

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly **worker**



**Tide turns against Jacob Zuma: SACP now looking for leadership change**

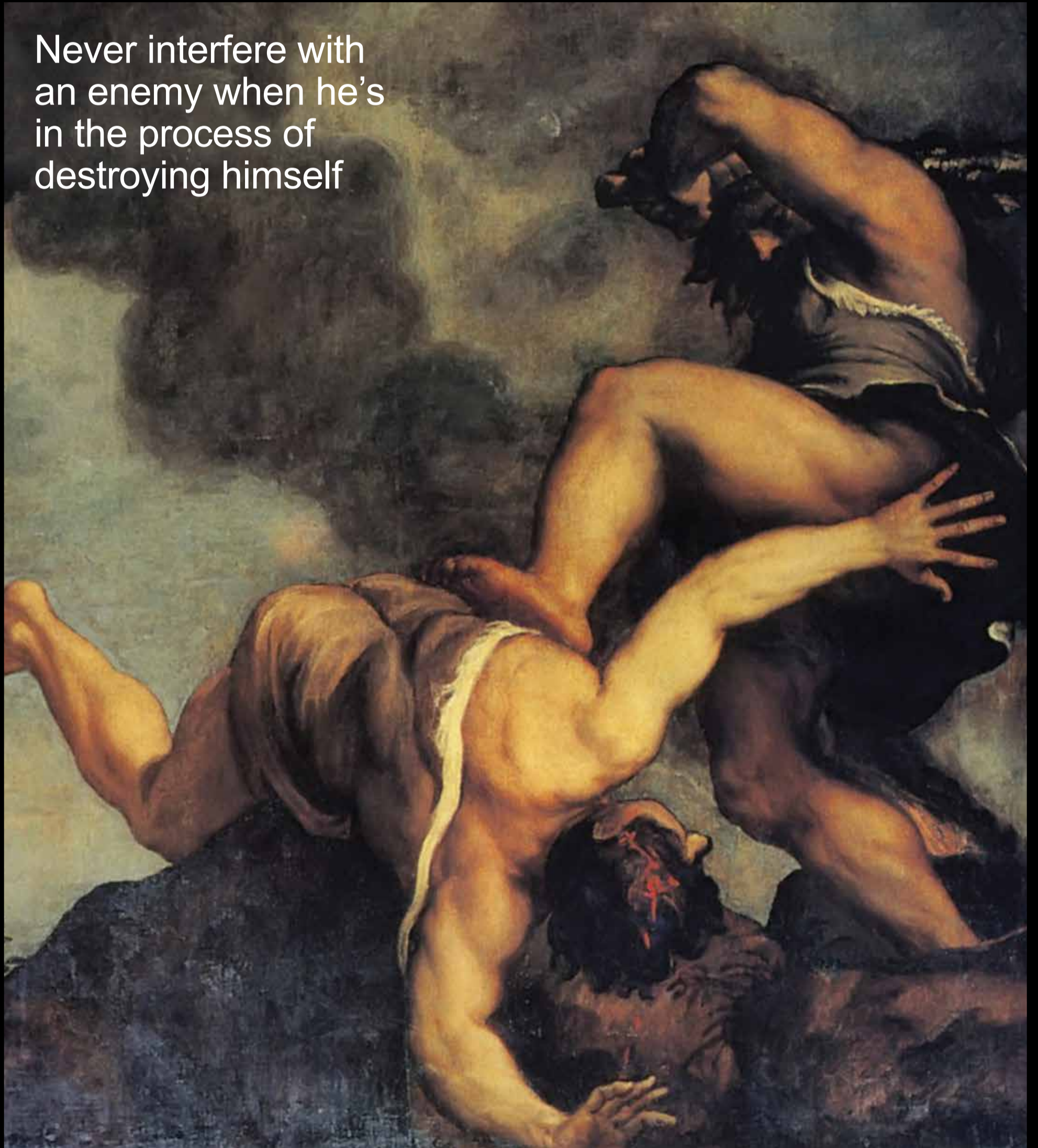
- Letters and debate
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Never interfere with an enemy when he's in the process of destroying himself



## LETTERS



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

## Expelled

I have now been expelled from the Labour Representation Committee for anti-Semitism. I found out via the tweets posted on April 2 by Andrew Coates and David Osland.

As I pointed out in my letter to LRC secretary Norrette Moore, this was conducted in flagrant disregard for the LRC constitution: "A capitalist employer - eg, a bus company in a bourgeois democracy - would afford me full rights of hearing and representation if I had killed a pedestrian by reckless driving when I worked as a bus driver. You have given me no rights at all in flagrant disregard for your own constitution. Do you think that you have acted in the manner appropriate to the functioning of the socialist society to which you claim to aspire? Is 1984 still to come for you?"

But the charge as reported in the tweets is anti-Semitism - a charge accepted by Tony Greenstein, only to find himself up on the same charge, suspended from the Labour Party and treated only a little better in democratic terms than I was. But he is totally innocent of this charge, whereas Ian Donovan and Gerry Downing are not, he thinks. He has had several goes at explaining why we are guilty, such as, "their politics leads inexorably in an anti-Semitic direction" (Letters, March 31) and on Facebook to me: "Although I've made it clear that I don't consider you to be personally anti-Semitic, this crackpot theory cannot but have anti-Semitic implications." And, best of all, to Ian and Gilad Atzmon: "Never said you hated Jews. Never said Atzmon hates Jews. Enoch Powell wasn't personally racist" in a tweet. So we are all not anti-Semitic like Powell wasn't a racist - ie, we are guilty as charged.

So what is anti-Semitism? It is a very politically charged concept, the reader will have realised by now. Typical definitions are, "prejudice against, hatred or discrimination against Jews as an ethnic, religious or racial group". So we are not that type of anti-Semites, are we? No, just people whose ideas might lead to that if we were to draw the wrong conclusions from them. And there are plenty of Zionists ready to draw such conclusions at a moment's notice. But the CPGB's *Notes for Action* directs us to the Zionist ex-minister Eric Pickles' government site which has a more pro-Zionist definition: "Examples of the ways in which anti-Semitism manifests itself with regard to the state of Israel, taking into account the overall context, could include: denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination - eg, by claiming that the existence of a state of Israel is a racist endeavour ... Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis." Greenstein is definitively guilty here, as are all anti-Zionist activists.

And what does our political positions lead to "inexorably"? "That we should campaign against the Jewish bourgeoisie separately from its non-Jewish counterpart," Tony says. But we don't do that and will not do that. We are definitely *not* going down the road of Esther Kaplan and "hang the Jewish capitalists". But we do recognise the unique position that Zionism holds in the USA and western Europe in particular. Witness today how it is being used to discipline and tame the leftism of the Corbyn leadership to prepare it to be a reliable second line of defence for British and global imperialism in the very likely event of the Tories collapsing in disarray over Brexit.

Tony, in his article 'Weapon of choice' (March 24), attempts to deal with the analysis of the Belgian Trotskyist, Abram Leon, who died in Auschwitz in 1944, of the Jews as a "people-class" -

the seminal text on the Jewish question for all Trotskyists. Turns out he was not so great, because Tony profoundly disagrees with him and only makes a bow in his direction and then proceeds to ignore everything he wrote on the subject. Jewish bankers were not any more influential in the Middle Ages than any others, he says, and: "What is certain is that a separate Jewish bourgeoisie, whose most famous representative was the Jewish financier and philanthropist, Sir Moses Montefiore, disappeared in the 19th century." But, no, he has gone too far there, he thinks, and contradicts himself in his blog of March 28: "Downing's stupidity is less excusable. The French revolution resolved the Jewish question, the place of Jews in European society, over 200 years ago."

So Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx were wasting their time in 1843 and Abram Leon likewise in 1942 when they wrote on the Jewish question. It was solved either by the French revolution or by the death of Montefiore almost a hundred years later in 1885. He tells us how was it 'solved':

"In the words of Stanislas Marie Adélaïde, the count of Clermont-Tonnerre, 'We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation and accord everything to Jews as individuals. Only the Zionists and the anti-Semites rejected the emancipation of the Jews.'" And: "As Leon noted, 'the economic process from which the modern nations issued laid the foundations for integration of the Jewish bourgeoisie into the bourgeois nation'."

Well, that has not happened and cannot happen because of the emergence of the state of Israel. The development of Lenin's and the Left Opposition's position on the national question understands that it will not happen this side of the world revolution. We do *not* seek the assimilation of 'the Jews' in a mechanical fashion, we do *not* think that the national question is an unfortunate diversion from the struggle for socialism - as the Second International and the Bolsheviks, including Lenin and Trotsky did until about 1920 and Lenin's last struggle against Stalin from 1921-23. Here he asserted the right of Georgia to self-determination as an integral part of the struggle to mobilise the masses for the world revolution. Stalin saw it as a bureaucratic nuisance to be crushed as soon as possible. Therefore, Trotsky's estimation of the Jewish question in 1937 was the same as Trotskyist Abraham Leon's position in 1942:

"And how, you ask me, can socialism solve this question? On this point I can but offer hypotheses. Once socialism has become master of our planet or at least of its most important sections, it will have unimaginable resources in all domains ... The dispersed Jews who would want to be reassembled in the same community will find a sufficiently extensive and rich spot under the sun. The same possibility will be opened for the Arabs, as for all other scattered nations. National topography will become a part of the planned economy. This is the grand historical perspective that I envisage. To work for international socialism means also to work for the solution of the Jewish question."

Nothing could be further from the current state of Israel with its monstrous racist laws and regular slaughter of defenceless Palestinians. And this 'solution' is definitely not assimilation either.

Tony Greenstein's lack of understanding of the Jewish question is the same as his lack of understanding of global imperialism itself. He cannot understand that the USA is the central enemy of all humanity because the social relations of production imposed on the entire planet under the leadership of Wall Street leaves the vast majority in penury and a whole section starving in the midst of humanity's technical and economic ability to produce everything

for everyone to have a full and happy life from cradle to grave.

Tony says I am wrong that "those who are fighting imperialism right now are by definition anti-imperialist". None of those fighting or who have fought imperialism, apart from the Bolsheviks, from the left 'progressive' Stalinists and bourgeois nationalists to the monstrous barbarians of the Taliban and Islamic State, are *consistently* anti-imperialists. From Castro to Saddam, to Gaddafi and IS, they sought or seek only a better accommodation with imperialism. It really is immaterial how barbaric they are or how they came into being; once we concede that we must condone US bombing them - and apparently they have now bombed them up to 20,000 times - we are then accepting the 'civilising mission' of imperialism and that there is a greater enemy.

Tony is in error about the Khmer Rouge: US imperialism, and China on behalf of imperialism, supported them against the progressive invasion of Vietnam, backed by the USSR. And he is wrong about the Kurds. They still have a right to self-determination, but are the main allies of imperialism today against IS; that cannot end in any kind of revolution. They will be betrayed by their own leaders because of this.

"I suggest we take our lead from the masses rather than Gerry Downing's bankrupt theories," says Tony - a very silly thing for a self-professed Marxist to say. He 'forgets', for instance, how the befuddled Egyptian 'masses' overthrew a democratically elected Morsi and replaced him with a bloody army dictator, al Sisi. He cannot forge any path for human liberation that does not rely on a section of 'liberal' imperialism. He just gives up: "Some groups are neither fish nor fowl. They defy political description".

So in the end Tony rejects my plea for a united front against reaction: "What I don't want to do is entangle my own fight with your case because it is not the same. That is not cowardice. I can hardly say that anti-Semitism is a pretext for attacking anti-Zionism if you come along and give them what they want." In my humble opinion that *is* political cowardice - bred of political confusion on what is the path for human liberation and who the main enemy is in achieving it.

**Gerry Downing**  
Socialist Fight

## Irrational

Tony Greenstein is correct when he says that neither Gerry Downing nor Ian Donovan "are anti-Semitic in a personal sense", but I have to say that his corollary - that "their politics leads inexorably in an anti-Semitic direction" - is, unfortunately, understated.

Socialist Fight, of which the two are leading comrades, has adopted wholesale Donovan's 'Draft theses on the Jews and modern imperialism', which can still be viewed on the website he ran before joining SF, *Communist Explorations*. The argument it contains runs like this:

"Of all the advanced capitalist/imperialist countries today, Israel is second only to the United States in the threat it poses to the future of humanity." But the huge ruling class support Israel receives in the west has "a material basis". It is "explained by one salient fact: Jewish overrepresentation in the US and other ruling classes". For example, in the USA, "informed Jewish sources" claim that "between 40% and 48%" of billionaires are Jews (<http://commexplor.com/2014/09/06/draft-theses-on-the-jews-and-modern-imperialism>).

In other words, if you are looking for an explanation for imperialism's consistent support for Zionist Israel, you need look no further: 'It's the Jews, stupid!' This support is undertaken not because the US bourgeoisie believes

such a policy furthers the interests of US capital, but simply because the Jews within its ranks are 'overrepresented'. The implication is clear: but for the influence of these Jews, the US would not offer such consistent support to Israel.

As with all examples of racially or ethnically based discriminatory politics, this 'theory' is totally irrational. First of all, it assumes that all Jews - or, shall we say, the overwhelming majority of Jews within the ruling class - are outright Zionists. Even if we accept that the statistics Donovan quotes regarding Jewish "overrepresentation" are correct (a big 'if'), why does it follow that Jew = Zionist? There is a specific *anti-Zionist* trend within Judaism - amongst orthodox Jews, for instance. The most you can say is that Jews are more likely than not to be *sympathetic* to Israel - they certainly do not act as a powerful, disciplined, homogeneous force.

More than that, there is a further assumption that the Zionist ideology of ruling class Jews actually takes precedence over the bourgeois drive amongst them to reproduce capital and generate surplus value - why else would they promote a policy that is *not* in the interests of US capital and US imperialism? It makes you wonder how they *became* "billionaires".

You also have to ask how the Zionism of this ruling class minority is able to hold sway. What does this 'theory' say about the ruling class majority? Why are they so stupid as to permit a policy which is not in their interests? Of course, if it is argued that support for Zionism *is* in the interests of US capital, then the presence within it of specifically Jewish pro-Zionists becomes irrelevant, except as part of a particular lobby (the actual situation).

None of this leads me to conclude that Gerry Downing's expulsion from the Labour Party should be supported: it is part of a concerted campaign to smear the entire anti-Zionist left as 'anti-Semitic', and all those currently being targeted in this way must be defended. But it has to be said that the politics Socialist Fight has recently adopted has in no small way played into the right's hands.

