

weekly



worker



June 23 referendum: a rotten choice between two Tory posh boys

- Labour and media
- Beppe Grillo's M5S
- Durham miners
- Victor Serge review

No 1111 Thursday June 16 2016

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

£1/€1.10

Corbyn and the media trap



LETTERS



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

Positive impact

I write in response to Arthur Bough's letter (June 9), responding to my intervention (Letters, June 2) in the ongoing polemic between him and Mike Macnair, which has been broadly about the nature of social democracy and its usefulness in the advancement of working class control of society.

I shall confine myself to a broad-brush response to what I see as the two main points raised in Bough's letter (anything more would entail something longer than I imagine the *Weekly Worker* would be willing to print in its letters section). I shall also not engage in a point-by-point analysis of areas where I think that Bough has misunderstood my intended meaning in a letter that I wrote rapidly and in a possibly over-concise style that was at points perhaps open to misconstrual.

To take Bough's most theoretical passage first: his last two paragraphs seem a pretty good summary of part of the argument of *Capital* Vol 1, as it might be wilfully misinterpreted by a bourgeois economist, so that it would support the idea that, although surplus value is extracted from workers under capitalism, this is all to the good, because economic growth through the accumulation of capital benefits everyone equally, workers and capitalists alike. However, Bough completely sidesteps the rest of the argument of *Capital* - ie, everything that suggests that the need for capital to accumulate (and at times not accumulate) stands in opposition to the interests of workers and leads to periodic economic crisis, unemployment, etc.

The rest of Bough's letter seems to assume that I and Macnair are asserting that all gains within capitalism by the working class are solely the result of the existence of the USSR and its satellites (and similarly organised states) before, during and after their existence. I do not think that either I or Macnair have said this; for myself, I have certainly not intended to state or imply such a point. Obviously, gains by the working class under capitalism are multi-causal, as nearly all processes in society are. To say anything different would be to fall into an extremely mechanistic approach to human history.

Throughout the period of existence of a workers' (revolutionary) movement of any size and level of organisation in Europe - let us say from the period leading up to the 1848 revolutions onwards - there have been periods of ebb and flow in its fortunes, both in terms of its ability to extract social democratic-type gains from the ruling class (eg, the widening of the electoral franchise, the provision of public services, various forms of social welfare, trade union rights, the allowing of openly organised, explicitly labour-movement-inspired political parties, rising living standards, free compulsory education, etc) and in terms of its ability to wrest power completely from the capitalist class for longer or shorter periods in larger or smaller geographical areas (more or less the events of 1848, 1871 and 1917). Broadly, my view is that the social democratic gains are made partly because of the threat of revolutionary action lying latent in the working class 'behind' social democracy.

However, the period immediately after World War II stands out as exceptional in terms of social democratic gains in the west (eg, the political decision by the ruling

class to guarantee full employment, the NHS), and the big thing that is different about this period is the existence of an apparently economically and technologically thriving USSR (think the panic engendered in the west by Sputnik - my mother, as an academic librarian, was sent off to learn enough Russian to catalogue accurately the Soviet science publications that Leicester University Library had decided to start buying). This difference is reflected in Eric Hobsbawm's use of the phrase 'The Golden Age' for the period, because of these gains.

Whatever we now think - or we think that workers in the west on the whole then thought - about the balance of positive and negative qualities of the USSR, the idea that its existence had no effect whatsoever on the attitude of western capital to its own labour force is laughable: the power of capital had been overthrown in a large portion of the globe, which raised the potential for the growth of the idea in western working class consciousness that the overthrow of capital was possible. Put alongside this the presence of mass communist parties in many countries in western Europe, the programmatic closeness of the Labour Party left in this country to the CPGB's *British road to socialism* programme, the perceived need in the US for anti-communist witch-hunts; then the idea that western capital was not influenced in its political behaviour within its own states by the existence of the USSR seems naive. The USSR, from the point of view of western capital, represented the apogee of latent revolutionary action lying 'behind' the social democracy of its own working class.

One also has to think of the experiences of the first half of the 20th century. Capitalism was widely seen as leading to two world wars and the depression: socialism/communism was widely seen as offering a way out of, or guarantee of non-return of, such a period, and was widely perceived as succeeding in the USSR, at least in this limited sense. In this overall context, the political discourse of social democracy in criticising simultaneously the USSR, communism and revolutionary politics, on the one hand, and capitalism in its worst excesses, on the other, has this effect: to the ruling class it is saying, 'If you don't give the workers some concessions, look at what the awful results might be for you, with workers driven to desperate measures.' To the workers it is saying, 'If you don't let us negotiate within capitalism for you, look at what the awful result will be if you try more extreme measures against capital.'

