Cameron's chauvinist chicanery**

The forthcoming EU referendum is a contest between reactionary forces, argues Paul Demarty

Talk about chickens coming home to roost.

When David Cameron first started talking about a straight-ahead, no bullshit, in-or-out referendum on continued British membership of the European Union, we were astonished. Momentarily under pressure from the UK Independence Party, and more insidiously from his own Europhobic right, our Dave somehow considered it wise to offer what they really wanted, rather than the usual handful of reactionary gimmicks and sops (which a Tory prime minister must periodically fling at his more overtly chauvinist camp followers, as if they were hungry hounds). But this? An actual referendum, with actual (and potentially disastrous) consequences for British capitalism?

It made a limited amount of sense, granted, when it appeared that Cameron's best outcome in 2015 would be a renewed coalition government with the Liberal Democrats - he would never get his little scheme past that gang of fanatical Europhiles. Yet the crushing defeat of the Lib Dems - whose MPs may not fit into a London taxi, but would get into a larger minicab if you booked well enough in advance - along with the Scottish National Party's equally crushing victory north of the border, handed Cameron his slim majority, and left him denuded of excuses for putting off his referendum any longer.

Carried along by such an unstoppable momentum, then, it is fitting that Cameron is busily looking for an "emergency brake". Everything hinged, after all, on his much touted 'renegotiation' of Britain's obligations to the rest of the EU; which is not to say that he was ever likely to get significant concessions (we weren't born yesterday), but that he had to find a way to sell it as a success. He needed to return, as the odious David Mellor has put it on his talk radio show, "borrowing Chamberlain's overcoat, stumbling down the plane's steps waving a piece of paper signed by Juncker". And European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker duly obliged.

Theatre

And so the "emergency brake" (a mechanism whereby a member-state could appeal to the others that its welfare system was overloaded, and with the collective say-so suspend certain in-work benefit entitlements for all migrants) was indeed included in the package, along with the misnamed "red card" system, whereby the (extremely limited) powers enjoyed by member-states to force a 'review' of EU Commission measures are

extended a little.

The whole sequence of events, of course, is political theatre, and the staginess of it is plain to see for the least interested spectator. On January 31, Cameron was to be found aggressively pitching his proposals to all who would listen, but the following day the negotiations reached a rather dramatic pitch, with inescapable rolling news coverage everywhere. And by February 2, European Council president Donald Tusk had made his proposal to Cameron. There are dramatic speeches, races against time ... No expense is spared to make it look like something important is being decided. If you close your eyes, you can almost convince yourself it is not a stupid gimmick.

Upon Tusk's proposal, announced with a suitably hammy flourish in a paraphrase from *Hamlet*, the narrative divides, depending on your point of view. The re-entry of *Star wars* to our cinemas has granted new life to the neo-conservative meme that, contrary to the narrative thrust of the original films, those from the Galactic Empire are the good guys. Likewise, the meaning of Tusk's proposal depends rather on what pre-existing opinions the reader brings to the proposal. He acknowledges all of Cameron's concerns, while watering them down still further from the already pretty lean proposals they were to begin with. The "emergency brake", as originally proposed, could only be exercised with the consent of the various EU bodies and member-states; but now it would be reduced not to a simple turning off of the tap, but instead seeing child benefits reduced to the level appropriate to the migrant's country of origin.

The Conservative 'in' camp has hailed this as a great victory, and Cameron is using it as an excuse to browbeat wavering Tories - notably home secretary Theresa May and supposed leader-in-waiting Boris Johnson - into acquiescence. Hardcore Euroscptics lack the required imaginative faculties to see this in

Churchillian terms, however. The substance of the "emergency brake" proposal is so timid, even in its original version, that doubts were raised before Tusk's proposal as to whether it even represents a break with the status quo at all. Cameron was fighting for the right to convince every other member-state to allow him to do something which surely is already in place.

Thus, on February 1, John Redwood branded the proposal a "sick joke". It was not only "an insult to the United Kingdom": it was not even "a serious offer", he fumed on the BBC's *Today* programme. "Parliament has to decide ... how many people to let in, not 27 other member-states on the continent." To put it mildly, he is not impressed; and nor will be Mellor, or any other Tory chauvinist, let alone Ukip.

Indeed, the theatrical character of proceedings does not stop with this particular mummer's farce of a showdown. As is the tendency with referenda - which are by their design Bonapartist imitations of democracy - the battle is really over the terms of the thing. Cameron wanted to get his piece of paper from Juncker soon-ish, so he can slot the vote in for June, in advance of an expected surge in migration into Europe (he has picked up the date of June 23 from Jeremy Corbyn). Others are not so keen: the SNP and some in Labour want it pushed back further away from May's elections. That, of course, is before we even get to small matters like the question on the ballot.

Schengen strains

So timing is everything, and Cameron picked a good time to go around the core European countries touting a 'relaxation' of the rules around free movement. European countries are in great tumult over the question of migration, prompted most immediately by the influx of refugees from the ever-increasing number of failed states that US imperialism and its increasingly uncontrollable clients are manufacturing. People in Syria are looking at the chaos in their home country, the filth and desperation of nearby refugee camps, and - if they have the material resources - alighting upon Europe as a more satisfactory destination for themselves. Who can blame them?

This is, on the face of it, a separate issue from free movement *within* the EU, whose extension has always been accompanied by the strengthening of borders at the EU periphery - the phenomenon we call Fortress Europe. At present, 22 countries participate in the Schengen area, within which borders are all but unpoliced, with no passport checks. Of the six countries outside Schengen, only two - the UK and Ireland - are not obliged to join.

Yet it is difficult to deny that the Schengen

agreement is fraying. The proximate cause is the aforementioned flight of refugees, who cross the Mediterranean from North Africa or Turkey, landing primarily in Greece, Italy and Spain. None of these countries are exactly in rude economic health, with things especially bad in Spain and Greece; so the migrants move on. They can do so easily, after all, since passport checks stop at the outer borders of the Schengen area (local laws about identification papers and so on aside).