**Peter Manson**  
South London

## Failing badly

Well done to both Ian Donovan and Tony Greenstein for spotting the allusion in my choice of pseudonym, but I would have been more pleased had they actually adumbrated the full intent of the pun (Letters, March 31). It's been said that anatomising a joke is a bit like dissecting a frog in the biology classroom: whether or not one learns anything from the exercise, the frog dies. So just to ensure this particular frog is not just very nearly dead but really most sincerely dead: the name is meant as a tweak to those who disingenuously slap a happy face on modern anti-Semitism, as if children's author Dr Seuss had illustrated Nazi propaganda movies about The Jew. Hence Judd Seuss. I suppose that in choosing it I had particularly in mind Gilad Atzmon's Jew-hating clown and clowning Jew-hater - a charlatan Tony Greenstein can see through, but Ian Donovan cannot.

Yes, certainly, Cameron's troupe - when not out stealing crutches from the elderly in the name of austerity - will now make as much anti-Labour noise on the anti-Semitism issue as they can. In doing so they give a convenient excuse for those in Labour who would rather not examine Labour's own troubles on the topic too closely, for there is no better reason not to clean house than to note that your opponent says you should.

There is a comparison to be made with the Black Lives Matter movement, a protest driven by the wildly disproportionate death rate of blacks at the hands of US police. Very early on, the

movement's opponents adopted as their reflexive response 'All lives matter'. It sounds high-minded, but really is intended by its generality to bung up specific criticism of a specific fact - in this case, the use of unreasonable, and needlessly fatal, force. 'Oh, let us not entangle ourselves deep in the weeds by harping on specific cases of a specific race,' BLM's opponents say disingenuously; 'by saying Black Lives Matter you've implicitly denied that *all* lives matter and isn't that racist in itself?'

What Corbyn doesn't understand is that his response on the anti-Semitism issue is cut essentially from the same cloth: 'All bigotries are bad, and to call the party to focus on just one, isn't that racist in itself? Many, many times I have said all bigotries are bad, and somewhere in there I suspect I almost certainly included anti-Semitism. But it is not all ethnicities winning the 'ah, look, another Labour functionary ousted for hating our ethnicity a little too publicly' lottery now apparently being held weekly. It is not all ethnicities targeted by, eg, the holocaust-denier, Paul Eisen. It is not all ethnicities making for the Labour exits.

Corbyn is not being looked to for a general statement on the general problem of generalised bigotry, but a specific statement reflecting that he understands in his gut the urgency of the moment; that he understands - in his *kishkes* - the concerns of the Jewish community are not *pro forma*, and should he continue to brush them aside so ineptly with his *pro forma* bromides, he risks sundering for a generation the bond between Labour and the Jewish voter. It is a matter not of cerebrum, but of heart, and to my great disappointment Corbyn is failing it badly.

**Judd Seuss**  
email

## Superb

What a supremely desirable and superbly revealing debate in your letters page surrounding anti-Zionism being deliberately, scurrilously and indeed perversely conflated with anti-Semitism. In my opinion Tony Greenstein has the matter 100% sorted out in his head, and fortunately shares those proper understandings of his with the rest of us.

Of course, all such calculated disinformation - aka carefully crafted 'psyops' manipulation of public perception - originates from the bowels of both the CIA and the Pentagon, which in turn owe a great deal to Goebbels and the Nazi propaganda machine (see [www.psywarrior.com/psyhist.html](http://www.psywarrior.com/psyhist.html)).

Similarly in order to put things in the widest possible perspective, might I suggest everyone involved takes proper note of professor Norman Finkelstein's books, *The holocaust industry: reflections on the exploitation of Jewish suffering and Image and reality of the Israel/Palestine conflict*. Those being works from an avidly anti-Israel Jewish man, who, as a direct result, was hounded out of his USA academic positions and career.

Further might I suggest that everyone reminds themselves about the existence of extremely well-funded and highly organised outfits such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in USA and a plethora of 'Friends of Israel'-styled outfits in many other countries. Moreover, about the existence of teams of Israel-based but globally-linked internet ghosts who make it their business to 'correct' Wikipedia entries and covertly challenge and thereby pervert other online items that they deem to undermine either the Zionist project or the state and government of Israel.

In all of these contexts, Glenn Greenwald at *The Intercept* (incidentally himself Jewish)

produces articles containing pristine and detailed evidence about Israeli/Zionist interference in and thereby partial control of both the media and government policy in USA plus elsewhere. The most recent example is via his article dated March 30 entitled: 'Complying with Israeli censorship order - *NYT* conceals name of soldier who shot wounded Palestinian'.

**Bruno Kretzschmar**  
email

## Super

Michael Roberts salutes John Smith's book *Imperialism in the 21st century* for exposing and analysing "the exploitation of billions of people in what used to be called the 'third world'". But he then disputes some of Smith's main theoretical arguments ('North and south', March 31). I would like to take issue with Roberts over a few of these.

He questions the division between 'oppressor' and 'oppressed' nations, which was fundamental to Lenin's analysis of imperialism, as well as to Smith's. Some nations oppressed by imperialists are also oppressors of others in their own right, Roberts observes. That fact is undeniable, and the world in this respect is more complex than in Lenin's day. But the distinction is still valid.

As Roberts points out, "imperialist domination means the appropriation of wealth and surplus value from other national economies". Indeed, a useful economic indicator is the balance of surplus value, imported vs exported. China, for example, invests capital abroad and exploits workers in south-east Asia and Africa, importing the surplus value they produce. But many more millions of Chinese workers are superexploited by foreign imperialist corporations, either directly or through intermediate contractors. China undoubtedly exports more surplus value to the global north than it imports from the global south. By this criterion - a key aspect of oppression - it is an exploited more than an exploiting country.

A couple of the countries that Roberts suggests cannot be classified easily (South Korea and Taiwan) indeed do not fall clearly on the downside of the balance of surplus value indicator. But others do - eg, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Malaysia. On the world scale they remain oppressed. There has been a valuable discussion, especially among Latin American and South African Marxists, suggesting that some of these countries - for example, Brazil and India - should be labelled as 'sub-imperialist': in brief, imperialised globally, but imperialist locally, through military as well as economic muscle. Developing such a category makes more sense than throwing up one's hands in indecision, as Roberts appears to do.

Roberts doubts that superexploitation is the predominant method by which imperialism extracts surplus value from the 'global south' today. He gives several reasons, none convincing. One is that superexploitation has always existed under capitalism, while other forms of increasing exploitation - namely raising absolute and relative surplus value - continue to operate. True, but the intermingling of multiple techniques that increase exploitation does not refute the claim that superexploitation is predominant today.

Then Roberts observes that low wages are not enough to prove that workers are superexploited. Low-waged workers could be so unproductive that they produce little surplus value. Yes, that is conceivable, but not dominant today. If productivity in the south is half of what it is in the north, but wages are only one-tenth or less (as is common), that means that capitalists can wring more value out of southern workers than northern. Moreover, again as Roberts points out, companies like Foxconn employ the latest technology, so the productivity gap is small. That's why capitalists are 'offshoring' so much

industry to the south.

Third, Roberts says there is no a single world value of labour-power, so poorly paid southern workers might not be as badly off as their low wage would seem to suggest. Again, the fact is true: many consumption goods cost less in the south, so even if southern workers are paid much less, they can buy more use-values with their wage than could northern workers if paid the same pittance. But capitalists move industries to the south to take advantage of lower wages and other costs based on international rates of exchange, not on purchasing power parity. From their angle, the reason they move southward is the opportunity to take advantage of the lower value of labour-power - in a word, superexploitation.

Fourth and finally on this point, Roberts astonishingly writes: "[W]hen wages are forced below the value of labour-power and are held there for some time, that can change the value of labour-power itself (which, remember, is a socially as well as physically defined category). When wages fall below the value of labour-power and are each time in the succeeding production process kept lower than the value of labour-power, this eventually becomes the new standard of living for labour and so the value of labour-power falls. The lower wage becomes the money manifestation of the new value of labour-power and 'superexploitation' disappears!"

Superexploitation disappears? No, in Roberts' scenario it has been made universal. Roberts interprets a massive defeat for the working class, south and north, as the elimination of superexploitation because, by current standards, all workers have become superexploited! This is a legalistic argument aimed at making not just superexploitation, but also its theoretical significance, disappear.

Theory aside, what makes Smith's case so persuasive is his demonstration that the great majority of the world's industrial workforce is located today in the south. In 1950, two-thirds of industrial workers were in the north. By 1975 it was half and half. And in 2010 almost 80% were in the south. Why? Because southern wages cost capitalists so much less. If we add the fact that underpaid migrant workers form an increasing proportion of the labour force in the north, it is hard to argue that world capitalism in the present century is not dependent on superexploitation.

Roberts criticises Smith for saying that the cause of the global financial crisis and the resultant great depression was "overproduction" rather than a falling rate of profit. In fact Smith says both, referring to the "twin crises of declining profitability and overproduction that resurfaced in the 1970s in the form of stagflation and synchronised global recession". I think Smith's "twin crises" could be made sharper by noting that crises of overproduction are cyclical, whereas the tendency for the rate of profit to fall is a long-term one. The two are, of course, interrelated. The secular tendency deepens the effects of the cyclical crises, while capitalism's efforts to overcome crises without a massive and potentially disastrous devaluation of existing capital create a build-up of fictitious values that in turn exacerbates the falling-rate-of-profit tendency.

That said, I agree with Roberts - and Smith surely does too - that there are limits to imperialism's ability to increase the rate of exploitation and thereby offset the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. As Roberts says, "the struggle of the burgeoning proletariat in the south is key". From this one hopes to see the emergence of an internationalist working class fighting to overcome capitalism everywhere.

**Walter Daum**  
New York

## Two-faced

I am at a loss to understand why the CPGB are supporting Bernie Sanders as some kind of socialist. In Eddie

Ford's article he places the description of Sanders as a capitalist politician by another of your correspondents in quotation marks, as if this was somehow a matter of opinion ('Tactical flexibility, political principle', March 31).

Sanders' political record as an independent liberal capitalist politician, who has consistently supported the capitalist Democratic Party even before he decided to stand to be their presidential candidate, is not a secret. You don't need to be a Marxist to see which side of the class line he actually stands on - see, for instance, [www.counterpunch.org/2006/11/15/a-socialist-in-the-senate](http://www.counterpunch.org/2006/11/15/a-socialist-in-the-senate).

Why are the CPGB pretending that this quite clearly capitalist politician is any kind of socialist. Reading the responses to the various letters arguing that your support to Sanders is a betrayal of the idea of working class independence, it seems that the CPGB believe that supporting liberal capitalist politicians is consistent with saying that working class independence is a core political principle.

Frankly this is an absurd idea and Marxism has a term for this kind of two-faced, abstractly correct 'principles', combined with doing the exact opposite in concrete politics - opportunism.

**Steve Johnson**  
email

## Basic income

As they would say in Glasgow, I 'would like to agree' with comrade Jacob Richter in his letter (March 31), but unfortunately he has missed the point completely in two respects.

1. Nobody is arguing that basic income would deal with structural and cyclical unemployment. It is not by any means a panacea.

2. On the subject of the desirability of work, the key question is: at what rate should the basic income be set (particularly in relation to any minimum wage)? It should not be so low as to be derisory, nor so high as to extinguish the desire to seek employment. It is not true that people in receipt of it would not be "doing anything" - they would spontaneously raise the level of effective demand. But we also all desire work, because it brings status and fellowship in a joint enterprise; a properly calculated basic income would not obstruct that.

Comrade Richter's other points are more substantial. Yes, there would be downward pressure on wages: this would have to be opposed politically, via trade union action and in other ways. Yes, there needs to be a fight for extended welfare provision, as well as a state-led expansion of employment. Thanks very much for the accompanying references.

Thanks also to Paul Smith for his comments. It may well be that such a scheme would "act as a means of stabilising commodity relations in a declining and crisis-ridden capitalism". However, such a forecast abstracts from our own activities to advance socialism. We cannot expect people to support socialism, and support us, merely by outlining the advantages of it, SPGB style. We need to campaign for the rectification of specific grievances, and having no monetary means of support constitutes a whopping grievance.

Basic income is a simple idea which, as Paul Smith concedes, could be a popular measure. We need to put forward a series of specific reforms whose rationale can be easily grasped. The idea is not to give advice to the ruling class, but to generate a demand for reform from below, so that we can win some effective changes to the system. It should be a cumulative process.

As Peter Sellers put it in the film *The Millionairess*, "You are suffering from a dire disease, called money. The only known cure is a revolution."

**Chris Gray**  
London

# 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 April 10, 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 3 ('Parliamentarism vs direct action'), section 4: 'Labour and communism'. Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

## Attack of the drones

**Friday April 8, 11am:** Protest against local manufacture of military drones, Thales arms factory, Manor Royal, Crawley, West Sussex. Organised by Sussex Stop Arming Israel: [www.ssa12016.wordpress.com](http://www.ssa12016.wordpress.com).

## IS, imperialism and Syria

**Monday April 11, 7pm:** Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, Upper Goat Lane, Norwich NR2. Organised by Norwich Stop the War Coalition: <http://norwichstopwar.org.uk>.

## How to stop Trident

**Monday April 11, 7.30pm:** Public meeting. Brent Trades Hall, 375 High Road, London NW10. With Dr Rebecca Johnson (Green Party). Organised by Brent Stop the War: [www.facebook.com/BrentStoptheWar](http://www.facebook.com/BrentStoptheWar).

## Against capital

**Tuesday April 12, 4pm:** Book launch, Doublet Bar, 74 Park Road, Glasgow G4. Discussion with editor Cliff Slaughter and contributor Bob Myers. Organised by Zero Books: [www.zero-books.net](http://www.zero-books.net).

## The housing we need

**Tuesday April 12, 7pm:** Discussion, St Mary's Centre, 82-90 Corporation Road, Middlesbrough TS1. What should Labour's housing policy be? Speaker: Chris Kemp. Organised by Momentum Teesside: [www.facebook.com/MomentumTeesside](http://www.facebook.com/MomentumTeesside).

## Nationalise Tata

**Wednesday April 13, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, Grand Hotel, Station Road, Port Talbot. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: <http://shopstewards.net>.

## Universal credit - what next?

**Wednesday April 13, 9.30am to 3pm:** Education session, Learning Partnership Cornwall, Redruth Centre, 5-6 Station Road, Redruth. 'Universal credit - what will it mean for workers?' Free entrance. Bookings: [www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/universal-credit-what-will-it-mean-for-workers-tickets-17222895143](http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/universal-credit-what-will-it-mean-for-workers-tickets-17222895143). Organised by South West TUC: [southwest@tuc.org.uk](mailto:southwest@tuc.org.uk).