As a final aside, I described my correspondence with Bough thus far to a colleague who lived under Soviet communism in eastern Europe (without being a blind supporter of it, or vehemently critical either, as far as I can tell); her response was that the existence of the eastern bloc clearly had a positive impact on the fortunes of the working class elsewhere in the world.

Sean Thurlough
London

Way back when

I found nothing to disagree with as such in Camilla Power's outline of the 'sharing' and 'counter-greed' strategies of ancient or still existing primitive communism ('Communism in living', June 9). The fact that all human society could have once been tribal-collectivist and ever on the lookout for individual assertions of superiority is something we might learn from.

However, Engels in *The origin*

of the family, private property and the state does go further, adding a discussion of how things then changed - which might also be instructive - of how such ancient collectivities gave way to another kind: the private-property, hierarchical kind. In other words, how we got from there to here. We need not accept every detail in the *Origin* to see the wisdom of accounting for such a transition of how Eden was spoiled. This, after all, is the point of historical materialism: how we got where we are.

It may be organised by Big Ride For Palestine: www.redspokes.co.uk/thebigride. that the private-property 'father-right' societies developed as separate clans (as with Abraham in *Genesis*, or the Greeks) - an alternative social organisation that came to replace or conquer the more collectivist kind in an evolutionary play-off. Or that the collectivist tribes themselves were transformed, once they began to store a surplus - as the Gravettians of central Asia did by freezing meat (their social organisation incidentally being both settled and sending out bands of hunters). Of course, we know of more recent social formations, in which property was and is held in a collectivist 'communist' fashion, but where this doesn't guarantee equality.

Furthermore a larger society constructed of an alliance of clans may have meant that the loyalty of members to their own particular family or 'nation' led to one clan gaining dominance over the others, even if within it men and women were more equal than they were later. Remember, Cleopatra became ruler of Egypt because of her membership of the right family.

Thinking of Egypt, we can also note how religious ideas might have helped in the development of class society: a ruler who asserts closeness to god - whether Abraham, Pharaoh or Louis XIV - is in a stronger position to tell others what to do.

Way back when, the evolutionary advantage of a bonding religion may have been due to how it helped convince, if not coerce, people that the settled community made life safer than the hand-to-mouth, 'immediate meal upon return' regime of the hunter-gatherer. Did the faith in a powerful father-god - creator, ancestor, perfect individual - outweigh the claims of collectivism? We know that the struggle continues over which of any kind of social model is best for the majority.

Mike Belbin
email

Basically true

Comrade Toby Abse oversimplifies matters by demanding that "everything" about the manufactured hysteria alleging anti-Semitism in the Labour Party should be seen "in a British perspective" - as a Blairite offensive, that has nothing to do with the pro-Israel lobby.

Yes, he is right in saying that "[John] Mann is an opportunist who cares not two hoots about Israel/Palestine, but just uses the issue for witch-hunting, from whatever angle is politically convenient". However, as I pointed out in my article, 'Don't apologise - attack' (May 19), this local anti-Corbyn offensive has merged with an international campaign launched much earlier by the Israeli propaganda machine, aiming to discredit any opposition to Israel's Zionist colonising regime and support for Palestinian rights as 'anti-Semitic'. Toby's attempt to dismiss this wider international dimension is obfuscatory, reductionist and insular.

His justification of Ken Livingstone's suspension is deplorable. It is arguable that Ken's comments for which he was suspended may have been impolitic; they were certainly

inaccurate, but they were basically true. It is a provable historical fact that the Nazi regime (though not Hitler personally) approved of Zionism before World War II. They shared the wish to prevent the assimilation of Jews, and the claim that Jewishness is not primarily a matter of religion.

Ken's (inaccurate) claim that Hitler had supported Zionism "before he went mad" and decided to exterminate the Jews may seem to Toby as implying that in the (alleged) earlier phase Hitler "was quite a reasonable bloke"; but this presupposes that support for Zionism is necessarily reasonable - a belief not shared by Ken (or by me). Clearly, Ken was deprecating Zionism by associating it with Nazism, not exculpating Hitler by associating him with Zionism.

Moshé Machover
email

White coats

Maren Clarke claims that my attack on Marx's theory of value is absurd (Letters, June 9). To me, what is absurd is using the labour theory of value to explain the present crisis of capitalism. That was brought on by the peaking of global oil production, leading to rising energy prices, which trigger recession and the temporary collapse of these same prices.