There is a rule that asylum-seekers who make it to Europe must apply for asylum in the first country they reach, but this is entirely unenforceable, since it would mean that Greece and Spain, who have no interest in taking on 100% of all the desperate people fleeing Libya, Syria and so on, would be obliged to do so. So now people in the core EU states are talking about shrinking the Schengen area, and moving the ramparts of Fortress Europe to the nearer side of Greece.

All of which explains the rather slender nature of what Cameron was asking for. After all, he is hemmed in by some fairly comprehensive treaties, which require consent from 27 other governments to change. While his proposals may elicit tacit sympathy in Paris and Berlin, he is nevertheless wading into a major source of tension, demanding favours at a time when several weaker states are getting special treatment of a very different kind.

But a deal will at least benefit his domestic agenda. Incursions on in-work benefits, as noted by many sceptical Europhobic politicians, will not significantly deter migrants from coming to Britain, but it *will* exert downward pressure on the living conditions of a section of the working class; and it is plain that such benefits are more broadly in government crosshairs, with little or no attention paid to the fact that decades of wage stagnation have left many thousands reliant on top-ups from housing benefit and tax credits to live any kind of tolerable life.

At the end of this road, ultimately, is a sort of return to the 19th century, with workers packed like sardines into filthy accommodation.

Those bourgeois ideologues who

we are simply too civilised nowadays to return to the time of cholera epidemics should observe the pace with which we are proceeding in that direction.

Those on the left who imagine that a British withdrawal from Europe is in the interests of the working class ought to note that the 'out' camp's principle objection to continued membership is that we are *impeded* in our progress to high-tech Victorianism - by all that meddlesome Brussels 'red tape', by our inability to wall out migrants, by the few tepid restrictions imposed on finance capital by concerned European policymakers.

We note that ever fewer of such comrades, however, are inclined to this view; instead, there has been a marked loss of nerve among many, such as the leadership of Socialist Resistance, which previously had taken a 'left Ukip' line. More illustriously, of course, there is the small matter of the Labour front bench: both Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell have recently been at best ambiguous in their attitudes to the EU, but now appear to have sided definitively with the 'ins' under pressure.

Faced with the possibility of Britain actually leaving, many previously sceptical leftwingers surmise - no doubt correctly - that a victory for the 'outs' will unleash a carnival of reaction, leaving the most rightwing of the significant forces in British politics rampant. Cameron will fall, and his replacement will not be so terribly concerned about appearing nice as he is. More sophisticated left support for an 'in' vote seeks to make it an issue of internationalism: that the limited unity of Europe even on a capitalist basis is objectively progressive, whatever the horrors of its lived reality.

This line is certainly preferable to the reactionary nationalist utopias peddled by the remaining left Ukipists. Yet what is an 'in' vote actually *for*? We do not know exactly, but something close to the *status quo ante*: British membership of the EU on its old terms, plus a couple of reactionary tidbits, so that Cameron could say he had something to show for his 'negotiations'; for Fortress Europe; and, above all, a vote of confidence in Cameron *himself*, in his stupid and contemptible political chicanery. It is scarcely easier to use this as a platform for proletarian internationalism than an 'out' vote.

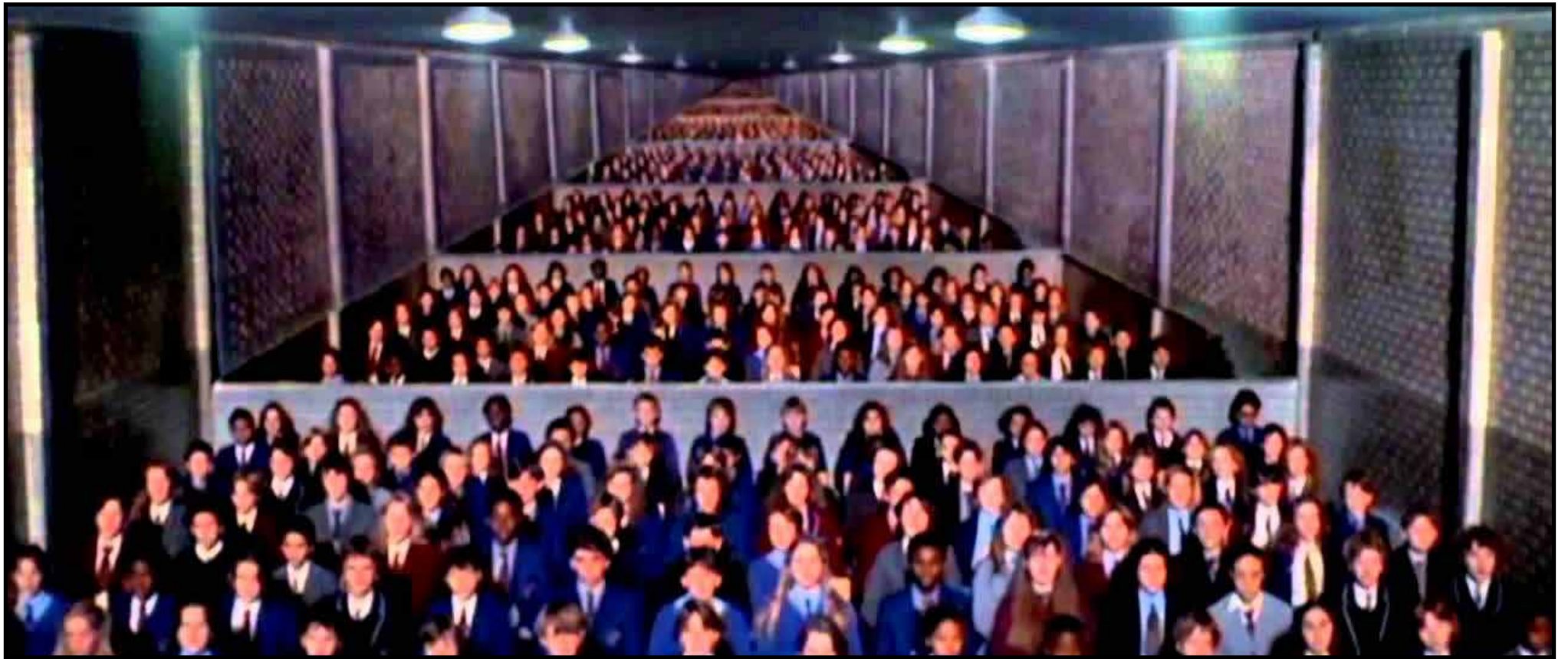
If ever there was a ballot that deserved to be boycotted, this is surely it ●