## No to anti-union laws

**Wednesday April 13, 7.30pm:** Activists meeting, Karibu Education Centre, 7 Gresham Road, London SW9. Organised by South London National Shop Stewards Network: <http://shopstewards.net>.

## End austerity now

**Saturday April 16, 1pm:** National protest against state budget cuts. Assemble Gower Street/Euston Road, London NW1. Organised by People's Assembly: [www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk](http://www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk).

## Skateboarding in Palestine

**Tuesday April 19, 7.30pm:** Film show and discussion, Whitstable Labour Club, 12 Belmont Rd, Whitstable. With Theo Krish, who builds skate-parks in Palestine. Organised by Faversham and Whitstable Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.facebook.com/fwpsc](http://www.facebook.com/fwpsc).

## Workers Memorial Day

**Thursday April 28, 11am:** Meeting, Unite the Union, 1 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF11. Memorial for all workers killed or injured due to unsafe working conditions. Free, with small buffet. Organised by Welsh TUC: [wtuc@tuc.org.uk](mailto:wtuc@tuc.org.uk).

## Racist and Islamophobic

**Saturday April 30, 5pm:** Meeting, Augustine United Church, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH1. The effects of the 'anti-terrorist' Prevent policy. Organised by Muslim Women's Association of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Stop the War and Scotland Against Criminalising Communities: [www.stopwar.org.uk/index.php/events/local-stop-the-war-events/1837-30-apr-edinburgh-public-meeting-prevent-racist-and-islamophobic](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/index.php/events/local-stop-the-war-events/1837-30-apr-edinburgh-public-meeting-prevent-racist-and-islamophobic).

## The Russian Revolution

**Saturday May 14, 10am to 5pm:** Critique conference, Student Central, Malet Street, London WC1. Preparing for and discussing next year's centenary. Organised by Critique journal: [www.critiquejournal.net](http://www.critiquejournal.net).

## Stop the War Coalition

**Saturday May 14, 11am to 5pm:** Conference, Midlands Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham, B3. Organised by Birmingham Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/index.php/events/local-stop-the-war-events/1842-14-may-birmingham-stop-the-war-conference](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/index.php/events/local-stop-the-war-events/1842-14-may-birmingham-stop-the-war-conference).

## Unofficial war artist

**Ends Monday May 30:** New exhibition of Peter Kennard's work, Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1. Free entry. Organised by Imperial War Museum: [www.iwm.org.uk/exhibitions/iwm-london/peter-kennard](http://www.iwm.org.uk/exhibitions/iwm-london/peter-kennard).

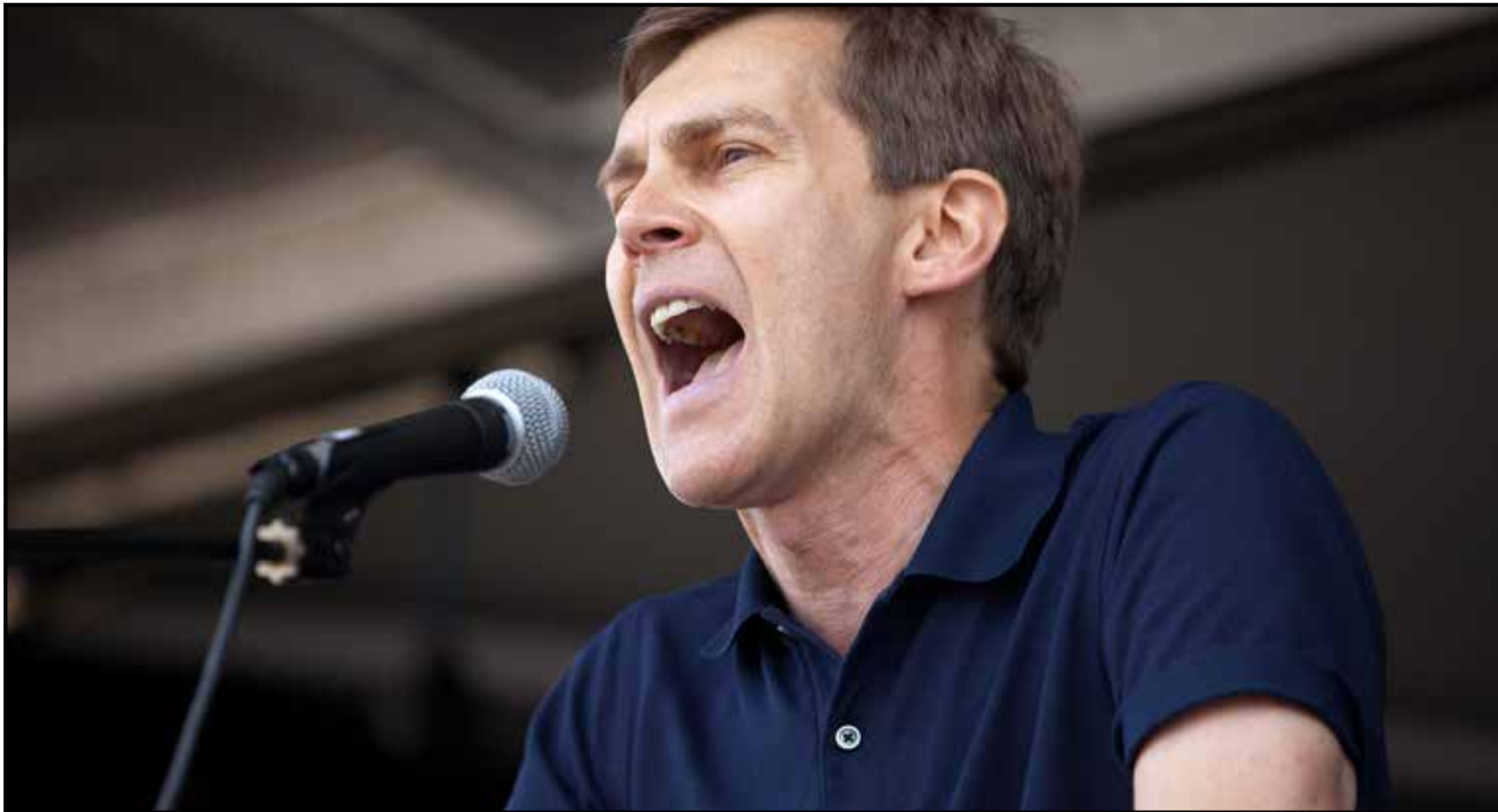
## CPGB wills

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

**LABOUR PARTY**

# Straight-talking left

There is nothing to fear from openly and honestly reporting our meetings, writes **Sarah McDonald**



**Seumas Milne: call to isolate hard right popular**

It's a funny old world. You attend a meeting, you make a few political points, then some bastard with a pencil goes and reports what you've said! Who'd have heard the like? Next thing, you'll have political activists writing in newspapers, making speeches, commenting on political issues ... It makes one wonder why they got into politics in the first place, if they wanted a quiet life and not let anyone know what they were thinking.

I refer, of course, to Seumas Milne, Jeremy Corbyn's current director of strategy, who made a "surprise appearance" at the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy's annual general meeting on March 19. Milne made some innocuous remarks about isolating the Labour hard right on social media. The comment was made in reference to those in the party who would like to see Labour do badly in the local elections and in Scotland (where it almost certainly will, due to the popularity of the Scottish National Party and Labour's role in the Better Together campaign) in order to undermine the Corbyn leadership and mount a challenge. Not least the likes of Labour backbencher John Woodcock, who wrote a *Mirror* article calling for Corbyn to be removed (March 24 2016).

What is especially odd about the fallout from this is that the issue of contention is not around the Labour right's relationship to the press or the tactics available to 'team Corbyn' to defeat it, but rather Labour Party Marxists member Stan Keable and his mighty pencil. Comrade Keable attended the CLPDAGM as one of about 80 members. It must be emphasised at this point that those attending could sign up on the day, as could observers, the only condition being that they must be Labour members. There was no stipulation to check your phones in at the door, like some exclusive fetish party, never mind pens, notepads and digital voice recorders. And comrade Keable's

great offence was to report the utterances of comrade Milne on the Labour Party Marxists website (not to mention in the *Weekly Worker*).

At the risk of overstating the obvious, a politician, who is the director of strategy for the leader of the Labour Party, attends a political meeting that is open to all Labour members who sign up to attend and vote on the day, makes a political statement - and then, bizarrely, we have some censorious comrades going onto this or that semi-public e-list protesting that his remarks were reported! What spurred our Seumas into politics in the first place? The bloke has some experience, after all. A quick Google search of him will throw up the fact that he stood as a Maoist candidate in a mock student election and, more seriously, that he was business manager for the *Straight Left* group in the 'official' CPGB, a pro-Soviet opposition faction formed around Fergus Nicholson, aka Harry Steel (Harry from Pollitt and Steel from Stalin, the man of steel), and others still prominent in today's Communist Party of Britain, such as John Foster and Andrew Murray. Presumably, he got into politics to fight for his ideas, however dubious, not to keep quiet. If the comrade did not want people to hear his political opinions, why speak? Why attend the meeting in the first place? Presumably the fear that the media and Labour right, about whom he made the offending comments (in case you'd forgotten the actual content of the story) would use his statements to discredit Corbyn. Well, I am afraid they did and were always going to. But, following that logic, Corbyn supporters should surely say nothing at all, ever, to anyone.

The Corbyn camp will be derided by the right and the media for the political positions it actually takes on war, imperialism, Keynesianism - not to mention those almost entirely

unfounded claims of anti-Semitism that the media has been rife with of late. There will be smears and ridiculing of greater or lesser importance and that was always to be expected as soon as Corbyn won the leadership. Comrades will have their political pasts brought into the limelight and must be able to explain or defend past positions. Seumas Milne might reasonably have been more worried that his association with *Straight Left* would be used as a way of tainting Corbyn with the politics of Stalinism than he would about comments regarding the Labour right.

Nonetheless, the *Mirror* did pick up the story (March 29 2016). Its piece quotes various outraged backbenchers who are opposed to Corbyn, including the aforementioned John Woodcock, who tweeted: "Tawdry ... explains a lot. Tactics hallmark of ultra-left apparatchiks, should have no place in British Labour Party." Quite a statement from the man who had just called for the democratically elected leader of the Labour Party to be ousted. Surely it is Woodcock, not Milne, whose position in the Labour Party should be in question. And, it seems the *Mirror's* readership are also of the view that rightwing, self-serving backbenchers like Woodcock should be isolated. At the bottom of the page on its website there is a poll asking, "Should Labour's internal critics be isolated on social media?" The answer over 60% of those clicking have given is "Yes". Not that this is a scientifically accurate measure of popular sentiment, but it is indicative of the fact that, far from alienating people by taking on the Labour right, Corbyn could garner support by doing so. Ironically, however, Milne is distancing himself from his own comments. According to the *Mirror*,

A source close to the leadership said Mr Milne "did not recognise"

the quote and it had come from a "small, hyper-sectarian group".

Asked about the 'isolated' claim, the source told the *Mirror*: "I don't think that's entirely accurate. "It was a closed meeting and a little sectarian group of one and a half, so I wouldn't be taking their account of it too literally. The broad point is that the number of Labour MPs who are so hostile that they are saying they want Labour to do badly in the local elections are a small minority."

Yes, a few control freaks on the left seem to think that Milne's comments should not have been reported; the rationale being that it aids the right wing. This leads to the absurd situation in which the right are given *carte blanche* in attempting to oust the man who won the leadership of the party outright. Criticism of the right should not be reported publicly because it will give them ammunition to attack the left, who presumably should just shut up and take it! Meanwhile, readers of the *Mirror* appear to support the

statement from which Seumas Milne and the like are making every effort to distance themselves, ironically, for fear of making Corbyn and his supporters unpopular. You just couldn't make it up.

The notion that what is said in a meeting ought to be the private property of those in attendance is worrying. This paper has often been accused of assisting the right - or the state - simply by reporting, which is nonsense. If people are in politics, then they ought to be political and held accountable for their positions. No-one is out to humiliate the naive or vulnerable - Seumas Milne is a seasoned politician, who ought to be able to defend his views publicly.

Of course, the media will attack the left, whether through *The Daily Telegraph* or the *Mirror*, *The Times* or *The Guardian*. That is why it is crucial that the left's own publications, websites, podcasts etc take politics seriously, develop arguments and advocate open and honest debate ●

## Nationalise Tata

The CPGB Provisional Central Committee at its meeting on April 3 called for the expropriation of Tata's UK steel assets in order temporarily to preserve steelworkers' jobs.

We do not call for protectionism as a solution to the problem, which would merely be to export job losses onto workers elsewhere; or for subsidies to Tata or to new private owners, which are merely an indirect form of protectionism. As to promoting alternative private bidders, we

remind the movement of the 'local business' buyers of the old Longbridge car plant, who merely gobbled up some state aid and stripped the assets.

We refuse to enter into debate about how much steel production capacity is objectively needed: such a debate would be relevant if the working class had full power to decide on production. As long as the capitalists retain the power to decide on production, they retain the responsibility for closures and job losses ●

## ANTI-SEMITISM

# Don't appease: fight!

The Labour Party's Compliance Unit is employing *The Daily Telegraph* to pursue its allegations of 'anti-Semitism', writes Tony Greenstein

For the last nine months the Labour right and the Zionists have been waging a campaign around anti-Semitism, beginning with the accusation that Jeremy Corbyn was consorting with holocaust-deniers. This campaign was launched by the *Daily Mail*, the paper that supported Hitler before World War II, and fronted by the editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*, Stephen Pollard, a man who has no problem supporting fascists and anti-Semites - as long as they support Israel.<sup>1</sup>

Then, when Corbyn was elected, primarily *The Guardian* and its editor, Jonathan Freedland, accused Corbyn of allowing anti-Semitism to prosper in the Labour Party. And the past few weeks have seen a welter of charges around trivial examples of 'anti-Semitism' - some real, some imagined. There has been the case of Gerry Downing of Socialist Fight, who idiotically believes, along with Ian Donovan, that the 'Jewish question' accounts for western support for Israel. A two-year-old tweet by Vicky Kirby alleging Jews had big noses was brought out of the cupboard to 'prove' that anti-Semitism was on the rampage in the Labour Party. This was cleverly coupled by Freedland with the actions of Oxford University Labour Club for supporting Israel Apartheid week.<sup>2</sup>

On the back of Downing and Kirby the Zionists have constructed their case. Thrown into the pot is a reference to six million dead Zionists by Khadim Hussain, a former mayor of Bradford. Quite understandably he uses the term 'Zionists' instead of 'Jews' - I can't imagine where he got such an idea! The point he made - the fact that the study of the holocaust in school syllabuses concentrates on the extermination of Jews (the disabled and Gypsies nearly always get left out) to the exclusion of the 10 million Africans who died in the Belgian Congo alone - is not in the least anti-Semitic.