My criticism of the labour theory of value suggested it was a 'time' theory of value, which argues that the labour time spent making something determines its value. I argued that that time is a mental abstraction, and I understand that most people, including scientists, believe in the reality of time. But, whether you believe in time or not, to argue that labour time determines the value of anything is purely arbitrary and subjective.

Marx derives value from abstract labour time. But abstract labour time is a mental construct. That is the meaning of the term 'abstract'. Real labour is concrete and the dialectical opposite to the abstract labour from which Marx derives value. To claim that something called value comes from abstract labour, which is purely mental, is a good definition of absurd.

People who believe value comes from an abstraction do not know the difference between the abstract and the concrete, or the mental and the material. They surely need a visit from the men in white coats.

Tony Clark
Labour supporter

EU evils

In framing the argument about the internationalist dimensions of the European Union, the trade union movement and the political left have discounted the problems that the EU has imposed upon the United Kingdom and on our fellow European neighbours on the continent.

Do I refer to immigration? No, I do not. I refer to the factual knowledge that the EU has deregulated labour markets, permitting the transnational capitalist class to diminish the inalienable rights of free-born individual trade union members to freely associate for the purpose of collective wage bargaining.

The EU has written hyper-competition into its institutional DNA, through the issuance of directives on the privatisation of state-owned railways, and opening up the postal services to private competition. These EU directives have been gold-plated by EU integrationist automatons in the establishment - people from privileged backgrounds who have no knowledge of the problems that their decisions have imposed upon the rank-and-file citizens and workers of the UK.

It was EU competition law that stopped the awarding of the Bombardier contract to our comrades

in Derby. The EU does not protect worker rights because it was the sacrifices of the Tolpuddle Martyrs and the formation of trade unions and worker associations that increased the bargaining power of the working class in the UK.

The Greek people have been forced onto starvation rations by the greed of the EU and its controllers in the international banker cartels. The treachery seen by Jeremy Corbyn and his trade union enforcer, Len McCluskey, should not be ignored, following the 'Workers' independence from Europe day' on June 23.

The Rail, Maritime and Transport union under the leadership and guidance of the sadly departed Bob Crow was not a rightwing capitalist lackey of the UK and EU elite. It was actually the representative of hardworking railway workers.

The enemy inside our ranks are the turncoats like Corbyn who come from a far more privileged background than working class council house lads like myself and the many trade union members I am proud to call my friends. In 1970 the Equal Pay Act became law and survived even the Thatcher government. It was not because of the EU and its invisible and non-existent worker protections that the equal pay principle survived. It was because of the resistance that would be organised by the trade union movement in the UK.

A 'workers' Europe' is a false and forlorn objective because the international and European class elite who created the EU, and who draw 99.99% of its collective benefits, will not permit it to be transformed into an association of workers and trade unionists mutually working for their own providence.

We don't need the banker institutions of the EU to do that; we can do it through pre-existing worker networks and through the digital transformation of communication. I am in regular contact with people from all over the world. We don't need outdated institutions like the EU to achieve worker cooperation.

The UK should leave the EU and remove one layer of transnational capitalist class control over our pay, living conditions and inalienable rights. Then we can organise 100% against the banker-funded Tory Party, who have transformed the UK into a paradise for the global plutocrats to come and deposit their ill-gotten gains made from exploiting zero economic borders.

We can't rely on non-elected, wholly appointed bankers, commissioners and EU court judges to protect the rights that our ancestors fought for in the trade union movement. We cannot sit back and watch the privileged controllers of the EU impose hardship, privation and starvation upon the fine Greek people. We here in the UK are being led down the road to serfdom.

Unlike the Greeks, we are not trapped in the EU, because we have an escape route and we must use that referendum ballot on June 23 to become independent - not of our fraternal comrades on the continent, but of the control that the top 1% elite of the UK and Europe have exercised over us for so long.

Jeremy Corbyn should stick to his younger days and commit the Labour Party to withdraw from the never-to-be-reformed EU, controlled by bankers and multinational corporation executives.

Tony Benn opposed the EU. Bob Crow opposed the EU. Dennis Skinner opposes the EU. Corbyn, you have to stand up for people and fight and fight and fight to defend the interests of UK workers against the corrupt bargain of the EU and the international bankers who will stop you renationalising

the railways and Royal Mail, and will overrule any opposition to the multilateral contract to start privatising European public services.