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David Cameron and Jean-Claude Juncker: a piece of paper

PARENTING



Pink Floyd's 'The Wall': school as a prison sentence

How to leave your kid in a pub

The government's latest attempt to pretend it knows a thing or two about children is laughable, says **Commissaress**

Who would be qualified to tell people that they are not being good parents? Maybe a child psychologist or therapist. Maybe someone who loves a child - a relative, a friend or even a teacher - and who has observed unhappiness, a lack of confidence and/or a change in behaviour. Maybe a child themselves: no-one knows their own circumstances better than they themselves do - even if sometimes they cannot or do not want to express their knowledge.

At any rate, if someone wants to judge others on the quality of their parenting, you would expect them to display some signs of - you know - actually caring about children and young people. They would probably not be making what seems like a deliberate attempt to jeopardise the future of over 10 million children by slashing the funding of children's centres and libraries, tax credits for families and affordable housing schemes, making education both more expensive and - thanks to the incoherent reforms - of a worse quality. Yet this is exactly what the Conservative government is managing to do and, even more remarkably, it is managing to do it with a straight face and plenty of moralising rhetoric.

Last month a plan called the Life Chances Strategy (I am not quite sure how to translate this from Newspeak) was unveiled, which will "include a plan for significantly expanding parenting provision" and "examine the possible introduction of a voucher scheme for parenting classes and recommend the best way to incentivise parents to take them up" in order to "make it normal - even aspirational - to attend parenting classes".¹ This is not the first attempt by the Conservatives to set up a parenting classes scheme: in 2011, the CANParent scheme completely flopped after just 2% of eligible parents signed up,² but apparently the issue of 'bad parenting' is so serious that we need a 'CANParent take 2'. Which is somehow going to be more successful this time round.

Ironically, I do think that the government has identified a real problem here. 'Bad parenting' is incredibly hard to define, since there

are, of course, no objective criteria determining what the task of parenting and its successful completion requires, no matter how much bureaucrats and authors of parenting guides want there to be some. But, when mental health problems amongst youth are rife,³ when over 50,000 children in the UK have been identified as needing protection from abuse and neglect, and when, for every child identified, eight more are suspected to be suffering,⁴ you know something is going wrong. In addition, researchers at Kansas University found astonishing disparities between the knowledge and communication abilities of poorer and richer children, which could be traced back to parenting.⁵

These very obvious problems, however, are not what I want to discuss, because most people are aware of the damage inflicted upon children and their lives as a result of such factors. Parenting which causes stress, unhappiness or ill health (physical or mental) and produces children with low confidence, an unquestioning attitude and a lack of passion is much more prevalent than physical or sexual abuse, mental illness or anything of the sort - but not enough people are talking about it. It is not only the worse-off parents - those more likely to leave their children in front of the TV, feed them junk food, order them around and not give them much in the way of intellectual stimulation (see Annette Lareau's *Unequal childhoods*) - who are guilty of this sort of parenting, despite being the more talked-about perpetrators of it.

Every autumn, I have the, um, pleasure of witnessing the middle class madness known as the 11-plus exam season - a period epitomising the style of parenting exclusive to affluent families, which Lareau termed "concerted cultivation". It involves months of organised preparation for the 11-plus application process, combined with steadily increasing parental stress over whether their little pumpkin is going to be admitted through the Gates of Heaven - I mean, admitted to an independent or grammar school. This kind of parenting may be sufficient for the purpose of passing a few exams, but it causes a lot of

needless stress and tends to produce children, like many of my peers, who cannot really think independently and have no flair or passion for anything. So it seems that very few children of any income bracket emerge unscathed from the process of parenting. This is a problem.

Root causes

Indeed, it is such an important problem that, as with phenomena like wars, poverty and anti-social acts, we cannot afford to make the usual liberal mistake of attributing it to individual 'bad parents' rather than to endemic social problems. Such abstraction of individuals from the causes and conditions of their behaviour will inevitably cause unwarranted blame-placing and failure to address the root causes of the problem at hand, which is why under capitalism we so often see the same mistakes being made over and over again. In the case of 'bad parenting', the mountain of research done into its causes (I gave a couple of examples earlier in the article) has made the roots of the problem and what we need to do to solve it very clear.

Parenting styles and their shortcomings are hugely dependent on social class and can be traced back to the general outlook of a certain class: for instance, 'aspirational' members of the middle class are more likely to cultivate the same sort of outlook in their children, as Lareau found. Furthermore, class disparities cause enormous disparities in knowledge. In this way, the root cause of 'bad parenting' lies in *class society*, and in institutions like the family which serve to perpetuate class disparities. It follows that the best way to remove 'bad parenting' would be to eliminate the poverty - and the wealth - which causes it, and transition into a system in which children are socially raised, so that disparities between families are not inherited by the next generation and all children can grow up free, surrounded by intellectual stimulation and a network of supportive people. But no self-respecting minister would ever be caught saying that, because the last thing the government wants to do is blaspheme against the holy family. Regardless of the obvious damage it

causes.

Parenting classes are an attempt to socialise child-rearing and reduce disparities a little bit without committing such blasphemy. Even so, any attempt by a western government to do anything which reduces the family's role would predictably bring the individualists crawling out of the woodwork, making the usual complaints about erosion of the sacred parent-child relationship, individual freedom and the ideals which Made Our Country Great™. This sort of individualist criticism will probably make up the bulk of the opposition to the Life Chances Strategy.