*The Guardian* has run a whole series of articles alleging anti-Semitism in the Labour Party, whilst refusing anything by way of right of reply. These have included a piece by Nick Cohen on why he is becoming a Jew - again.<sup>3</sup> It is a rerun of an article seven years ago in the *Jewish Chronicle*. Another figure joining in is Owen Jones, *The Guardian*'s resident leftist, whose brain seems to take a leave of absence whenever anti-Semitism is mentioned.<sup>4</sup> So overwhelmed is Owen that he feels the need to write the same article every year. His article in 2014 even starts with the same phrase - "Anti-Semitism is a menace!"<sup>5</sup>

Having had the ground prepared by *The Guardian*, the Labour Party bureaucracy is now preparing to move against individual members who are active anti-Zionists or Palestine solidarity activists.

Two weeks ago I got a letter out of the blue from the Labour Party. John Stolliday, head of the Compliance Unit, informed me that I had been suspended from membership because of comments I am alleged to have made. Despite three letters to Stolliday and Harry Gregson, Labour's south-east regional organiser, I have not been able to ascertain what the alleged comments are, still less who the complainant might be. Of course, I have my suspicions - especially after Jeremy Newmark of the grandiosely titled Jewish Labour Movement (overseas branch of the racist Israeli

Labour Party) boasted on Twitter of my suspension.

Gregson had promised the chairperson of Brighton Labour Party, Lloyd Russell-Moyle, that I would be given the evidence regarding my crimes within a week. When I rang Gregson, however, I was informed that Labour Party procedures require that I should be kept in the dark until after he has conducted his investigation, despite the NEC's own guidance stating that "the respondent should be notified of the investigation and the nature of the complaints or allegations at an early stage".

Those readers of a literary disposition will recognise that Labour Party procedures bear more than a passing resemblance to the trial in *Alice in Wonderland*. First the sentence, then the verdict and finally the evidence!

### Identity

Behind the Labour Party's arbitrary procedures there lies a direct political attack on the left, led by people like John Mann, the rent-a-mouth MP who was branded a pompous liar by the employment tribunal in the case of *Fraser v University College Union*, when the Zionists failed in their efforts to show that the UCU was anti-Semitic because it had supported a boycott of Israeli universities.

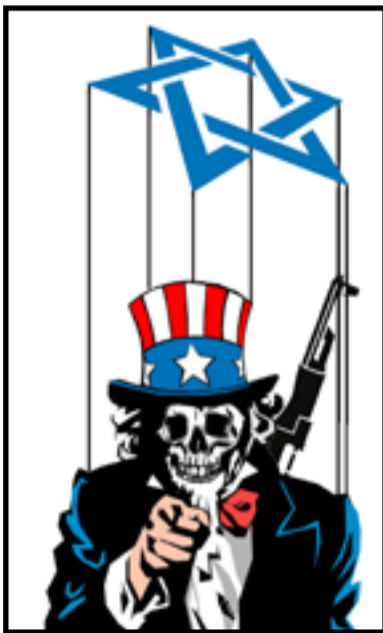
According to Freedland, 93% of British Jews say that Israel forms part of their identity.<sup>6</sup> The unstated implication being that challenges to that identity, in particular anti-Zionism, is anti-Semitic. Logically therefore if a group of people define their identity as white and male, then challenges to that identity on the grounds of sexism or racism is in itself discriminatory! This is not *reductio ad absurdum* - fascist and racist organisations do indeed claim that the white working class is the most oppressed group in society.

In the age of identity politics, offending any group, however powerful they may be, is a particularly heinous crime. Attacking millionaire tax dodgers may soon become the new oppression! Far from being an aggressive militaristic state, armed with nuclear weapons and \$3 billion of US military aid a year, Israel is "the collective Jew among the nations".<sup>7</sup>

You can imagine my surprise when, after an evening out with my children, I came back to be informed that the internet and Twitter was buzzing with a *Daily Telegraph* 'exclusive' that I was the latest Labour anti-Semite to be unmasked. A somewhat cleaned-up version appeared in the Saturday version.<sup>8</sup>

Despite not giving me any details of the allegations made against me, the Compliance Unit had nonetheless passed the information on to a paper which is not known for supporting the Labour Party. Naturally John Mann was on hand to inform the *Telegraph*'s Labour readership that it was "hugely inappropriate" for me to remain a member of the Labour Party. Over the summer Mann had argued that it was "hugely inappropriate" for Jeremy Corbyn to be elected leader.

The internet version of the *Telegraph* article, from which *The Times* story was copied, claimed erroneously that I said that Jews supported the Nuremberg laws.<sup>9</sup> The 1935 Nuremberg laws have been described as "the most murderous



But Uncle Sam is no puppet

legislative instrument known to European history".<sup>10</sup> They stripped Germany's Jews of their citizenship, made German 'blood' the requirement for citizenship and forbade marriage and sexual relations between Germany's Jews and 'Aryans'.

But they are comparable to Israeli laws and practices. There is no civil marriage in Israel, because Israel wants to prevent Jews and non-Jews from marrying. There is only religious marriage. Although theoretically an Arab can convert to be a Jew, the authorities routinely bar Arab conversions to Judaism.<sup>11</sup> The attitude of Israeli Jews to relationships between Arabs and Jews is that it is "national treason".<sup>12</sup>

The Israeli government even funds, thanks to the efforts of deputy foreign minister Tzipi Hotoveli, the 'charitable' wing of the fascist Lehava group. Lehava beats up Arab men in 'Jewish' areas to stop forbidden relationships. Its activists have been convicted of setting fire to one of Israel's only mixed Arab-Jewish schools, while Hand in Hand in Jerusalem and its leader, Benzi Gopstein, advocate the burning down of mosques and churches. If a Palestinian did likewise they would be arrested at a moment's notice.<sup>13</sup>

The print version of the *Telegraph* article<sup>14</sup> alleged that I compared Israel's laws on inter-racial marriage to the Nuremberg laws and implied that this is yet another example of anti-Semitism in the Labour Party. If I am guilty of anti-Semitism, then so is the greatest Jewish political philosopher of the 20th century, Hannah Arendt, herself a refugee from the Nazis, who wrote:

Israeli citizens, religious and non-religious, seem agreed upon the desirability of having a law which prohibits intermarriage ... there certainly was something breathtaking in the naivety with which the prosecution denounced the infamous Nuremberg laws of 1935, which had prohibited intermarriage and sexual intercourse between Jews and Germans.<sup>15</sup>

The German Zionist Federation (ZvFD) were enthusiastic supporters of the separation of Jews and 'Aryans'. As the Introduction to the Nuremberg Laws stated,

If the Jews had a state of their own

in which the bulk of their people were at home, the Jewish question could already be considered solved today... The ardent Zionists of all people have objected least of all to the basic ideas of the Nuremberg laws, because they know that these laws are the only correct solution for the Jewish people too ...<sup>16</sup>

Whereas world Jewry were shocked and angry at the rise of the Nazis to power and began a massive economic boycott of Germany, the Zionists welcomed Hitler to power. They even concluded their own trade agreement, *Ha'avara*, with Nazi Germany in August 1933, which helped destroy the Jewish and labour movement boycott.<sup>17</sup>

Zionist historian Francis Nicosia wrote that "So positive was its assessment of the situation that, as early as April 1933, the ZvFD announced its determination to take advantage of the crisis to win over a traditionally assimilationist German Jewry to Zionism" (my emphasis).<sup>18</sup> Berl Katznelson, a founder of Mapai, the Israeli Labour Party, and editor of Labour Zionism's daily paper *Davar*, who was ranked equally to David Ben-Gurion, saw the rise of Hitler as "an opportunity to build and flourish like none we have ever had or ever will have".<sup>19</sup>

I suspect that this aspect of the charges will be quietly dropped because the historical record is so clear and embarrassing to the Zionists. Unless, of course, Labour's witch-hunters want to turn their Star Chamber process into a historical investigation!

### My record

The accusation of 'anti-Semitism' is absurd because my record as an anti-fascist is well known and documented. Not only am I the author of the book *The fight against fascism in Brighton and the south coast*, published by Labour History Workshop, but I was a founder-member of Brighton and Hove Anti-Fascist Committee in the 1970s, as well as being secretary of the Anti-Nazi League in Brighton in the early 1980s, when we cleared out the National Front. I later became an executive member of Anti-Fascist Action.

I led the fight to eradicate Gilad Atzmon and his supporters from the Palestine solidarity movement at a time when Zionists such as Michael Ezra and David Taube were arguing that he was not anti-Semitic.

Even Jamie Slavin of the overtly Zionist Board of Deputies of British Jews admitted on its website:

Tony is an anti-Zionist, Jewish member of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC). Whilst his views on the situation in the Middle East are a complete anathema to me, to his credit, he has led the opposition within the PSC against rising levels of anti-Semitism.<sup>20</sup>

And Jonathan Freedland himself confessed in a private email to me that "I have always had respect for the integrity of your position: I remember your admirable stance on Gilad Atzmon, for example" (October 23 2015).

However, it is amusing that non-Jewish bureaucrats, who have never lifted a finger when it comes to fighting racism, are accusing a Jewish anti-fascist of anti-Semitism!

I look forward to doing battle with Labour's McCarthyites. I hope that Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and those in Brighton Momentum and the Labour Representation Committee who want to turn a blind eye will understand that those who come for me will soon enough come for them. No-one serious can accuse me of anti-Semitism - a useful vehicle to attack the left and the Corbyn leadership itself.

Corbyn says that he has condemned anti-Semitism seven times. What he does not appreciate though is that the anti-Semitism he is talking about - hatred of, discrimination and violence against Jews - is not the anti-Semitism that the Board of Deputies is talking about. Anti-Semitism to the Zionists means anti-Zionism and opposition to the apartheid state of Israel.

McDonnell, who, as the Iron Chancellor in waiting is trying to make himself acceptable to the City of London, has also conceded to the Zionists. In an interview with Andrew Marr he said that he would take his lead from the Board of Deputies on anti-Semitism. The same Board of Deputies which, in the 1930s, told Jews to stay at home and ignore Moseley's march through the Jewish East End of London. Thousands ignored them and at the 1936 Battle of Cable Street they defeated the fascists decisively.

Corbyn and McDonnell have a choice. They can allow the witch-hunt by Labour's bureaucrats to go ahead or they can call a halt to the process before they too are its victims. As Kipling put it, "Once you pay them Dane-geld you never get rid of the Dane." In other words, don't appease the right: fight them ●

### Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/oct/09/michael-kaminskiantisemitism.
2. See 'Weapon of choice', March 24 2016.
3. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/19/why-i-am-becoming-a-jew-and-you-should-too.
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9. What it should say is that the Zionist movement supported the Nuremberg laws - a classic example of confusing Jews and Zionists!
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11. http://m.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Palestinian-requests-to-convert-to-Judaism-rejected-automatically-449987?article=6017ODN CNEJBMzA4NUeYRTE3NjA0NzQxOTFDMjdC QzZBNDU=.
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15. H Arendt *Eichmann in Jerusalem* Old Saybrook 2011, p7.
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17. See E Black *Ha'avara - the transfer agreement* New York 1999.
18. FR Nicosia *Zionism and anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany* Cambridge 2008, p146.
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20. The page has since been removed.

## REFERENDUM

# Both sides are reactionary

Demands are growing for Jeremy Corbyn to swing the balance to save Dave Cameron's bacon. Eddie Ford calls for an active boycott

David Cameron has dug himself well and truly into a hole. When he made his promise, panicked by opinion polls showing the UK Independence Party riding high, to hold an in-out referendum on the European Union, he did so in the comforting expectation that after the 2015 general election he would still be in coalition with the Liberal Democrats - who, of course, would block any such move. Problem solved. However, things did not turn out that way. Cameron got saddled with a Tory majority and therefore had to deliver on his promise.

Now, alarmingly for Cameron, the polls are showing a very close result - maybe his downfall is imminent. A telephone poll conducted by *The Daily Telegraph* on April 4 has 51% voting to stay in the European Union and 44% in favour of leaving, with 5% still undecided. But when "certainty to vote" is accounted for, the campaigns are virtually neck and neck, with 'remain' on 49% and 'leave' on 48%.<sup>1</sup> An ICM online poll published on the same day produces a similarly close result, with 'remain' on 44% and 'leave' getting 43%, while 13% are still undecided. In perhaps the most interesting poll of the lot, an Opinium survey that came out on April 2 has 'remain' on 39% and 'leave' on 43%, with 18% undecided and 1% refusing to say. However, when pressed, most of the supposedly 'don't knows' said they were actually "leaning" towards 'remain'.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the 'poll of polls' tracker for the *Financial Times* gives a fairly small lead to the 'remain' camp of 45% to 42%.<sup>3</sup>

What does seem apparent from all these surveys is that Brexiters are more likely to vote, as they tend to be more ideologically motivated than the 'remainers' - especially when it comes to hot-button issues like immigration and 'national sovereignty'. This becomes even more apparent when we break things down by age group: the same Opinium poll found that in the 18-34 age group, 53% said they backed staying in, as opposed to 29% who wanted to leave. On the other hand, amongst voters in the '55 and over' category, support for leaving was far stronger, as was their certainty to vote. Some 54% of this group said they favoured Brexit and a huge 81% were "certain" to vote.

Another poll commissioned by the Fabian Society shows that nearly two thirds of Labour voters say they are "likely" to vote 'remain' - around six million people. However, revealingly, little more than half of them say they are "very likely" to turn out.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the study discovered that, after listening to arguments from both campaigns on various topics (ie, immigration), 47% then decided to support 'leave' - two points ahead of the 'remain' vote.

## Barnstorming?

All of which places Cameron in an extremely awkward position - an irony not lost on anyone. If he wants to save his job and avoid political humiliation, he needs help from none other than Jeremy Corbyn - particularly as the Labour leader has a strong following among young people who, at the moment, are less likely to vote than their elders. If he can persuade enough of them, and Labour voters in general, then he can swing the vote. Cameron comes out smiling.

Thus we have seen the beginning of a campaign - you can call it nothing less - to get Corbyn to throw his full energies behind the 'remain' campaign.