If you cannot be bothered to represent genuinely working people, then please step aside and let the real representatives in the trade union movement, such as the RMT, Aslef, SLEF and the other unions and union members do it. I am an optimist with reason and caution and, to be candid, I can't see you changing, so, to borrow from history: 'Depart, I say depart, for all the good that you have done and never will do.' Depart and give the Labour movement back to those who genuinely care for it.

Oliver Healey
Leicester

Three trends

As we move into the final countdown for June 23, we need to take stock of the three basic positions in the socialist movement, which are reflected in the Republican Socialist Alliance. First, there is the reformist case for 'remain' backed by Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour left, Left Unity and Socialist Resistance. Second, there is a revolutionary case on the EU which is expressed around 'boycott and abstain'. Variations of this are promoted by the CPGB, *Fight Racism, Fight Imperialism*, and the International Socialist League. Third, we have the ultra-left case for 'leave', or UltraExit, supported by the Socialist Party, Socialist Workers Party and the Communist Party of Britain.

Of course, these three broad trends - reformist, revolutionary and ultra left - have variations and 'internal' contradictions. Although millions of people will abstain or boycott the ballot, in the working class movement comrades are polarised between the reformist and ultra-left positions.

The 'reformist-remain' position is that the only way to fight to remain in the EU is to vote for Cameron's anti-immigrant and pro-City of London deal. This is by far the largest and most influential in the labour movement and has created a popular front between liberal big capital, represented by Cameron's Tories, the City and big corporations, and the organised working class in the right wing of the Labour Party, the trade union bureaucracy, and socialist reformism.

The popular front is based on the idea that all classes benefit from the EU, both capital and wage labour. It is accepted by Corbyn that the EU is not perfect, but Labour can reform it to serve the working class. In reality this promise of 'jam tomorrow' is empty because there is no means by which the Labour Party can deliver on their promissory note. It is a promise that the EU will carry on in the way it treated the Greek working class.

UltraExit is a mirror image of reformism. Whilst reformism says the EU can be reformed without having any plan or means of achieving it, the ultra-left claims it cannot be reformed and so have no plan either beyond its assertion. Like reformism, UltraExit denies the possibility and necessity of a European democratic revolution.

The revolutionary camp is not in good health either, because it is divided between anarchist and revolutionary democratic arguments. There are two anarchist arguments. First, some anarchists say 'a plague on both houses' and refuse to vote, as a moral argument. They have no perspective beyond the polling booth. Second, there are revolutionary anarchist arguments which simply think that breaking things up is revolutionary like smashing the crockery or having smaller businesses. This 'revolutionary' 'mash it up' is firmly in the UltraExit camp.

UltraExit is seriously flawed. The EU has changed, is changing and will continue to change. But the ultras claim that permanent change is and can

only ever be in one direction: worse or backward. This is to deny the potential power of the working class - more than capable of extracting a few crumbs from the bosses' table, and bringing democratic and social revolution. UltraExit denies and opposes the possibility of European revolution led by the European working class.

UltraExit claims that leaving the EU will overthrow Cameron and destroy the Tory Party. Of course, Cameron may be sacked by the Tory Party, but they will keep him if he can still deliver for the City. We should not underestimate the ability and determination of the Tory Party to keep its grip on power. Worse, it ignores the reality that if Cameron is ousted he will be replaced by Boris Johnson, not the SWP or the SP. A victory for exit, with the present balance of forces, leads to the right. Despite its own radical intentions, ultra-leftism sounds 'revolutionary', but delivers its voters for hedge funds, smaller businesses and rightwing politicians, and adds to the anti-immigrant mood.

UltraExit claims that the EU is worse than 'ordinary' capitalism. The EU attacks the working class, imposes neoliberal policies and austerity. But, unlike capitalism in the UK, this EU capitalism cannot be reformed nor overthrown by revolution. If this is true the entire world will be taken over by the EU and capitalism will remain unchanged for ever.

UltraExit is built on intellectual pessimism about the potential power of the working class. This is quite understandable, given the defeats suffered by the working class in the UK. Various socialists have lost confidence in the international working class and no longer see it as the agent of change - reform or revolution - in Europe.

There is a world of difference between saying 'Remain by voting for Cameron's reactionary policy' and saying 'Remain', while opposing the Tory policy by not voting for it, and calling for militant class struggle opposition to Brexit, if necessary, after June 23. Whoever wins the referendum, the economic classes will have their say, whether in the form of a financial crisis, a strike of capital or workers' general 'strike against exit'. Given the situation of striking workers in France, there is no better time for a militant fight linking up with French workers.