But it is a ridiculous criticism. There is nothing wrong in principle with greater socialisation of childcare - except the fact that it goes against bourgeois dogma. The problem with parenting classes is that 'teaching' some kind of parenting strategy will not address the root cause of 'bad parenting' and, moreover, that the state does not seem at all qualified to tell parents how to raise children, when it is not doing such a great job of raising children itself. The latest Children's Society report on children's subjective well-being found that many were more satisfied with their home life than with their school life.⁶

I for one hate being forced to waste my youth at the intellectual prison that is school, and I know very few people who actually enjoy it. In primary schools in particular: food is unhealthy, water fountains do not work and very little is actually learnt (just ask my brother), but uppity teachers and council bureaucrats still have the audacity to tell parents what to do, inspect children's lunches and propose fines for parents who take their children on holiday during term time - even during the last week, which is often spent watching Disney movies. Evidently, all the controls and restrictions, the bombast about creating a positive learning environment and the tangled web of bureaucracy employed in managing a state school have failed to produce anything but a moralistic, intellectually strangling hellhole. In what universe should the state which produced this spectacular mess be

trusted with children?

The flaws of the education system and the reasons behind them are a topic for another article (or, more likely, a tome), but I think part of the reason why that system is failing and why any set strategy for parenting is a bad idea is that there are too many rules. People almost instinctively need to feel as though they are doing things 'right', and the parenting manual industry has made a fortune by providing puzzled parents with a set formula for raising children: a formula involving fruit-and-veg pirate ships, behaviour charts with gold stars and Mandarin hypnopædia. Although this formula was created by yummy mummies in a conference room for the sole purpose of profiting from parents' need for (in)validation, it has resulted in making parents feel as though they are always getting something wrong and the mistaken belief that there is 'a way' to raise a child.

Well, guess what? I grew up eating fruit and vegetables without pretence, getting verbal, not physical, rewards for good behaviour and taking my afternoon naps without any educational tapes in the background, and I've turned out ... kind of OK. A parenting class would most likely result in the manufacturing of more fruitless and meaningless formulae, since to teach anything a bit of pattern and rigour is needed. And more rules are certainly not what parents need at the moment.

If there had to be some sort of formula to parenting, it would be a very simple one: 'expression, not compression'. Children need stimulation, autonomy and a space to find and pursue their passions. This is something which cannot be dictated by rules and cannot be taught by classes. Least of all, classes run by a state which is systematically failing millions of children ●

Notes

1. www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-families-are-the-key-to-ending-poverty.
2. www.theguardian.com/money/2013/mar/24/free-parenting-classes-scheme.
3. www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-32075251.
4. www.nspcc.org.uk/services-and-resources/research-and-resources/statistics.
5. <http://literacy.rice.edu/thirty-million-word-gap>.
6. <http://goodchildhood2015.childrengovernance.org.uk/>.

REVIEW

Dealing with the legacy

Artist and empire: facing Britain's imperial past Tate Britain, Millbank, London SW1; ends April 10

Now that the British empire is gone, what do we do with the remains, the legacy of monuments? This has become a live issue of late, with the focus on the statues of Cecil Rhodes in Oxford and slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol. Meanwhile, *Artist and empire* at Tate Britain exhibits many other examples of art from the empire period. This invites the query: do we still need to deal with all that - the celebration of an empire which the rest of the world has long since learnt to condemn?

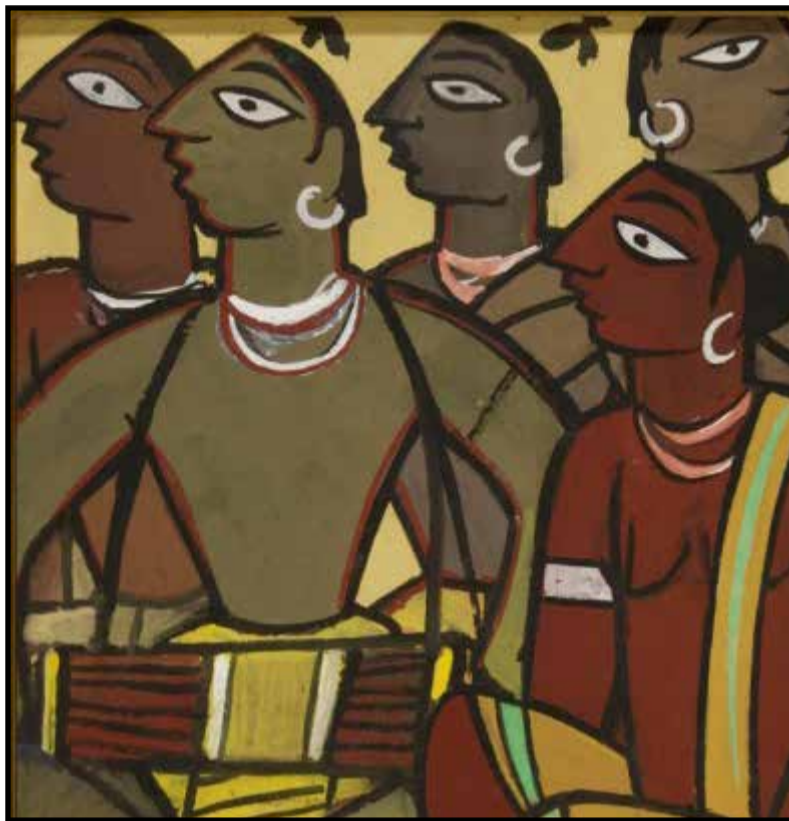
The exhibition provides a kind of narrative in covering art from and about the empire over the centuries. It begins with 'Mapping and marking' - portraits of the early explorers and pirates, Drake and Hawkins, and showing maps of the Americas and Caribbean. In the next room, 'Trophies of empire', we find records of the new flora and fauna the Europeans found. Next, the inevitable large history paintings of 'Imperial heroes', followed by 'Power dressing', with white administrators adopting local costume. Then we come to portraits of the native people themselves in 'Face to face'. Finally we arrive at the post-1900 era and works that came out of the empire after it began to disappear, as well as recent responses to its legacy.