Cain slaying Abel (Titian 1543-44)

Adopting a stern, statesman-like tone, an editorial in *The Independent* declared that the Labour leader should put the "national interest" before any "narrow party advantage" and "get off the fence before it is too late", given that the referendum is "arguably more important than last year's election". The column added that a "big speech" on Europe by Corbyn has been promised for many weeks, yet "we are still waiting".

The editorial also notes, interestingly, that the Opinium survey found that only 47% knew that Corbyn favours 'remain', compared to 78% for Cameron - 12% were convinced he actually backed the 'leave' campaign. This confusion over Corbyn's position is quite understandable. Even we on the left were surprised when he came out with his new 'pro-EU' stance, something you would never have gleaned from listening to his and John McDonnell's various speeches over the years. Indeed, Corbyn has written regularly for the left-nationalist *Morning Star* - therefore we were expecting some variation or other of the 'socialist exit' line.

Anyway, Polly Toynbee in *The Guardian* (April 5) puts further pressure on Corbyn - writing that now the Tories are in "meltdown", Corbyn needs to "find his voice". For Toynbee, this should be the moment when Labour is "speaking unequivocally in the national interest" - and who cares if it "helps save Cameron and Osborne's bacon"? What really matters is that "Tory and Ukip outers are defeated forever". A popular front against the

extremist menace.

Therefore, concludes Toynbee, what is needed is a "roadshow of barnstorming Labour rallies" featuring the "united forces" of Corbyn and John McDonnell, alongside Hilary Benn, Alan Johnson, Chuka Umunna, Yvette Cooper, Emma Reynolds, Lisa Nandy ... They would all be "reaching across Labour's own deep divide". What "an eye-catching show of unity in contrast to the Tory civil war"!

From the communist perspective, following the advice of the likes of Polly Toynbee is the *worst possible thing* Jeremy Corbyn could do - remember Scotland? There it cannot be denied that Labour enthusiastically took the lead in the Stay Together campaign, and for their patriotic service were *punished at the polls* for being in bed with the Tories. Something that was totally predictable. There is mass psychology in Scotland that says we never voted for Margaret Thatcher or David Cameron - rather, England did, and we got stuck with a Tory government: a sentiment that the Scottish National Party has been able to successfully manipulate for its reactionary, nationalist ends. In reality, it is more the case that working class Scots voted 'yes' for separation not because they are under the sway of petty nationalism, but because they hate the Tories.

Similarly, if Corbyn started to enthuse about the 'remain' campaign it would be a similar disaster: sharing any sort of platform with Cameron would be the kiss of death. Once again Labour would be seen to have climbed

into bed with the Tories - a message that that would kill off any chance of a Labour revival in Scotland. There is, of course, much talk of another independence referendum, maybe even a UDI declaration, if Scotland is dragged out of the EU as a consequence of June 23.

But the Labour right is obviously worried that Corbyn will remain semi-detached throughout the entire referendum campaign. They are hopping mad that he might be going to the Glastonbury festival in the same week as the EU referendum vote - apparently he is "keen to attend" after being invited by the Left Field travelling stage/bar organisers and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.<sup>5</sup> One disgruntled MP moaned that "this is the 'make or break' weekend for the next election" yet Corbyn is "donning his sandals to dance around in a muddy field with his peacenik Islington chums".

Under the circumstances though, maybe talking to the music fans at Glastonbury makes perfect sense. Perhaps he is following Napoleon's wise advice: "Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake". Let the Tories continue to destroy themselves.

## Prediction

We would not be foolish enough to try and predict the actual result of June 23 - it is too close to call. However, what we do foresee with some confidence is that if Brexit narrowly wins on the day there will be an almost immediate campaign by the political establishment to run *another* referendum: irresponsible politicians put party advantage over the national interests and as a result the turnout was too low ... or some such line.

Quite obviously, it would not be difficult to manufacture a climate of fear - especially if there was a run on the pound following a Brexit vote. You just flood the media with all sorts of opinion polls and stories from rueful people saying they voted 'out', but now regret their decision: if only they had been fully informed of the facts and the dreadful consequences beforehand. Then, near miraculously, the new Tory leader (obviously it will be goodbye to Cameron) will suddenly wrest a few concessions (or pseudo-concessions) from the EU and before you know it, time to have another go - but now get it right.

Anyone who says this cannot happen should just take a look at Ireland, France and Denmark - all of which voted the 'wrong way' initially. With regards to Denmark, the first referendum was held on June 2 1992, when 50.7% said 'no'. Strangely enough, the Danish government quickly secured four opt-outs from portions of the Maastricht treaty: economic and monetary union, union citizenship, justice and home affairs and common defence. A subsequent referendum the next year had 56.8% now voting in favour of the renegotiated treaty. Normality restored.

Of course, we in the CPGB have consistently argued for an active boycott. Cameron's EU 'renegotiations', by definition, were powered by an explicitly anti-migrant, anti-working class, nationalist agenda. By the same token, however, the 'out' campaign dominated by 'Little Englander' Tory frontbenchers and Ukip is likewise totally reactionary: you cannot stop the world and get off, nor would the rights and conditions of the working class improve one iota in an 'independent' Britain finally making its own way in the world.<sup>6</sup>

In this context the demand by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition to be designated the 'official' campaign to get Britain out of the EU is absurd - not to mention Tusc's threat of legal action if either Vote Leave or Grassroots Out are chosen. According to national agent Clive Heemskerk, neither group can meet the test set down by the 2000 Political Parties and Representation Act requiring referendum campaigners to "adequately represent" all those campaigning for a desired outcome, since neither can speak for anti-austerity campaigners who want to leave the EU because of their "pro-business" and "reactionary" views.<sup>7</sup> If the Electoral Commission were to recognise one of the two main Brexit groups, that would constitute a "political decision", and in the process give the 'remain' campaign a "five to ten point boost" (the EC will come to a decision on April 14).

Understandably, given that this unexpected development first appeared on the BBC website on *April 1*, for an instant this writer thought it might be a joke. But after a few seconds reflection it sounded horribly plausible and, yes, the normally moribund Tusc website had an article dated April 2 about "challenging the Tory- and Ukip-dominated exit campaigns" to a "public debate on who should be the voice of Leave"<sup>8</sup> - plus a link to a petition to the EC ("Don't give taxpayers' money to Ukip and Tory EU campaigners!"<sup>9</sup>) and a leaflet outlining Tusc's 'Exit Left' opposition to the EU.<sup>10</sup>

I am not quite sure whether to laugh or cry, though the former is probably better. As a minuscule organisation with absolutely no social weight - sorry, comrades - Tusc's 'left' exit will be drowned out by the clamorous voices of those demanding a *right* exit: make Britain great again. Sadly, Tusc will merely be providing left cover for this nationalist crap. Do the comrades really imagine that a Britain 'freed' of the EU, and possibly breaking apart under centrifugal nationalist forces, will be able to legislate in 'socialism' or even social democracy in one country?

No, under concrete British conditions, communists fight for *independent* working class politics. Our class has had no say in negotiating the terms and conditions for either 'stay' or 'leave' and should therefore refuse to back either camp. Both sides would have us believe that the main question in British politics is migrants and how best to keep them out - why the hell should we vote for that? ●

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## Notes

- www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/04/04/eu-referendum-project-fear-working-as-poll-shows-remain-taking-a.
- www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/apr/02/eu-referendum-young-voters-brexiteer-leave.
- https://ig.ft.com/sites/brexit-polling/ - calculated by taking the last seven polls from unique pollsters up to a given date, removing the two polls with the highest and lowest shares for 'remain', and calculating an adjusted average of the five remaining polls, where the more recent polls are given a higher weight.
- www.ft.com/cms/s/0/7154788c-fa44-11e5-b3f6-11d5706b613b.html.
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## SAFE SPACES

# A bureaucrat's tool

Imogen Wilson's predicament is a timely reminder that 'safe spaces' policies are anti-democratic and a gift to the right, argues Paul Demarty

**W**e wonder sometimes if April Fool's Day is losing some of its charm, primarily because the world we live in is increasingly beyond satire.

So it was with Google's disastrous mic-drop prank in mind that we first learned of the misfortune of one Imogen Wilson, a sabbatical officer at Edinburgh University Students' Association, who found herself the subject of a widely reported complaint at an EUSA general meeting last week. She had violated the student union's 'safe spaces' policy! So far as we can tell, somebody had got up to denounce her over access issues, during the course of which she raised her arms in frustration and shook her head. This, apparently, is against the rules.

Were we being punked? It seems not; for one, the meeting itself was on March 31, and live reports of the complaint were being smeared over Twitter for the benefit of those for whom an EUSA meeting is both a matter of importance and not so important to actually attend. (We wonder sometimes if it is possible for a gerbil to fart without somebody providing 140-character descriptions of the smell.) Since then, of course, the story has run and run - spreading out from the *Huffington Post* to the *Daily Mail* and the rest of the press, eager for yet another example of lefty madness.

Edinburgh's 'safe spaces' policy is a little on the comprehensive side, and compliance can only be assured by "refraining from hand gestures which denote disagreement or in any other way indicating disagreement with a point or points being made. Disagreements should only be evident through the *normal course of debate*" (my emphasis).<sup>1</sup>

We assume that there is a dictionary in the university library, but evidently it was not consulted so as to inform students on the use of the word 'normal'. Surely most people, when they have normal debates, communicate as a matter of course using the full spectrum of means available to the human body, including hand gestures and other body language. If you are speaking, meanwhile, you are probably keeping an eye on those you are addressing, and keeping track of visual cues to see how your contribution is going down. This is how humans *work* - and, indeed, a good clutch of other higher primates. EUSA's safe spaces policy is mad in part because it is a snub to hundreds of millennia of evolution.

The logical conclusion is to hold all future EUSA meetings in a pitch-black room, with contributions pre-written and fed into a speech synthesiser, to be read out in an affectless robotic monotone. This would, admittedly, present other difficulties - for instance, in the darkness, how would we identify hecklers so as to shop them into whatever committee it is that arbitrates on 'safe spaces' violations? What if the low lights are exploited for mischievous ends? Nevertheless, given the bizarre level of imagination people bring to these policies in the first place, we are confident solutions could be found.

An analogy may be drawn - bear with me now - with the Taliban. Having come to power, the Afghan Islamist movement proceeded directly to enforce a very strict form



Waldorf and Statler: inveterate hecklers

of 'modest' dress on women. But it was somehow never enough. By the end of its reign, the prohibitions extended to hard-soled shoes; the clip-clop of a woman walking down the street was deemed enough to pose an unacceptable risk of impure thoughts to nearby men. Thus, the taboo on head-shaking and hand-waving seems to be a generalisation of the taboo on heckling, when the frustrations bottled up in silence inevitably spilled into physical gestures.

Heckling, as we have discussed previously, has a fine and noble history as a form of resistance by the masses to their *soi-disant* betters, going back in some ways to Homer. The word itself refers originally to a particular group of Dundee flax workers notorious for their radicalism in the early 19th century: one would read the paper to the others, and the others would scream blue murder at the injustice of it all.

### In whose interest?

On the face of it, then, this prohibition of even silent 'heckles' is merely the triumph of the bureaucracy - the fact that it happens to have rebounded on one particular junior member of the bureaucracy in this case changes very little. *In general*, governing debates with complicated rules sets up a property relation over the content of the rules; debates are won by those with the time and inclination to learn all the bylaws, and - with the general overbroad vagueness characteristic of 'safe spaces' policies added in - to use one's personal confidence, connections and charisma to make a complaint stick. In short, heckling (and shaking one's head) is a tool primarily of the oppressed; suppressing the same

serves primarily the interests of the middle class.

One would think this was the height of obviousness; yet 'safe spaces' policies are not a rightwing, but a leftwing hobby horse. There is a petition going around, started before this whole farrago by one Charlie Peters (who seems, at a glance, to be on the sympathising periphery of the *Spiked* crowd), to "reinstate free speech at Edinburgh"; it now has more than 1,000 signatories, but we would be surprised if the majority were particularly leftwing. (The third most recent comment, as I write, opens: "liberal/socialist policies and practices aim to restrict all views and opinions that differ from their agenda.")

How did we get here? Mr Peters has a few ideas. His foes are

in many ways the 'bastard children' of their equally illiberal predecessors in the 1980s and 90s, who no-platformed racists and Zionists and later sought to silence religious fundamentalists and even rap artists. Those students of the last century who argued that speech needs to be policed and that offensive ideas are a form of violence are now grown up (well, kind of) and they have influenced, and in some cases are teaching, the new generation.<sup>2</sup>

There is a link there, in that the most vociferous proponents of 'no platform' tactics are those who have come to believe that the royal road to socialism is merely getting people excited about something, rather than intellectually tooled up to

do anything about it. The buzz of political activity, no matter how low-level, is sufficient to engender consciousness. The refutation of this nostrum consists entirely in that the same arguments employed for no-platforming undesirables are now employed not in pursuit of r-r-revolutionary ends, but merely to the purpose of setting up the student union, or the trade union, or whatever, as some kind of collective social worker.

Perhaps now is the time to raise the *main* item on the agenda at the EUSA meeting - the adoption of a boycott, divestment and sanctions policy towards Israel. Wilson opposed it, on the grounds that it was 'anti-Semitic', but it passed anyway. We bring it up only to make the point that all these tricks - the bureaucratic regulation of public speech, the blurring of the line between thought and action, the appeal to sentiment over reason - are exercised most effectively by campus Zionists, who are well schooled in presenting any symbolic nod towards the plight of the

Palestinians as a threat to Jewish students' safety. Of course, on this occasion the boot was on the other foot and Wilson is concerned that the motion got through - as well she might be, seeing as her very own 'safe spaces' policy does not specifically outlaw pogroms, and therefore anything could happen.

The defect in Peters' understanding - and that of *Spiked*, with whom he is completely in accord on this point - is that there is no grand historic battle between illiberal forces policing people's behaviour and the defenders of liberty *as such*. For capitalist ideology is based on a *lie*, that - left to their own devices - individuals will construct a just order merely by free economic interaction. Such a thing is not possible. Either a paternalistic state bureaucracy will make up the difference, or a bevy of private bureaucracies (such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt) will do the same. Liberalism is not opposed to, *but produces*, illiberalism.

There is a way out of this bind: the self-organisation of the exploited - today the proletariat - in pursuit of political change and in concrete material solidarity (unions, mutuals and what have you). The drift of the left towards bureaucratic thinking tracks the *material* decline of these forces: from possessing an understanding, however inadequate, that we ourselves must organise to make change happen, we have fallen ever more into appeals to some power over us - a Bonaparte, whether an individual or a state apparatus - to *protect* us from the enemy. The result is the 'slave morality' Nietzsche imputed unjustly to the socialists of the 19th century, which is, alas, all too appropriate a diagnosis today.