Before anybody claims that workers strike action would be illegitimate by defying the democratic decision of the people, we need to remember that 2.3 million EU citizens have been excluded from the ballot. If women were not allowed to vote in this referendum would we accept it as a legitimate democratic result? Why should we accept the exclusion of EU citizens from this ballot as anything other than Tory gerrymandering?

Steve Freeman
London

Unsung hero

On July 19 1936 general Franco, with the backing of Hitler and Mussolini, led a coup against the democratically elected government of Spain. It kick-started the Spanish Civil War, which saw a turbulent conflict unfold between rightwing and leftwing ideologies. Here in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England many like-minded individuals joined the International Brigades to fight against Franco's fascists in Spain. But so too did many Americans and one such young man from Texas would become the first African-American to lead an integrated fighting force.

Oliver Law was born on a ranch in Texas on October 23 1900. At the age of 19 he joined the United States army but, despite his impeccable record, segregation prevented Law from rising in the ranks and after six years in uniform he left for a civilian

life. In 1925, like so many others of that time, he left the rural south to seek better opportunities in the industrial north. At the beginning he found work in a cement plant in Indiana before eventually settling on the Southside of Chicago, where he worked as a cab driver and then took employment as a stevedore.

Racism fuelled Law's passion to fight for social equality, while the great depression only served to strengthen his leftwing values. He chaired the Southside chapter of the Labour Defence League in Chicago and became a frequent target of police harassment, as his activism grew. In 1930, Law was beaten and arrested with 14 other activists at an International Unemployment Day rally in Chicago. In 1935, he helped organise a large rally in protest against Mussolini's occupation of Ethiopia and was arrested, while giving a speech to the 10,000-strong crowd.

When the Spanish Civil War flared up in 1936, Law joined the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and within a year he was in Spain fighting Franco's fascists. On January 16 1937, Law, along with many other volunteers from America, arrived in Spain. On February 17 they got their first taste of action in the Jarama valley, where the task of the International Brigade was to stop the advancing might of Franco's troops.

Although Law and his fellow brigadistas were unable to hold out against the better-equipped fascists, his display on the battle field saw him rise through the ranks of the Lincoln Brigade. Two weeks after landing in Spain, Law had been promoted to section leader and on February 27 he took part in an attack on Pingarron Hill in the Jarama Valley. Of the 500 Brigadistas that went into that battle against Franco's troops, some 300 were killed and wounded. Two weeks after this setback, Law was promoted to commander of the machine gun company.

Heavy losses dented the International Brigades, and the Lincoln Brigade was one that suffered the most. With the high losses, Law soon rose quickly among the ranks and six months after arriving in Spain he had become commander of the Lincoln Brigade. Oliver Law became the first African-American to lead an integrated American fighting force. In the United States army, the highest rank Law could rise to was corporal due to segregation, but in Spain he was now leader, even if it was just for a short time.

In July 1937, Law led his brigade into the Battle of Brunete, where Franco had sent back-up troops to prevent an approach on Madrid. It proved a bloody battle and one in which Law would lose his life. On July 10, he assembled his troops to advance on a hill known as Mosquito Crest. Franco's troops were there waiting with severe fire power, but Law charged forward, waving his pistol and encouraging his men to follow.

A sniper's bullet hit him in the stomach and he fell in mid-charge. As he was being brought down from the hill on a stretcher, another bullet hit him and his life ended there in the battlefields of Spain, along with 135 other Americans that day. The 37-year-old Oliver Law was well respected and had gained trust from those who fought alongside him, and his loss was a major blow to his comrades in the Lincoln Brigade.

In the immediate years after his death, an attempt was made to make a film on the life of Oliver Law but it was blocked by the rightwing influences in the film business. Among the 3,000 volunteers from the United States that went to fight against fascism in Spain, some 80 of those were African-American. Among them was Oliver Law, an unsung hero.

Pauline Murphy
email

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 June 19, 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 6 ('The price of respectability'), section 2: 'In pursuit of the national interest'. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk
Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday June 21, 6.45pm: Introduction to social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1. 'Spinning/weaving in the heavens: the new archaeoastronomy.' Speaker: Morag Feeney-Beaton. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Imperialism centenary

Thursday June 16, 7pm: Lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London, EC1. Speaker: Andrew Murray, marking 100 years since Lenin wrote *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marxlibrary.org.uk

Convoy to Calais

Friday June 17, 6pm: Rally, Emmanuel Centre, Marsham Street, London SW1
Saturday June 18, 9.30am: Vehicles depart, Whitehall, London SW1. Organised by Convoy to Calais: <http://convoytocalais.org>.