One way of dismissing the show has been to see it as just a dusty collection of waxworks of the past with little relevance to the modern UK - an imperial "junk shop", as *The Observer* called it, with the exhibits as mere "evidence, instance or historic document", like Pharaoh heads or Spanish paintings of court dwarfs (December 6 2015).

One thing that saves the show from being just a pageant of glories or infamies is that the curators have provided informative labelling. Exhibition labels can, of course, test the visitor's patience. However, in this show the accompanying text tells you the artist, date and title, but then adds a few facts which extend your attention rather than swamping it. For example, there are some small paintings from India which look as if they came from a Mughal court, but turn out to be have been commissioned by the East India Company. What is more, the deep dark green of the lawn in the pictures - hints of an English park - turn out to have been explicitly requested too. Queen Victoria seemed to have done her own share of commissioning, requesting a picture or three of foreign subjects. This makes one wonder how this affected the way the artist depicted the native sitters.

As the show is called *Artist and empire*, we need not think of the works of art as just evidence of events, but rather of how the artists related to the subjects. A picture by Rembrandt is Rembrandt's vision, but all artists are historical beings and their works can tell us much about the general attitudes of the times, as well as contemporary artistic approaches and traditions. For example, in a somewhat clumsy sketch done by a British traveller inside an African hut, a woman lies semi-naked with her hands posed behind her head, stretched out like a Goya nude.

Empire pictures, especially of soldiers and 'imperial heroes', were for popular consumption too, not just patrons. Some sold very well as postcards and prints. Readers may even be familiar with a few, such as 'The death of General Wolfe' or 'General Gordon's last stand' (1885). No-one is now taken in by these as photographic presentations. In fact, in a video produced for the exhibition, Oxford's Zareer Masani talks about the



Jamini Roy (1887-1972) 'Santhal drummers'

iconography of the Wolfe picture, how the general is laid out like a figure of Christ taken from the cross. The label next to the painting tells us that the native Canadian in the painting, shown pensively watching the hero's demise, was a fiction. Wherever Wolfe died, it was not alongside a red man.

However, popular depictions of other ranks reminded this viewer of something more recent than other 19th century history paintings. Here are several large compositions showing a tight knot of British troops standing resolute against attack by Zulus, "Matabele" (Ndebele) or Afghans. They are the outnumbered squaddies, resolute in defending whatever a spectator considers worth defending about the British empire. In another big picture, a bulky Britannia is about to plunge a sword into a huge tiger, representing rebellion in India.

Sure, we no longer believe in such rhetoric. Rebels are not tigers and Latin symbols no longer exercise retribution towards them ('Retribution' is the title of the picture, which is a reference to the contemporary Cawnpore rebellion). But the imagery of British soldiers, far from home, defending themselves against local violence is not some dusty relic. What else are the many accounts of events in Helmand province and Iraq? Such sympathy for the troops abroad is an abiding theme of hegemonic persuasion in the press and other media supporting interventions abroad.

Us and them

In another picture by 19th century favourite Henry Nelson O'Neil, 'Eastward ho!' (1857), women and children take leave of a ship, while soldiers clasp hands with them for one last time before the departure. In an accompanying picture, 'Home again' (1858), servicemen descend an almost vertical gangplank into the arms of their relatives. Some of the soldiers are wounded; some have beards marking long service. Here are images of a Victorian crowd - a busy crush in which chance of affection is fleeting; moving pieces that, by admitting the pain of separation and the wounds sustained, could suggest there might be some possible protest that the wars involved are unnecessary and unjust. Hegemony means not domination by

William Fielding poses in a Van Dyck of 1635 in his specially made silk pyjamas. He is learning from the east no doubt, but what is he demonstrating here? An interest in new cultures and their transcendence by 'mixing', or his consumption of rich materials (sugar, tea and other commodities being the product of relationships far from equal and benign, from plantations, for example)? As John Hutnyk put it, "Pluralism on the basis of the current distribution would only be to confirm hierarchy, never its undoing." The supposed festival of diverse and mixed national cultures can hide "obdurate" questions of politics and histories of inequality, thereby occluding the legacy of colonialism understood from the viewpoint of the colonised" and ignoring "the experiences of poverty, dependency, subalternity that persist well beyond the achievement of national independence" (*Ethnic and Racial Studies* January 2005).

Reggae styles in music and ethnic restaurants on the high street do not mean that the divisions of the world have been overcome - indeed they may even have got worse with moribund capitalism's reluctance to invest in the places these first came from. The democratic ideal that all can mix (and have mixed) risks denial of the ways in which they cannot (and could not) mix and are still unequal.

At the Tate in 'Power dressing' we have more images shaped by the colonialist eye. For example, a photo of a Maharaja which, as the label tells us, underwent retouching that left his "beard exaggerated". However, not all the images go this way. A photograph by Jonathan Adagogo Green reveals the Oba of Benin sitting, his feet shackled, looking resentfully into the camera lens, while guarded by three African soldiers. Enough complexity here to counter any accusation that the curators are just giving us, for better or worse, pin-ups of Victorian empire-builders. There are also darkened wood statuettes from 1911 by a Yoruba artist, of one elongated figure in uniform with an accordion and another in a pith helmet. The accompanying label lapses in telling us what to think, warning us not to take these caricatures of 'gods' as "sardonic".

Also far from fawning in my opinion is a portrait, in the 'Power dressing' room, by the celebrated painter, John Singer-Sargent, of Sir Frank Swettenham, Resident General of the Malay States (British Malaysia). Here displayed is a commanding Englishman leaning against what looks like a golden carpet hung over a chair. He is looking down on the spectator, as if daring us to find him a fraudster and bigot. It is from 1904, when the empire was already being challenged by anti-imperialists at home and rival nations abroad. Sargent's attitude can indeed be taken as a snobbish metropolitan disregard of the chancers who sustained the UK's position in the world, those hard-grafting guards and adventurers of whom Kipling sung the praises. Nonetheless Swettenham is no self-sacrificing hero; he is revelling in his position and rubs up against imperial booty to prove it.