Politics is not a safe activity, nor will it ever be. Assuming, unrealistically, that the political field is occupied entirely by honest 'good actors', it will *still* be the case that disputes will be hot-blooded and inflame the deeply held convictions of the participants. There will, in short, be heckling. *Good*. Nonsense should be tolerated silently not a second longer than necessary; doublethink should not be protected from interruption. And people should be free to shake their heads ●

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### Notes

1. [www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/eusapolicy/internal/safespaceupdate](http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/eusapolicy/internal/safespaceupdate).
2. [www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/at-my-university-censorship-is-out-of-control/18219#.VwO5eRlKu5](http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/at-my-university-censorship-is-out-of-control/18219#.VwO5eRlKu5).



Imogen Wilson: hands

## SOUTH AFRICA



When they were friends: Blade Nzimande and Jacob Zuma

# Tide turns against Zuma

While the 'official communists' are now looking for a change of leadership, writes Peter Manson, they have no intention of championing working class independence

At last the South African Communist Party has succumbed to the pressure to join the bourgeois chorus and ditch the man it promoted to lead the African National Congress and replace Thabo Mbeki as president back in 2009.

True, SACP MPs, who are also ANC members, voted against the motion to impeach Jacob Zuma on April 5, but that was because it had been sponsored by two opposition parties: the rightwing Democratic Alliance and the left populist Economic Freedom Fighters. SACP members were among the 249 MPs in the 400-seat national assembly who saw off the motion by 90 votes. Rather, the SACP wants to retain as much influence for itself as possible by ensuring that Zuma is replaced from within the ANC, just as in 2009.

The issue that provoked the impeachment attempt was the 'Nkandla scandal'. Vast sums of state cash have been spent on Zuma's private residence, the Nkandla country estate, allegedly for 'security' reasons. But last week South Africa's constitutional court ruled that the president had violated his terms of office by refusing to pay back R246 million (£13 million) of public funds spent on 'upgrades' that included a swimming pool, visitors centre and amphitheatre.

This scandal had been rumbling on since 2014, when the public protector's office published a report laying out the state expenditure at Nkandla. But for two years Zuma denied he had done anything wrong - apparently the swimming pool's main purpose was actually to stop fires, for instance - but in February

2016, he finally admitted he had not acted correctly, having received 'bad legal advice'. And on April 1 the constitutional court upheld the applications of the opposition DA and EFF, and instructed the treasury to determine within two months the "reasonable costs" which Zuma will then have to repay within 45 days, in addition to legal fees.

The following day, Zuma appeared on television to issue a personal apology, claiming that the court's "ground-breaking" judgement had in fact strengthened democracy. He had "never knowingly or deliberately set out to violate the constitution" when he approved the spending of those millions of state funds: "The intention was not in pursuit of corrupt ends or to use state resources to unduly benefit me and my family." Not at all. And in fact, "The judgement has been very helpful" in ensuring that he makes no such further 'mistake'.

You would not know from the SACP's statement, issued on April 3, that the party now wants Zuma out (unless, of course, you read between the lines). It declared that the judgement and his public apology represented "important moments in the reaffirmation and consolidation of constitutionality and the rule of law in our still relatively young democracy". The statement went on:

President Zuma's acknowledgment that "with hindsight, there are many matters that could have been handled differently and which should never have been allowed to drag on this long" is correct. It lays the basis for a range of further lines of inquiry, reflection and,

above all, corrective action ....

Thursday's ... judgement and the widespread positive public reaction to it provide an important opportunity for the ANC and the ANC-led movement to seriously embark on a collective process of decisive self-introspection and self-correction. Strict implementation of the remedial measures called for by the public protector on Nkandla will be a beginning, but self-correction must clearly go way beyond this.<sup>1</sup>

### State capture

But the SACP's idea of "remedial action" and "self-correction" is obvious from its reaction to the second public scandal that has been engulfing the president: his close but secretive relationship with a particular family of capitalist entrepreneurs.

The family in question consists mainly of three brothers: Ajay, Atul and Rajesh Gupta, who emigrated from India in 1993. Today they have built up a business empire with interests in computing, mining, air travel, energy and the media. Their Sahara Group employs some 10,000 people in South Africa and has won several important state contracts.

But the Guptas' influential relationship with Zuma has been an open secret. The president's son, Duduzane, has common business interests with them - they have openly spoken of how they gave him a breakthrough when no-one else wanted to employ him back in 2005 and now he is a board member of at least six Gupta companies. But, incredibly, it seems that the Guptas

have been so close to the president himself, they have sometimes ensured that senior ANC politicians have been awarded key government positions in return for favours. Recently deputy minister of finance Mcebisi Jonas claimed that members of the Gupta family "offered" him the top job in the finance ministry, while former ANC MP Vytjie Mentor has also said the Guptas once offered him a ministerial post.

Zuma's relationship with the family was highlighted when in December 2015 he appointed two different finance ministers in four days - meaning that the post had three occupants within the space of a week. Share prices were hit and the rand took a tumble before the current finance minister, Pravin Gordhan, was given the job on December 14. The reappointment of a man who had previously occupied the post from 2009-14 was intended as a message to capital that the state's finances were once again in safe hands. There had been no 'state capture' by a tiny clique.

During all this time the SACP had kept a discreet silence, claiming loyalty to the president. No surprise there, as the party never publicly criticised Mbeki, his predecessor, during the months when it was campaigning within the ANC for his recall. But on March 18 *The Citizen* newspaper reported the words of the party's second deputy general secretary, Solly Mapaila, who allegedly said the ANC should take action against Zuma for "crossing the line". According to the paper, he declared: "If an ANC president can't listen to the ANC, why should he

lead the ANC?" Mapaila reportedly said that it was essential for the ANC to "discuss and resolve" the Gupta question. If Zuma does nothing, "The ANC will have no choice but to ask him to step down as president."<sup>2</sup>

Strangely (or perhaps not so strangely, in view of the SACP's record) the party made no official statement in response to this story - although it goes without saying that its failure to issue a denial was telling in itself. Within two days there were rumours that SACP ministers - namely, general secretary Blade Nzimande (higher education), Rob Davies (trade and industry), Ebrahim Patel (economic development) and minister in the presidency Jeff Radebe - were about to lose their posts in an impending reshuffle. But the presidency issued a denial and the four kept their jobs. However, the ANC has not acceded to the SACP call for an official commission of enquiry into the whole Gupta affair, instead announcing an internal investigation behind closed doors.

But, as I write, the lead item on the SACP website remains a link to a news report that is now two weeks old. This consists of film footage, which the party has headed: "SACP calls on Zuma to cut ties with Guptas".<sup>3</sup> It shows second deputy general secretary Mapaila addressing a trade union conference, in which he states: "If the president feels he can't call for a commission of enquiry" - pregnant pause - "he must always keep in mind that the next president may do it." Following another pause, he added: "... And there'll always be consequences."

We should not forget that it was



the SACP that was the principal force in ensuring that Mbeki was recalled by the ANC and Zuma installed as the man best placed to lead the "national democratic revolution" - which, according to the party, is the "most direct route to socialism" in South Africa. This despite the fact that Zuma was under investigation in relation to numerous allegations of corruption because of his dubious relationships, and those of family members, with various businessmen and corporations.

True, all charges against Zuma were dropped just a month before he was elected president by the national assembly. But since then he has been continually accused of feathering his own nest - although it has to be said, it was not as though the SACP did not know what sort of man they had been promoting.

Interestingly, SACP thinking on the current state of South African capitalism in the light of the Gupta affair is revealed in a statement from the party's Moses Mabhidla provincial leadership on April 1. As this was issued several days after the provincial executive committee meeting that discussed the question, we can safely assume that this represents the views of the party's central leadership. According to the statement,

What we are witnessing around the events of December 2015 and the recent revelations on Gupta influence on the ruling party and the government is in fact a clash between the two wings of the capitalist class in a declining economy.

On the one hand, there is a big business with dominance of the most profitable sectors of the South African economy. On the other hand is the small upstart capitalists, who are largely dependent on their closeness to high political office to make their profits ....

In this process of ever increasing looting of state resources, one state department after the other was captured. Obviously the prime enemies of this Gupta front project tend to be the established capital on the right and the SACP on the left ....

What we are witnessing therefore is the attempt by a certain wing of the capitalist class to wrest control of the treasury away from another section of their class.<sup>4</sup>

Irrespective of the accuracy or otherwise of this, it says a lot about the kind of regime that the SACP has consistently supported in the name of the "national democratic revolution".

## Union split

All this has somewhat overshadowed another big issue for the SACP - not to mention all partisans of the working class movement - and that is not just the party's role within the ANC-led popular front, but its disgraceful behaviour within the trade union movement.

In November 2014, the SACP-dominated leadership of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) expelled its largest affiliate, the 350,000-strong National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa). Its crime? Numsa, having finally seen through the SACP nonsense about the ANC-led "national democratic revolution" leading directly to "socialism", had withdrawn support from both the ANC and SACP, and called for the formation of a new working class party.

Numsa had garnered the support of several other Cosatu unions and in all of them there have been big factional battles, as SACP loyalists desperately struggle to keep control - and keep

the federation firmly attached, along with the party itself, to the ANC-led alliance. The bureaucratic clampdown by the loyalists has resulted in several small breakaways.

The response of Numsa, with the support of former Cosatu general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, has been to announce the creation of a rival federation, to be launched on May 1. General secretary Irvin Jim, describing Numsa as a "Marxist-Leninist-inspired union", which acknowledges the "fundamental contradiction between labour and capital", insists that Numsa must sponsor a new formation rather than affiliate to one of the existing federations. Back in February Numsa issued a parallel call to "move with urgency to establish a new democratic workers' party, which will stand for the complete socialist transformation of society".

A group of "nine-plus" sympathising unions - some of them Cosatu affiliates - have stated their intention to come on board the new federation, provided their leaderships can win support from the members. But the problem in winning such support has been illustrated by the example of the South African Municipal Workers Union (Samwu). On March 14 Samwu's central executive committee announced it had "resolved to terminate the membership of the president, Pule Molalenyane, first deputy president John Dlamini and national treasurer Portia Lindi" for "conniving with the new federation" and "attending meetings in the dark corners without our mandate". Allegedly these "former national office bearers were running the union like private property".<sup>5</sup> So Samwu will not be at the May 1 launch despite the intentions of its now deposed leaders. Meanwhile, the latter have called on members to leave Samwu and join a new union, the Democratic Municipal and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (Demawusa). No doubt Demawusa will be represented on May 1.

Also present, I suspect, will be the currently Cosatu-affiliated South African National Defence Union (Sandu), which represents members of the armed forces. Sandu was amongst those calling for Zuma's head following the constitutional court judgement. In fact it appealed for "mass action" to force Zuma to resign.<sup>6</sup>

This provoked a furious reaction from Cosatu, which stated:

We also condemn Sandu for calling for the removal of the president and we strongly believe that their actions are treasonous and should be given the necessary attention by those in charge. We cannot have a situation where an army union is involved in calls for regime change.<sup>7</sup>

Yes, that's right - Cosatu is demanding that the leaders of one of its affiliates be prosecuted for taking a political position in opposition to the president, whom the federation still (formally) supports. Apparently members of the armed forces must never come out against the country's rulers or call for "mass action" against them, even though Sandu specified that such action must be "lawful".

For his part, Vavi - who was dismissed from the Cosatu top post in 2014 for, like Numsa, wanting the unions to break with the ANC - has said he has held several talks with the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu), which he hopes will join the new federation. Amcu is a sizable split from the National Union of Mineworkers - a reaction to the NUM's connivance with mining bosses and failure to support militant action from the

members because of its loyalty to the ANC-SACP-Cosatu alliance. But its leadership strikes me as having, shall we say, rather dubious politics.

On March 24 Cosatu issued a statement condemning the fact that its "unions, leaders and members" are being "enticed to attend the so-called workers' summit convened as part of the process towards the formation of a divisive 'new federation'". It pointed out, correctly, that South Africa currently has "180 registered trade unions and 23 registered trade union federations" and commented that this is "a weakness because it leads to a splintering of the voice of workers, to the absolute delight of the bosses".

But then it added: "Cosatu's stance remains that of achieving our vision of 'One country, one federation', 'One union, one industry'." In that case, why did it expel Numsa over a (admittedly substantial) political difference?

## Capitalism

That major difference can be seen in an article penned by Numsa leader Irvin Jim, in which he remarks of the Zuma-Gupta affair:

The SACP makes the fundamental error of seeing the deep crisis we are in today as caused just by corrupt individuals, families or companies, rather than a structural crisis of a bankrupt and equally corrupt capitalist system, led by white monopoly capitalism and its allies in the treasury ....

'State capture' has become the latest buzz-phrase, but what does it mean? .... It was not, however, the corrupt Guptas who initially captured the state, but those in the 'Stock Exchange' faction of 'wealth' - white monopoly capitalism - who have been and remain the dominant power behind and within the government ....

So why only now has the SACP expressed concern over something that was already happening in 2013 ... ? The only answer can be that until very recently they have been silent about anything that might embarrass president Zuma ....

The real issue we must confront is that the SACP was willing to join the forces that dismissed Numsa, the voice of the working class, and who fragmented Cosatu, when we raised sharply this 'state capture' by neoliberal forces. The SACP leaders presented us as being anti-Jacob Zuma and his government - something they regarded as criminal then.<sup>9</sup>

Note, by the way, Jim's characterisation of the current order as "white monopoly capitalism" - a characterisation he seems to share with the likes of the black nationalist EFF. Presumably the Guptas are some kind of 'honorary whites'.

Meanwhile deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa, who is also Zuma's number two in the ANC itself, has promised that the government will "spend billions" on what is called "broad-based black economic empowerment" (BBBEE) in the coming years. Obviously he is not talking about "economic empowerment" for the millions of unemployed and shack-dwellers. No, he aims to help "black business" to assert itself. According to the *News 24* website, Ramaphosa said the time of "white business monopolies was over" and the government would make sure "blacks owned and managed the economy".<sup>10</sup>

It has to be pointed out, however, that a substantial number of blacks have been doing rather well already - not least Ramaphosa himself. This

former anti-apartheid militant and first general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers is today one of South Africa's richest men. Amongst the many companies in which he has been involved is Lonmin, the British-owned corporation which employed the 34 miners slaughtered by police at Marikana in August 2012.