Remain, leave or boycott

Saturday June 18, 2pm: Meeting, Liverpool Central Library, William Brown Street, Liverpool L3. How should socialists vote? Speakers: James Heartfield ('leave'); Sandy McBurney ('remain'); Jack Conrad (boycott). Organised by supporters of *Critique* journal: study4socialism@gmail.com.

Spirit of Soweto

Saturday June 18, 11am to 5pm: Public meeting on the legacy of struggle, Barbara Strang Teaching Centre, Newcastle University, Newcastle NE1. Organised by Newcastle Stop the War Coalition and others: www.northeaststopwar.org.uk/index.html.

No to Immigration Act

Saturday June 25, 12 noon: Protest march. Assemble top of Stanhope Street, Newcastle upon Tyne NE4. March to Grey's Monument, Newcastle NE1 for rally. Organised by Migration and Asylum Justice Forum: www.facebook.com/migrationandjustice.

Yorkshire rebellion of 1820

Saturday June 25, 1pm: Discussion, the Red Shed, Wakefield Labour Club, Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1. Admission free. Buffet and ale. Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group: www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html.

Marxism, imperialism, profits

Monday June 27, 9.30am to 5.30pm: Day conference, room V111, School of Oriental and African Studies, Vernon Square campus, Penton Rise, London WC1. Discussing the theories of Marx and Lenin, the globalisation of production and the role of finance and profitability. £5. Speakers: Lucia Pradella, John Smith, Michael Roberts, Tony Norfield. Organised by International Initiative for Promoting Political Economy: <http://iippe.org/wp>.

Investment, not cuts

Thursday, June 30, 6.30pm: Economics seminar, Unite the Union, 128 Theobalds Road, London WC1. Participants include: Victoria Chick, James Meadway, Mick Burke, Sian Errington. Organised by Labour Assembly Against Austerity: <http://labourassemblyagainstausterity.org.uk>.

Beyond caring

Wednesday July 6 to Saturday July 9, various times: New play, Theatre Delicatessen, 17 The Moor, Sheffield S1. How the lives of people working on zero-hour contracts are affected. Book online: http://theatredelicatessen.co.uk/js_events/beyond-caring. £20.

No to Chilcot

Wednesday July 6, 5.30pm: Vigil to remember victims of war, Grey's Monument, Blakett Street, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1. Organised by Newcastle Stop the War Coalition: www.northeaststopwar.org.uk/index.html.

End the arms trade

Thursday July 7, 6.30pm: Public meeting, small meeting room, Friends House, 173-177 Euston Road, London NW1. Organised by Campaign Against the Arms Trade: www.caat.org.uk

Durham Miners Gala

Saturday July 9, 10am to 5pm: March: Assemble Market Place, Durham DH1. Main event: The Racecourse, Green Lane, Durham DH1. Organised by Durham NUM: www.durhamminers.org/gala.

For a world without arms

Sunday July 10, 11am to 5pm: Conference, St Hilda's East Community Centre, 8 Club Row, London E2. Organised by Campaign Against the Arms Trade: www.caat.org.uk.

No sales to Israel

Monday August 8, 12 noon: Protest, UAV Engines Factory, Lynn Lane, Shenstone, Litchfield, WS14. Organised by Big Ride For Palestine: www.redspokes.co.uk/thebigride.

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

Corbyn and the media trap

Labour should stop basing its strategy on appealing to the media - it will fail, argues **Paul Demarty**

About the best that can be said for Jeremy Corbyn's appearance on last week's edition of the Channel 4 comedy chat show, *The last leg*, is that it was not a disaster. It was not a success, either; but it could have been much, much worse.

It was, after all, on 'friendly territory', so far as these things go. *The last leg* began as part of Channel 4's Paralympics coverage four years ago - two of its three hosts have disabilities of one sort or another - and its output is irreverent, but basically right-on. (The latest winner of the show's annual Dick of the Year award is that other notorious political Jeremy, Hunt.)

So the objective - as far as anyone can tell - was to be a good sport and get out alive. Look vaguely human. That sort of thing. (Incidentally, it is striking how quickly the image of the robotic politico with the thousand-yard stare has been pinned onto Corbyn, given that part of his appeal in the leadership contest was that he alone looked human, surrounded by the Stepford candidates.) So he was filmed turning up at the studio in a tuxedo and floor-length pimp-coat, with louche rap music playing over the top; there was a ridiculous and not terribly funny skit about how he likes manhole covers; he was forced to debate political etiquette with Russell Crowe. On it went: and it was over. All agree he came out of it better than Nick Clegg, who suffered a real lynching on the same programme a few years ago.