There are plenty of replies to the official version appearing throughout the gallery. A Hausa artist from Nigeria had painted a number of figures on a piece of light-coloured leather (1940). Like a non-narrative comic strip it shows white men in sun hats riding horses, with black men standing or walking near or behind them. The status difference is obvious.

The exhibition features photographic

work by Hew Locke. There are two photo-collages of certain prominent figures in stone: one photo of the Bristol slave trader, Edward Colston; the other of philosopher Edmund Burke. They are shown covered, in fact dripping, with gold chains and gems of various kinds. So much so that the figures themselves are obscured under the evidence of loot.

Drawing the line

Another thoughtful use of empire material is the series of four panels entitled 'Lay back, keep quiet and think of what made Britain so great' (1986) by Sonia Boyce. Each panel contains a ground of wallpaper, a pattern especially admired by Queen Victoria, three of them with cut-out sections in the shape of a cross, showing different pencilled images of respectively South Africa, India and Australia - the last panel features a young black woman, who may well be the artist.

Is this to be disregarded as simple condemnation of the past, about which we no longer need to bother? Or does it make the very subject of the work the layers of response to such a theme and how we react to these images being brought together? What are the sketches inside the cross shapes worth? Are they more clichéd views of those places? What is our relation to the woman in the last panel? Is she English or British? (Boyce herself is described online as an English artist.) What is British? Why did Queen Victoria like that wallpaper?

While there are more immediate issues art could confront today, a challenge to the given story of the past is part of the overall challenge to hegemony. Too many people still ask, 'Are these countries any better off now without British rule?' - implying that we have to choose between colonialism and neocolonialism. Meanwhile, liberals who dismiss themes of the old empire, racism, nation, etc underestimate their continuing mobilising power. But let us not overestimate it.

Our era is one where people are drawing the line in many areas against ruling class arrogance, including through public-sector strikes and the struggle for democracy in the Labour Party. What is offensive about statues like that of Rhodes in Oxford is not the sculpture itself, but its position, its acceptance in a public place. Doing something about it would not be denying history, but making a choice about our view of the past. We have no need to remove or demolish everything, but equally there is no reason to leave everything as it was - especially when such a work's positioning symbolises mute public acceptance.

If the struggle over Rhodes and other questions of cultural legacy is a debate about how we see the past and its relevance to the present, it is not the only thing to challenge. Yet all the replies to this that appeal to patriotic nostalgia will not obscure the growing public perception that the money is going to the few rather than the many.

At the Tate, I would have preferred a few more utility objects - cups and porcelain, for example; evidence of the tea, sugar and silk trade. But then I no longer observe the demarcation between *beaux arts* and design, images on walls and used things. Nevertheless, this show is rich in material. It not only raises questions about what we remember or need to remember, but about how art is shaped and the class relations of the creole culture is created. And about what visions of the world we may still carry with us after the British have left ●

Mike Belbin

OBITUARY

A lifelong internationalist

Yassamine Mather salutes a dedicated Marxist fighter

Comrade Torab Haghshenas, who died on January 27 2016, was a revolutionary Marxist, a genuine internationalist and a man of great principle.

He was born into a religious family in Jahrom in southern Iran, and his first political activities were as a member of Islamic societies. But he became a Marxist in the 1970s and was one of the founding members of the Mojahedin-e-Khalq (People's Mojahedin of Iran). He and his wife, Pouran Bazargan, were amongst members who joined the Marxist split from Mojahedin-e-Khalq in 1975.

The group explained the reasons for the split in a short pamphlet entitled *Manifesto on ideological issues*, where the leadership of the new organisation declared that "after 10 years of secret existence, four years of armed struggle and two years of intense ideological rethinking" they had reached the conclusion that Marxism, not Islam, was the "true revolutionary philosophy". Just weeks before the Iranian revolution, in December 1978, the group changed its name to Organisation of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, after the St Petersburg League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, set up in 1895 by Lenin. The new Iranian group was known by leftwing activists as 'Peykar' ('Battle').

Torab and Pouran (who died in 2007) worked and fought alongside comrades from a number of Palestinian groups in the 1970s and he often commented on how they both learnt a lot about internationalism during that period. He decided to use the occasion of Pouran Bazargan's funeral to give an oration in which he described those times as though she herself was relating the story:

In 1974 I married Torab Haghshenas, a comrade I had known for a long time. In this marriage ... we had no priorities higher than the political struggle. Our involvement with the Palestine movement started during this time. I served in the Palestinian Red Crescent Hospital in Damascus. As such, during the 1970s civil war in Lebanon I moved to the Palestinian hospital in Sabra refugee camp near Beirut. One of the best times of my life was living with the oppressed but resisting people of these regions.

Later on, I was assigned to move to Turkey, where our organisation had established a communication and logistic base. I lived underground and worked in clothing sweat shops and as a hotel worker in order to earn my living; meanwhile I participated in carrying arms from one country to another towards Iran. These life experiences provided us with

education and preparation for our future tasks. I learned about the lives of toilers of other nations, and it opened my eyes to the international, rather than national, dimensions of class oppression.

With the growth of our political and military experience and the evolution in the organisation and our society, we came to question our ideological foundations and eventually renounced our religious ideology (which was different from, and often in contradiction with, the traditional conceptions of the clergy, especially those of Khomeini) and shifted towards Marxism. We were all practically ready to accept the new ideology, but it was the leadership of the organisation that had officially declared the change. Of course, I was not at the forefront of this development, but I could understand it and I went along with it.

In this process wrongdoings happened that can never be compensated for, but they cannot camouflage the revolutionary essence of liberation from religious ideology. The methods of the change to Marxism would not have been endorsed by many of the activists of the organisation, if they knew the facts at the time. But in a guerrilla organisation in which the ruling relations strictly limit the exchange of information

and ideas, there is no possibility of participation in collective decision-making. At the root of this limitation were the oppressive conditions and the necessity of struggle against the regime ...¹

Like most other groups of the Iranian left, Peykar did not survive the terrible repression of the 1980s and many of its members and leaders faced torture and execution, having been singled out by the Islamic authorities as apostates for their conversion from Islam to Marxism.