Notoriously Ramaphosa emailed a senior manager of the company the day before the massacre, declaring that it was essential to get the minister of police to "act in a more pointed way". The strike was "not a labour dispute", he wrote. The mineworkers' behaviour was "dastardly criminal and must be characterised as such". So there must be "concomitant action to address the situation". This is the man whom a faction of the ANC would like to see replace Zuma (it is unclear who the SACP will back at this stage).

Be that as it may, Ramaphosa's views are not just held by the black bourgeoisie and aspiring petty bourgeois. Cosatu too seems to believe that the problem is not the system of exploitation, but the skin colour of those at the top and bottom. In a statement bemoaning the power of "racists", it claimed:

The structure of the economy is in favour of white people and it still gives them power over black people. This is the source of power that allows even public personalities to boldly vocalise their racist feelings because they have nothing to lose.

We need to restructure the economy to ensure that black people are not only viewed as cheap labour in this country. The poverty wages that are still paid to the black majority have left many black workers being viewed and treated by some white people as nothing but glorified slaves. The fact that 60% of the employed workers who earn less than R5,000 a month are mostly black is proof enough that our economy remains rooted in apartheid and colonial capitalism.<sup>11</sup>

What it actually proves is that, in the absence of a programme based on the independence of the working class, the majority of those at the bottom have no means of making substantial improvements in their conditions of existence. True, thanks to BBBEE, thousands of well-connected blacks have been

given a helping hand to join the ranks of the exploiters, whether corruptly or otherwise. But the SACP and Cosatu have no intention of breaking with the system of exploitation, despite all their fine words about "socialism".

And unfortunately, while the likes of Irvin Jim may have seen the light over the SACP's misleadership, they are still locked into the politics of the social democratic Freedom Charter, which they believe the SACP has betrayed. However, while it remains to be seen whether their "new democratic workers' party" will get off the ground, it is very likely that the May 1 launch of the new union federation will go ahead.

But that will leave the union movement even more divided, as Cosatu states. In my view, working class oppositionists should strive to win over existing mass organisations whenever that remains a possibility. In other words, although Numsa could not prevent its own expulsion, in general such oppositionists should persist in attempting to win over the majority of both individual unions and the federation to which they are affiliated.

Similarly there is still a fight to be had within the SACP. For example, in several provinces members have reacted to corrupt and sometimes violent ANC bureaucrats with a call for the party to break with the alliance and contest elections independently. At last year's special national conference of the SACP the leadership comprehensively defeated such calls, but at least it now admits that they are not illegitimate.

The fight for working class independence and genuine Marxism must, whenever possible, take place within existing mass organisations ●

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## Notes

1. www.sacp.org.za/main.php?ID=5240.
2. http://citizen.co.za/1039568/sacp-calls-for-zumas-head.
3. www.sacp.org.za.
4. www.sacp.org.za/main.php?ID=5237.
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10. www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/white-control-of-business-will-end-ramaphosa-20160324.
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## Fighting fund

# Money well spent

After the success of last month's fighting fund, April has also got off to a fine start, with £365 received in the first six days of the month. The final total for March was lifted by an extra £25 received on the final day of the month from comrade HG, thanks to the PayPal button on our website, taking us to £1,820 all told - that's £70 over target.

As usual, the biggest factor in the early drive to surpass that £1,750 again in the new month has been the large number of standing orders that always land in our account during the first few days - 21 of them, ranging from £5 to £30. Amongst them, three comrades - TB, SW and CG - came up with their usual £30, while FK donated £25, and both DL and II gave £20.

This week's PayPal contributions came from NW - there were two separate ones from him for

£20 and £5 (that's enthusiasm for you!) - and TT (£11). They were among 3,782 visitors to the *Weekly Worker* website over the last seven days.

Finally, we received three cheques - from GJ (£20), LU (£15) and BC (£10). In BC's case it was added to his resubscription, which he says, is "£60 very well spent", for "the most honest and open paper on the left". Kind words, comrades, backed up with hard cash.

To all those others who also appreciate us, but who don't usually contribute to our fighting fund, I say this: There's always a first time! ●

Robbie Rix

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

**SYRIA**

# Who are the 'moderate' opposition?

Amongst the chaos, new alliances are taking shape, reports **Yassamine Mather**

Last week the Syrian army recaptured the ancient city of Palmyra and this week it regained the central town of al-Qaryatayn once again, with the help of Russian airpower, Hezbollah fighters and Iranian special forces. By all accounts, this was a significant defeat for the Islamic State jihadists, yet, as Robert Fisk pointed out in *The Independent*, Cameron, Obama and other western leaders were silent:

I could not help but smile when I read that the US command claimed two air strikes against Isis around Palmyra in the days leading up to its recapture by the regime. That really did tell you all you needed to know about the American 'war on terror'. They wanted to destroy Isis, but not that much.

Fisk is absolutely right to point to the lacklustre approach of the US and its allies. Every time Daesh commits an atrocity (if it happens to be in Europe or America), leaders of the 'free world' compete with each other on who can use the strongest language in condemnation, yet on the ground there is little sign of any serious effort to defeat IS. On the contrary, aid is still flowing to the 97 Syrian groups deemed to be 'moderate' by the US administration; there is no sign of any effort to reduce IS's financial transactions, aided and abetted by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf countries; there are no plans to impose sanctions against the individuals and governments who support IS ... However, like many other critics of US foreign policy, Fisk falls into the trap of praising Iranian, Hezbollah and Russian interventions, none of which is progressive.

Iran's intervention is part of the country's unambiguous regional ambitions, at a time when the economic miracle promised by the government following the nuclear deal with the P5+1 powers has yet to materialise and the majority of the population continue to suffer from the disastrous effects of sanctions. The government - or, more precisely, the Revolutionary Guards - are busy buying up property in Shi'ite majority areas of Damascus and, in addition to military advisors and fighters, the government is also exporting construction workers, including Afghan refugees, to Syria. The idea being that ownership of land and property will guarantee Iran's long-term role in Syria and, of course, supreme leader Ali Khamenei and his supporters have always maintained that keeping Assad in power is one of the priorities for Iran's Islamic Republic.

So, while many leftwing Iranians abhor Tehran's intervention in Syria, ironically the rightwing middle and upper class nationalists tolerate - indeed support - this adventure. They consider it a legitimate part of the centuries-old ambition to recapture land that once belonged to the Persian empire. Given the increasing involvement of Iranian special forces, as well as growing economic ties, it is not surprising that Bashar al-Assad seems to be losing the support of sections of the Alawite community.

According to a document circulated to the press and unnamed western embassies, a group of community and religious leaders from the Alawite community are "dissociating" themselves from the Assad leadership, stating they are committed to "the fight against sectarian strife".<sup>1</sup> They also make it clear that they adhere to the "values of equality, liberty and citizenship", and call for secularism to be the future of Syria, and a system of governance in which Islam,



**While the 'moderate' opposition fights for a theocratic state, the masses suffer hell on earth**

Christianity and all other religions are equal. The supporters of the document claim they represent a third model (not Shia, not Sunni, but "within Islam").

Signatories of the declaration accept they share some formal religious sources with Shia Islam, while stressing differences over notions such as the fatwa. Indeed they denounce previous fatwas, by leading Shia clerics, that seek to "appropriate the Alawites and consider Alawism an integral part of Shi'ism or a branch of the latter".

## Moderates

When it comes to the Syrian conflict one of the main issues is the absence of a credible alternative to the current regime. For all the talk of 'moderate' opposition groups supported by the west, the reality is that after four years of conflict the secular forces are few and far between. The overwhelming majority of the so-called 'moderate' opposition are various offshoots of Islamic currents, including al Qa'eda. Far from being a viable force, they are a very loose and constantly changing alliance of political and armed groups dominated by Syrian Sunni Arabs. In December 2015, the Syrian opposition convened in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, with 34 groups participating. As in other such gatherings, the most notable absence was the only force with any credibility in fighting IS, the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its affiliates.

It is said that until late 2014 and the dominance of Islamic State and Al Nusra, there were as many as 1,000 armed opposition groups in Syria, although most had only been operating on a regional or even local level. However, as the two major jihadist groups became more powerful, the smaller units lost support and their fighters and supporters have since dwindled still further.

So who are the groups described as 'moderate' in the terminology used by US officials?

**Supreme Military Council of the Free Syrian Army:** once led by brigadier-general Salim Idris, an East German-trained expert in electronics radars who defected from Assad's army in 2012 and was considered a leading figure among the 'moderate' elements of the armed opposition. But in December 2013 Idris was reportedly driven out of his headquarters in northern Syria by the Islamic Front and went into exile in Doha.

SMC affiliates include a number of Islamic groups, such as the Martyrs of Jabaal al-Zaniyah Brigade, formed in 2011. This group changed its name in 2012 to the Martyrs of Syria Brigades **Aurar Souriya Brigade:** came to prominence when, as a faction of the Free Syrian Army, it took part in fighting in the north-west of the country and was involved in what became known as the 'November 18 statement for the establishment of an Islamic state'.

**Northern Storm Brigade:** another Islamic group that is part of the FSA, known for its control of a major border crossing between Syria and Turkey. In September 2013, it fought against IS for control of the city of Azaz.

**Syrian Martyrs Brigades:** yet another unit of the FSA. It is claimed that the group's leader, Jamal Maarouf, personally shot down one of two Mig jet fighters it downed. However, support for the group has dwindled over the last three years following allegations of criminal activity.

**Syrian Islamic Front:** a Salafist umbrella organisation of Islamist rebel groups fighting the Assad government. The group was originally created through a merger of 11 Islamist groups in December 2012, but seven of them - Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya, Jaysh al-Islam, Suqour al-Sham, Liwa al-Tawhid, Liwa al-Haqq, Ansar al-Sham and the Kurdish Islamic Front - departed in November 2013, declaring that they were forming the largest rebel alliance yet in the current Syrian conflict, fancifully claiming 45,000 fighters.

They said the new Islamic Front was an "independent political, military and social formation" that aimed to "topple the Assad regime completely and build an Islamic state". The new command structure was supposed to be shared between the seven.

**Jaysh al-Islam (Army of Islam):** formed of 50 Islamist factions, based in and around the Damascus suburbs. Zahran Alloush, a Salafist whose group, Liwa al-Islam (Battalion of Islam), is the most prominent and powerful member of the alliance, said Jaysh al-Islam had been formed to "achieve unity among the units of the mujahedin and avoid the effects produced by the divisions within the national coalition".

Saudi Arabia is credited with helping towards its formation - an attempt to counter the growing influence of al Qa'eda affiliates near Damascus. In

July 2012 it claimed responsibility for the bombing the National Security Bureau's headquarters in Damascus, which killed a number of senior figures, including the defence minister and Assad's brother-in-law.

**Suqour al-Sham (Falcons of Syria):** formed in the north-western province of Idlib in September 2011. The group has at times called for a moderate Islamic state - "one that is not imposed on society". In February 2014 IS besieged several hundred Suqour al-Sham fighters in Hama and there was little news of its activities until September 2015, when one of its leaders told Reuters that the group's camp was struck by 20 missiles launched during two Russian sorties into Idlib. He also admitted that his organisation received support from Washington, while, according to Reuters, its fighters had received training in Qatar and Saudi Arabia.<sup>2</sup>

**Liwa al-Tawhid (Battalion of Monotheism):** formed in July 2012 as a front to unite a number of groups operating in the northern Aleppo countryside. It calls for an Islamic state ruled by civilians and guaranteeing the protection of minorities. Despite its claims of moderation, however, the group has kept good relations with more hard-line Islamist groups, such as Harakat Ahrar al-Sham and the al-Nusra Front. In addition to its military operations, Liwa al-Tawhid has medical and media 'foundations' and claims to have thousands of civilian 'administrators' helping to run areas under its control.

**Liwa al-Haqq (Battalion of Truth):** formed in 2012 by Liwa al-Ansar, who is a hard-line Islamist, although the United States considers it to be a moderate group.

**Kataib Ansar al-Sham (Supporters of the Levant Brigades):** mainly active in the northern provinces of Latakia and Idlib. According to researchers in Stanford, the group's leaders include Abu Omar, a veteran of the Afghan war, and Abu Musa al-Shishani, a Chechen.

**Kurdish Islamic Front** is an alliance of seven separate groups, backed and supported by Saudi Arabia.

**Syrian Islamic Liberation Front (SILF):** consists of 20 groups and it too is considered 'moderate' by the US and its allies, although it contains a variety of forces, including ultra-conservative Salafists.

## Independents

**Ahfad al-Rasoul (Grandsons of the Prophet):** another coalition of some 40 small groups mainly in the northern province of Idlib. In the past it has received support from both Qatar and the west. IS fighters forced it out of Raqqa in 2013.

**Asala wa al-Tanmiya:** formed in November 2012. In March 2016 it claimed it had been able to capture about 10 villages north of Aleppo that had been held by IS, having been "partially armed by the United States".<sup>3</sup>

**Durou al-Thawra Commission:** formed by an alliance of a few dozen small factions in Idlib and Hama provinces. Its roots go back to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, although the group describes itself as an Islamic-democratic alliance, while acknowledging it has received support from the Brotherhood.

**Tajammu Ansar al-Islam:** formed in 2012, has recently suffered a number of splits.

**Yarmouk Martyrs' Brigade:** linked to the SMC. It operates mainly near Syria's borders with Jordan and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

**National Unity Brigades:** claims to

be active in all of Syria's provinces, aiming for a "civil, democratic state for all ethnicities and social identities". There are reports that some of the group's fighters were from the minority Alawite and Ismaili sects.

**Syrian Democratic People's Party:** claims to be a socialist party which played a "key role" in the creation of the SNC. It emerged in 1973 from a split within the Syrian Communist Party. Until 2005, it operated under the name of 'Syrian Communist Party (Political Bureau)', but in 2015 declared it had abandoned communism and was now a social democratic party.

**Supreme Council of the Syrian Revolution:** grants local opposition groups representation within its national organisation.

**Syrian Democratic Turkmen Movement:** consists of Syrian Turkmen and was formed in March 2012.

## Confusion

In the midst of all the mess in Syria, where a key US ally, Turkey, is clearly implicated in supporting IS, there are further signs of confusion. The positive comments by Steve Walker, US consul general in Basra, about the Popular Mobilisation Units (which includes an Iraqi faction belonging to Muqtada al-Sadr's group) were interpreted as yet another policy twist. The US had fought this militia in the aftermath of the Iraq war and in general the administration's attitude towards it has been negative, with repeated demands on the Iraqi government to exclude it from combined efforts to 'liberate' areas and cities under IS control. But, according to Walker, "The US and Iraqi people are very, very proud of you."