Far worse was *Jeremy Corbyn: the outsider* - an 'inside story'-type documentary from the Vice media group, which saw the hipster outlet's Ben Ferguson follow Corbyn around during the eight weeks running up to the May elections. The film itself is not unsympathetic, really; but it has provided a lot of raw material for far more hostile coverage, with Ferguson repeatedly sent packing, as the inner circle faced yet another crisis. Foremost among these, naturally, was the anti-Semitism pseudo-scandal, which broke over this period. The very fact that Corbyn's people definitely did *not* want to be caught on camera candidly discussing their tactical options was ammunition enough for Vice's more old-fashioned brethren.

This is the problem for the Corbynite battle for hearts and minds, in two incidents. *The last leg* spot is basically as good as mainstream media appearances are going to get for Corbyn, ever; and the result is a television appearance two or three notches lower on the cringe-ometer than might be expected. Many of his advisors are

'The last leg': cringe



Capitalist media: predator, not friend

intoxicated with the idea that new and alternative media will be a more hospitable environment for a politician with a foot outside the Overton window like Corbyn; the Vice disaster is a salutary reminder that this is not the case.

Media 'strategy'

Both of these moments point to a deliberate choice on the part of Corbyn's handlers to focus on relatively more sympathetic media platforms where possible.

We have already discussed the bona fide lefties of *The last leg*; and Vice, at least in its UK incarnation, has been a hotbed of support for Occupy, Focus E15 and what have you - the sort of thing we would call millennial leftism (did the very word 'millennial' not make us want to vomit snakes).

In taking this path, we expect that many of the Corbyn inner circle imagine themselves on the rising tide of media history. There is a seductiveness to the picture, not least because the numbers don't lie: the *print* circulation of most newspapers is declining, and on the web 'traditional' media organisations - though still very much dominating the upper ranks of the page impression charts - are *relatively* less

dominant than they are in dead-tree form. The proof of the pudding - what else? - is the very fact that Corbyn was elected to the leadership, against the fervently worded advice of every damn paper from the *Mirror* to the *Mail* (Bernie Sanders' impressive campaign in the United States is a similar phenomenon), but with the support of at least some at Vice, and various other 'new media' outlets, Twitter cliques and what have you.

Yet somehow it does not seem to work like that. In order to understand why, we must understand what *has not* changed about the media, as well as what has.

The most egregious aspect of continuity is the *agenda* - and who sets it. This is quite obvious when it comes to the Vice debacle. In the first instance, there is the film itself. Ben Ferguson states at the outset that he is a Labour member who voted for Jeremy, but is frustrated by the lack of obvious change. What is obstructing it? We are led to conclude that Corbyn's people are permanently on the defensive - from what? In reality, from the old media. Zoom out a little: the practical result of Ferguson's film is that the Corbyn camp has come out looking paranoid and incompetent. It would be perfectly legitimate to draw the conclusion that they were doing some kind of job under intense and hostile bad-faith pressure from the bourgeois media. Who decides which of these two interpretations is valid? Why, the bourgeois media.

There is the more insidious problem, which is: who *are* these shiny new media organisations? In the case of *The last leg*, of course, the question does not even arise: it is Channel 4, owned by the state, albeit not so obviously as the BBC, and occasionally mooted for sale to (in truth) relatively little controversy. As for Vice, the question is a little more vexed: the UK organisation's news coverage sits oddly with the rightwing politics of its founders (Shane Smith fled Canada for the States to escape its 'socialism'), and notoriously the

organisation is now part-owned by Rupert Murdoch, though his stake is a small (by his standards) 5%.

Vice is, in reality, in a similar position to many of its peers, although it has had enough success over the years to attract \$70 million of Murdoch money. It is attempting to carve out a sustainable existence outside the charmed circle of traditional media outlets, and it is attempting to do so on a capitalist basis, in which somebody, somewhere will make some money out of the whole deal. Thus, despite its relentless lefty outpourings, Vice has become notorious for its callous treatment of freelancers and suchlike - the margins are, at the end of the day, very thin, and squeezing an ounce more blood out of the workforce can make all the difference!

Thus, the faith in alternative capitalist media - never mind 'alternative' pockets of the mainstream media, like *The last leg* - is ill-advised on two counts. First of all, the plucky upstarts are still effectively dominated by the big-money incumbents in terms of their content and impact; secondly, the same plucky upstarts are at a more fundamental level dominated by capital, which needs an honest reformist in Number 10 like it needs a hole in the head. It's a losing bet.