So Pouran and Torab continued their political activities in exile, translating many works from French, English and Arabic (including a number of books by Palestinian poet and writer Mahmoud Darwish). They both concentrated on a theme that dominated the initial launch of Peykar: a critique of guerrilla movements and armed struggle, where activists were isolated from the workers' movement, and they set up a publication website, *Peykar Andisheh* ('Peykar Thought').

Torab's last contribution to the website is dated January 25 2016 - a translation of an article in French in support of the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign against Israel.

Anti-imperialist

I knew Pouran because of her activities in support of the workers'

movement in Iran, and my conversations with Torab mainly centred around what I wrote about her before² and after³ her death. He was always modest about their work, and was an internationalist and anti-imperialist to the end. While devoted to the Palestinian cause, he remained a committed supporter of the Iranian working class and a knowledgeable opponent of political Islam and the Islamic Republic in Iran.

He had no time for those sections of the Iranian opposition which accepted US regime change funds and he signed this document, entitled 'We say no to US aid', in 2006:

We, the undersigned, feel compelled to take a clear position in response to the recent announcement by the US administration to allocate \$85 million in aid to groups opposed to the Islamic regime.

1. The independent Iranian opposition deems it indecent and politically immoral to accept any aid (financial or otherwise) from the US or any other government and condemns such aid as a clear insult to the Iranian people.

2. The independent Iranian opposition has always waged its struggle without expecting financial aid from the interested foreign powers, both during the Pahlavi dictatorship, that enjoyed the direct and open support of the United States, and since the outset of the religious despotic regime of the Islamic Republic; and it will not stop its efforts until the emergence of a free, independent and democratic Iran.

3. The objectives of such aid are evident, as it is offered by profit-seekers who have always supported despotism at all important moments in Iranian history and have been - directly and openly or indirectly and secretly - involved in suppressing the patriotic and progressive movements. The Iranian people have not forgotten that the government crushed their efforts to achieve freedom and independence by the shameful coup d'etat against the patriotic government of Dr Mossaddeq in 1953 and pushed Iran into the abyss of the Pahlavi dictatorship.⁴

The Iranian left has lost a dedicated Marxist with valuable experience. A comrade who was a committed socialist and internationalist, whose principled positions ensured he stood out above many of his contemporaries in the exiled community ●

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Notes

1. <http://peykarandesh.org/noFarsi/pouran-BazarganFuneral-Oration.html>.
2. www.iran-bulletin.org/IBMEF_1_word%206%20files/Pouran_bazargan.htm.
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4. <http://iranian.com/News/2006/March/Images/WesaynotoUSaid.pdf>.

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.

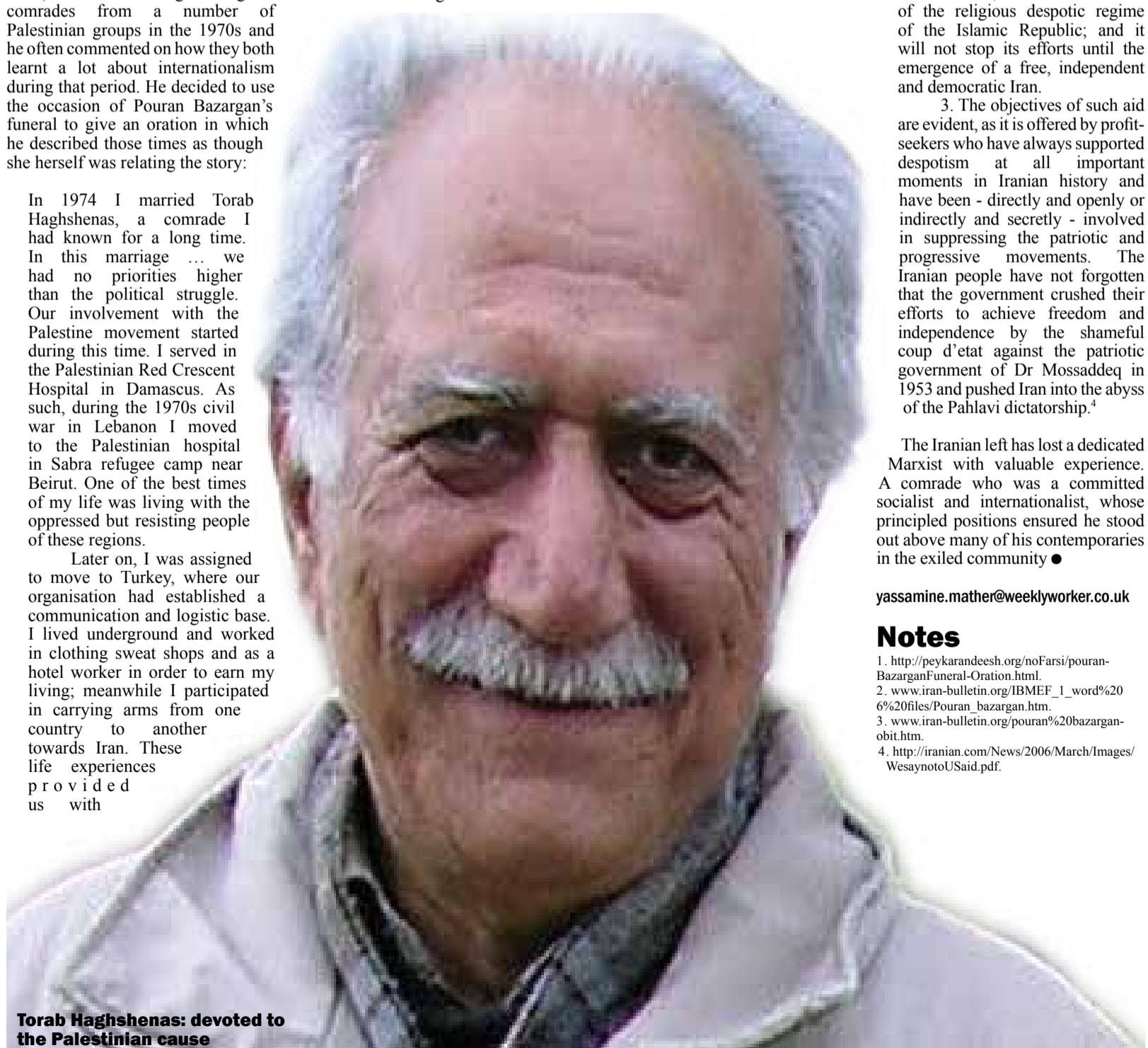
■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ 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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Torab Haghshenas: devoted to the Palestinian cause

weekly worker

Give him
critical
support



Bernie Sanders: on a roll

The real Iowa coup

Thanks to Sanders, a space is opening up for the ideas of Marxism, argues Tom Munday