Of course, this new positive spin is not shared by US regional allies. The Saudi ambassador to Baghdad has called the PMU a "sectarian organisation with a criminal agenda". However Walker's remarks seem to reflect a shift by sections of the US administration in terms of its alliances. Following the nuclear deal with Iran, US policy has clearly changed - Washington has distanced itself from its old friends, most notably Saudi Arabia, and moved closer to Iran. On March 12 Barack Obama criticised Saudi Arabia for funding the Wahhabist madrassas, religious seminaries that teach "the fundamentalist version of Islam". He added that the Saudis need to "share the Middle East", including with their "Iranian foes".

The ink is not yet dry on the Iran deal, and most of the sanctions have yet to be removed. Indeed there are doubts about the new relationship - all Republican candidates in the US presidential elections have promised to "tear up the nuclear deal" - and they are supported in this by the more conservative factions of the Islamic Republic. Especially those who benefited financially from the sanctions and lost out in Iran's recent parliamentary elections. According to the rightwing paper *Kayhan*, "The wisest plan of crazy Trump is tearing up the nuclear deal". Once again Iran's conservative clerics and rightwing US Republicans have found common cause ●

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## Notes

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2. www.rferl.org/content/syria-us-backed-groups-bombed-by-russia/27283508.html.
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REVIEW

# Commodification and conditioning

Adam Unwin and John Yandell *Rethinking education: whose knowledge is it anyway?* New Internationalist, 2016, pp143, £7.99

The Easter holidays have just started, and with them, the, um, highlight of the student year: exam/revision season. Or, more appropriately, the season of procrastinating, chocolate bingeing and a whole lot of self-pity.

There could be no better time to read this book, not just because critiques of the education system and feeling as if 'we're all in this together' is sometimes the only thing keeping me on that hamster wheel, particularly during the barrage of fruitless tests pelted at secondary school inmates every year during early summer. Exam season is also the time of year when the problematic aspects of schooling, highlighted by *Rethinking education*, are the most visible. Just as the sun comes out and it becomes physically possible to leave the house without resembling a human scarf shop, everyone from Ofsted bureaucrats to tiger mums to teachers seems to lose their marbles and come down with a severe case of exam fever - while students themselves get even more fed up with school and with the endless process of assessment and ranking than they already are.

One of the central messages of *Rethinking education* is that all this exam fever, all this relentless testing and worry about testing, not to mention teaching for the purpose of success in testing, is not necessary. We live in a world where the fundamental nature of learning is being misconceived, to disastrous effect. Learning is seen as passive, context-independent reception of unquestionable facts; as a "process of transmission" (p26) to pupils who are "blank slates or empty containers" (p33), which occurs in "predictable, identifiable and incremental stages" (p105) and depends almost entirely on the individuals involved. Linear assessments are correspondingly seen as an absolute determinant of both teachers' and students' intellectual worth and of how much has been learnt, while "every activity [is] regulated and subordinated to the imperative of attaining higher test scores" (p117). The result is that, despite some rhetorical differences and newer technology, the education system looks as individualistic, inorganic and discriminatory as it did a century ago - "the traditional layout of the classroom persists because that is what schooling looks like" (p54).

All this produces robotic exam-passers and "maintains, justifies and reproduces" (p89) structural inequalities, and marketisation and 'edubusiness', increased state control of schools and blindly throwing technology at the problem will not mitigate any of these effects. In order to realise the long-held vision of education as emancipatory rather than enslaving, the book concludes, we must radically change the way in which we conceptualise learning and classroom relations. Students need to be active participants in their learning, not passive recipients; curricula should be negotiated and not prescribed; and the process of learning in a formal setting should reflect the dialogic and situated nature of learning in everyday life. Classrooms should be "sites of knowledge-construction", which acknowledge education as "never merely a means to an end", but "a mark of what it is to be human" (p139).

As a first-year GCSE student, I wholeheartedly agree with these criticisms and find them an extremely



Exam factory

accurate and acutely perceptive assessment of the current state of education. I like to scribble highly unprofessional things in the margins of the books which I intend to review while I read them, and most of my scribbles in this particular book consisted of the word "yes" and varying numbers of exclamation marks. *Rethinking education* is lucid and descriptive, and manages to cover an impressive number of subsets of education concisely but sufficiently in just over 100 pages, including: how people learn and the misconceptions bred by schooling about this; gender and racial inequality in education; and the relationship between schools and power structures. Most of the points made are extensively backed up by case studies, which are varied and interesting and contribute greatly to the international relevance of the analysis.

The section on British imperialism and English linguistic hegemony in the first chapter - a topic which is not often linked to the role of education in preserving hierarchies, but is intimately related to it - was particularly well thought out and explained. Although the book contains not many analyses which I had not seen or considered before - the authors seem to be coming from the same theoretical angle as I do and the concepts of popular education and active learning are not new to pedagogy - it does lay out radical pedagogical ideas in an engaging manner and poses a sharp, confident and urgently needed challenge to the sleepy dogmas of modern education theory. If you have been trying to find a comprehensive, materialist (though not overly 'Marxian') critique of the education system - and there is certainly room for one - I would definitely recommend this book.

## Criticisms

That being said, I have a few criticisms. Education has been overlooked by socialist theorists in the past - unjustifiably so, given the efficacy of education as a means by which to preserve class rule and indoctrinate the populace into bourgeois ideology. However, in the past many criticisms have been made of the education system's 'exam factory' nature, its artificial approach to learning and increasing commercialisation and marketisation, by everyone from Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Latin American popular education advocates, to Pink Floyd.

*Rethinking education* does a great job of pulling together all these criticisms, but to bring something really new and revolutionary to the table which has not been discussed before, a more in-depth look at the root causes of the identified problems would be ideal. There is a lot of

detailed discussion of problems and their effects, and attention is drawn to how disparities and hierarchies in education reflect wider society; but not enough attention is paid to that society itself, to what social circumstances are making education the way it is and need to be changed in order to improve education. This leads the criticisms made in the book to be, while true, a little abstract and disconnected from the societal context in which they exist; and, as the authors rightly point out, education does not "happen in a vacuum" (p106).

Indeed, the book mostly concentrates on criticising, devoting most chapters to picking apart flaws in the current system rather than describing root causes or alternatives; and, where alternatives are described, they are not quite as inspiring as I had hoped. One case study of what is termed "active pedagogy" (p48) and praised as a form of teaching which "starts with different assumptions about learning" and "seeks to make the students active participants in their own learning" (p45) involves Cultures in Contact, a project run by the British Museum and adopted by several schools. This informed 12-year-old students about the period of European imperialism in west Africa, using a starter activity at school, followed by a day at the museum and a plenary back at school. Ample use was made of artefacts, pictorial resources and 'hands-on' approaches, and each section involved a role play of some description, which was presumably how the students were made "active participants" in their learning.

I understand that some people have problems with anecdotal evidence, but, since I am in full-time education, hopefully my own perspective will be helpful in this instance. Personally, if I had been a participant in the Cultures in Contact project two years ago (at the age of 12), I would most likely have seen all the role-play and "hands-on learning" as a novelty, but found it slightly patronising and not been able to recall the information I learnt later on. Because the way I learn, for as long as I can remember, has been by reading written information, making notes and drawing whatever conclusions I wanted from the information in the form of an essay, which I would take great pleasure in writing. That sounds old-fashioned, and certainly does not align with modern pedagogical orthodoxy, which preaches 'interactive learning'. But it is how I learn.

And one of the great paradoxes of the education system is that, while ostensibly being individualist, it makes huge generalisations about the most effective ways to learn and assumes that one teaching strategy

is universally better than another. For all their talk of learning styles, schools are abysmal at taking into account the fact that everyone learns differently, and that there is no 'one true method'. Even 'interactive learning' does not work for everyone. This is an important component of the lack of contextual awareness - criticised for good reason in this book - in the education system. Yet it is not taken into account in *Rethinking education*, and in fact the authors are rather disparaging towards the notion of learning styles, arguing that "there is no robust evidence that any of these types of learner actually exist" and that the idea serves to "encourage teachers to put children into different categories" (p99). I for one would like there to be more categorisation of students; as long as we were allowed to categorise ourselves and to choose classes which utilise the teaching methods most helpful to us. Sweeping generalisations are equally as coercive and detrimental as categorisation.

Finally, apart from Cultures in Contact and some additional case studies focusing on relatively small-scale philanthropic projects targeted at adults in Latin America and the (largely short-lived and unsuccessful) popular education establishments of the 20th century, there is not much description of a possible alternative education system and no truly daring, visionary propositions. The space to make such propositions is limited by the intention of showing that "other ways of doing school are possible, not in some far-distant future, but now" (p133). This is well-intentioned, but right now, as the entire world is mired in perhaps one of the most severe periods of reaction in history, there is no way for schooling to exist in a way which does not reflect these reactionary attitudes. Since education systems reflect wider social conditions, we would need a revolutionary period at the very least, if not a society on its way to socialism, to yield a system which does not reproduce inequalities or implicitly condition everyone into capitalist dogma and which can permit the self-emancipation of the working class. This is, of course, necessarily a future society. Thus in order to envisage a genuinely radical, alternative method of schooling, some deductions would need to be made from our ideas of a future society.

This does not have to mean explicitly labelling this critique of education as 'Marxist', but it could involve making reasoned inferences from socialist ideas about certain characteristics of a future society. However, people on the left seem to be a bit allergic to attempts to predict any feature of our future vision, for fear of utopianism. This 'allergy' is both misplaced and harmful. Utopianism does not stem from logical deductions of possibilities, but from abstract prophecies, which consider the ends without the means. And without a clear, multifaceted idea of a possible end point, the socialist movement has no direction and no selling point.

Despite the above shortcomings, *Rethinking education* is well-argued and thought-provoking - it is certainly worth a read, particularly for those new to pedagogy. I just hope that a serious discussion about the nature of education and attempts to re-imagine will continually be engaged in by socialists, because this issue is profoundly relevant to the fight for emancipation ●

Commissaress

## What we fight for

- Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.
- There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.
- Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.
- Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.
- Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.
- The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.
- Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.
- Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.
- The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.
- We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
- Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
- Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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# weekly worker

**Solidarity  
is the  
key**

## Harmful change is intolerable

Joint action is the way forward, says **Richard Galen** - and so is affiliation to the TUC

Last week the department of health finally released its 'equality analysis' of the proposed new junior doctors' contract<sup>1</sup> - and it contained plenty to fuel the outrage felt by striking medics on the picket lines this week during the fourth round of our industrial action.

The most inflammatory statement was this: "... any indirect adverse effect [of the contract] on women is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim". In other words, a blatant admission (even though it was followed by a swift denial) of discrimination in a contract that is supposed to "advance equality". This was specifically noted by Jim Campbell, director of the World Health Organisation's 'Health Workforce', who called the contract "regressive", stating that it contradicts the stance of the UN commission on the status of women.

The UN body also notes the impact on single parents, who would have a higher burden of childcare costs as a result of the increased numbers of unsocial hours that the new contract would oblige them to work. But this is countered by the 'equality analysis' with the bizarre statement that working evenings and weekends can in one sense be considered a benefit - after all, informal and unpaid childcare may be easier to arrange outside normal hours. Another example of how out of touch with reality the authors are.

As expected, the true aim of the contract shines clear in its objectives section: "to enable employers to roster doctors ... more affordably to support the delivery of a seven-day NHS" (my emphasis). It is important to note that the standards of the "seven-day NHS" - as set out in the findings of the *Seven days a week forum*<sup>2</sup> - explicitly acknowledge the multifactorial nature of the so-called 'weekend problem'. Lack of availability of social care, access to senior (ie, consultant) review, and inconsistent diagnostic and scientific services (such as labs and medical imaging) are just a few of those mentioned, yet none of these will be extended if the new contract is implemented. This is yet more evidence that improving patient care is not the motivation underlying the 'action plan' of health secretary Jeremy Hunt.

However, it has to be said that all of these points are mere confirmation of what was already suspected by junior doctors and their supporters. But the question still remains: what is the best way to combat the contract imposition and produce a better deal for both doctors and patients?

The judicial review launched by the doctors' union, the British Medical Association, aims to challenge the legality of the new contract's implementation, claiming that the government has failed to follow 'due process'. This is currently underway and will possibly be bolstered by the findings of the equality analysis. A second legal challenge has also been launched by the NHS staff campaign group, #JustHealth,<sup>3</sup> which has managed to raise over £120,000 through crowd-funding for its action. They aim to show that the



**Junior doctors: not dummies**

government has no legal power to impose the new contract and that the necessary consultations with relevant parties have not taken place.

Ultimately, though, these challenges may only serve to delay rather than derail the department of health's scheme, and, like the ongoing series of strikes, can hardly be relied on as the means of defeating the contract imposition. At best they should be viewed as part of a strategy based first and foremost on solidarity from other unions and other groups of workers. Such solidarity will surely be essential, as unfortunately the effect of our own action is felt mainly by those we are seeking to protect - our patients - not the government and NHS management.

This will particularly be the case if the April 26 strike goes ahead, as planned, without emergency cover.

However, there are some small signs that such solidarity could yet be delivered. For example, at last month's National Union of Teachers conference in Brighton, a vote was carried in favour of a strike ballot in the summer term, in protest at the department for education's plans to force every school in England to become an academy. The motion also called for the NUT to join forces with the other teaching unions for collaborative action, including combined strikes.

This presents the BMA with both a model for progress as well as an

opportunity. Following a letter of solidarity and support from the junior doctors committee of the BMA, the outgoing general secretary of the NUT, Christine Blower, has already stated that the union's intention is to coordinate industrial action with junior doctors - the importance and benefits of such an opportunity cannot be overstated. Likewise, the BMA needs to open more lines of communication to other public-sector unions - especially those representing NHS staff, such as Unison and the Royal College of Nursing.

The BMA should also take the opportunity to strongly consider affiliating to the Trades Union Congress. This would not only provide more options for

collaboration between NHS staff (the TUC affiliates include the unions for physiotherapists, radiographers, midwives and psychologists), but would also give a stronger public voice through association with non-medical workers as well. Displays of solidarity between workers both in and outside of the health service are what is truly needed to get the message across to the government: the imposition of misguided and harmful change will not be tolerated ●

### Notes

1. [www.gov.uk/government/publications/junior-doctors-contract-equality-analysis-and-family-test](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/junior-doctors-contract-equality-analysis-and-family-test).
2. [www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/forum-summary-report.pdf](http://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/forum-summary-report.pdf).
3. <https://twitter.com/justhealth2016>.

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