Hillary Clinton 49.9%; Bernie Sanders 49.6%. At the close of play, voting in the Democratic Iowa caucus pretty much stands as close to a tie as it realistically could do. In fact, so tight was this race that even with 99.4% of precincts declaring their results at the scheduled time, the remaining 0.6% window still presented enough wiggle room that Sanders could have squeaked ahead in the dying seconds of the race. That is, so long as he did not lose too many coin flips - the pleasingly situationist method currently being employed to decide dead heats in the individual precincts.¹ In fact, the question of whether the outcome should have been contested will likely shade future proceedings, not least because the usual anomalous irregularities here - including those stemming from a rather fishy understaffing of impartial arbiters in 90 democratic precincts - could potentially have become pivotal to the final result.² Martin O'Malley, the lacklustre, shirt-sleeve-rolling thumb-pointer in third place, finished with a truly paltry 0.6% - an embarrassment even by his standards. He has now, unsurprisingly, dropped out of the race.

In spite of the vote technically falling in Clinton's favour, it would take a deeply dishonest pundit (although there are plenty of those about), to call this result anything other than a fair draw. Many on both sides of the divide will have the gut-urge to call it in their own favour, and both have good reason to. A strange conclusion perhaps, if you come to the numbers cold: Clinton's win of 0.4% is still a win, after all.

septuagenarian without so much as blinking; that instead he barely registered speaks volumes about the transformation occurring in American politics.

The Clinton camp will have wanted this win to be decisive. Whilst that dream went out of the window the minute polls started, indicating Sanders was 2%-3% behind (well within the margin of error), the current result likely offers the slim respite of being the 'best worst result': ie, whilst it categorically failed to shrug off an unelectable socialist, the Clinton team did at least demonstrate its appetite for a fight.

That will be a disappointment, particularly for those rather naive sections of the left who imagined a full-on goliath toppling, but also for those of us who had hoped for a result that might significantly weaken the Clinton media stranglehold. A few points more - 1%-2% say - would have significantly raised Sanders' profile (his subtle snubbing by mainstream media being a definite Achilles heel) and made for the kind of upset that would have been impossible to keep out of the headlines. That may still come in New Hampshire, where Sanders enjoys a healthy 18-point lead, but victory there, next to his home state of Vermont, hardly gives

him the kind of 'stop the presses' clout that an Iowa triumph would.⁴ Instead, and frustratingly, 'Clinton victory' is the key phrase that hogs the morning's headlines, right next to the 'Cruz beats Trump' shocker that is really nothing of the sort (given that Ted Cruz led the Republican headline-grabber, Donald Trump, by four points in early January and dropped behind only a fortnight ago).⁵

In any case, nothing that was said by the more balanced commentators in the Sanders camp has fundamentally changed. The long-term narrative, against all odds, has still been one of their man's ascendancy, and a slow erosion of Clinton support, even if it is not as dramatic as we may like. There is also no need to claim that Sanders will win the contest overall to argue that he has quite clearly had a dramatic impact on its character - that much is already self-evident.

On multiple crucial issues the Clinton campaign has swung against its natural statist instincts. If nothing else, that will be Sanders' legacy - and it is indisputably a worthwhile one. For one, Clinton now opposes the Trans-Pacific Partnership (the TPP, sister-treaty to our own TTIP) - a trade deal which threatens American jobs (particularly hers as would-be president). On paper

the TPP is a bread-and-butter 'third way' treaty - which opens up markets to further liberalisation and shores up the US bourgeoisie's global privileges (stringently enforcing their intellectual property rights, elevating corporations to a level of sovereignty on a par with states - the usual). In other words, a thrilling sequel to president Clinton's North American Free Trade Agreement - and one that senator Clinton advocated numerous times.⁶ Sanders can at least take some credit for similar miraculous changes of heart.

Those comrades who had previously panicked at the thought that we might sully our movement by cheering on a Democrat were always missing the point (and I would not say we were cheering so much as making a gesture in favour of *what follows* from mass support for Sanders). The fact that the Vermont senator is now the only Democratic challenger to Clinton left standing *and that he claims to be a "socialist"* has an enormous significance, otherwise lost on these comrades. Sanders, whether he wins or loses, is just a small chapter of a much longer narrative: that of the long overdue rehabilitation of basic leftwing thought in mainstream American politics.

It was and remains correct to give

critical support to Jeremy Corbyn, knowing full well that he is a left reformist, for we appreciate that he creates a space for our arguments to be heard. This is likewise true of Sanders, a man who has forced some elementary collectivist ideas - eg, universal education and healthcare - back into the public forum, and has to some extent obliged his rivals to follow him into such uncharted territory. The real coup in Iowa - that a self-avowed "socialist" could jostle with a former first lady and snatch close to 50% of the vote - demonstrates that a Corbyn-type space for revolutionary arguments has to some extent been opened up for those who dare to occupy it.

@Tommundaycs

Notes

1. www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-elections/iowa-caucus-hillary-clinton-wins-six-delegates-by-coin-toss-a6848126.html
2. www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/feb/02/hillary-clinton-bernie-sanders-iowa-caucus-cruz-trump
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDPjd8i0HA>
4. www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2016/president/nh/new_hampshire_democratic_presidential_primary-3351.html
5. www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2016/president/ia/iowa_republican_presidential_caucus-3194.html
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