A real 'alternative media'

The time has come to think not about what material is immediately to hand, but what material we *actually* need in order for the healthier parts of the labour movement not to be permanently on the defensive. For it should not actually be difficult; the mainstream media are all characterised by flagrant bias and corruption, and there is no reason why any rational person should trust them without serious attention to the inherent conflicts of interest at work. (Frankly, one does not have to be an investigative journalist to spot

the important ad contracts at a given newspaper these days.)

It turns out that history is full of labour movements who bothered to do it for themselves - create newspapers, radio stations, television stations (never mind websites!) that were funded and staffed by the voluntary sacrifice of those *politically committed* to the success of the movement (which is one way to get rid of Vice's zero-hours troubles ...) Thus, the media could become one of many sites in capitalist society where the political economy of the capitalist class could be *contested* by that of the working class, of the free association of producers.

In order for this to succeed, however, we have to press the advantage - which is to say, we have to be able to compete in terms of *content*, and be braver than the yellow press. That, in the end, means overthrowing the dead hand of the labour bureaucracy. There already are labour-movement media, but who actually looks forward to their union newsletters and suchlike? Where's the spark, the danger? Remember - both the state (Channel 4) and the corporate media (Murdoch and Vice) are able to entertain pockets of dissidence. Regrettably, the labour movement and far left are *worse* on this score.

The Corbynistas will protest that this is all very well, but we do not presently live in a country with a thriving workers' media, and we are faced with the task of getting Jeremy into Number 10 in 2020 - given lemons, we must make lemonade. This is backwards. We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to start rebuilding a sturdy movement, a necessary though not sufficient part of which must be a compelling set of media adequate to our tasks. There will always be more elections - and they certainly won't be won by dressing the leader up in a pimptastic fur coat ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

RIGHTS

Gulag conditions are the new norm

Jeremy Corbyn is spreading illusions about the 'progressive' nature of the EU bureaucracy, writes **Eddie Ford**

Recent polls by YouGov and Orb have shown the tide seeming to turn in favour of exit, with the *Financial Times* 'poll of polls' instant tracker putting 'leave' ahead on 47% to 44% (the rest being 'don't knows').¹ Inevitably, these findings increase the pressure on Jeremy Corbyn to discard his semi-detached position - as it is widely regarded - and appear *extremely* enthusiastic about the European Union over the last few days of the campaign.

Indeed, with an alarmed David Cameron deliberately lowering his profile on the understandable basis that it only alienates Labour supporters, Corbyn is now seen as central to the 'remain' cause - especially as the 66 year-old Labour leader is thought to have the ear of under-30s, who are far more likely to vote 'remain' than older people. If Cameron wants to keep his job, he needs Corbyn out on the stump battling for the EU.

However, alarmingly for Labour - hence for Cameron and the government - a campaign memo from Britain Stronger In Europe showed that about half of its voters were "uniformly uncertain" about the party's official position on the EU referendum.² Perhaps more worrying still, whilst they did not really know what Corbyn thought or believed about the EU or the referendum, they agreed that "his heart isn't in it". But, as this paper has pointed out, this is hardly surprising. All his political life, Corbyn has been opposed to the "bosses' club" of the European Economic Community/EU - meaning that he is now forced to argue for a *new* position, one that does not fit so comfortably.

The Times maintains:

When the history of the European referendum is written, Jeremy Corbyn will have a controversial walk-on part as the inverse of Forrest Gump. Instead of being omnipresent and endearingly sincere, he will be depicted as largely absent and culpably dishonest (June 13).

In similar vein, Alex Andreou, normally sympathetic to the Labour leader, castigated Corbyn's "anonymity, lack of passion and refusal to engage meaningfully" in the referendum battle.³

Yet Corbyn's dilemma is very real. How do you mobilise six million Labour voters to save the skin of a Tory prime minister, and more broadly get left-leaning voters to support the status quo? Trying to sound more upbeat, on June 14 he appeared with the entire shadow cabinet, members of Labour's national executive committee and trade union leaders at an event in central London, where he stated: "It is the Labour position, the trade union position to vote to remain. We urge our supporters to think carefully and vote to remain". A few days earlier in Aberdeen, he gave a speech saying he was campaigning to stay in the EU in order to protect the advances made in "workers' rights", including maternity and paternity leave, paid holidays, working hours, anti-discrimination legislation, environmental protection, etc.

Of course, he had said the same back in April as part of his long-promised speech finally committing himself to support for continued EU membership, "warts and all". Though admitting that he was still critical of Brussels' "shortcomings", he told us that the EU had helped to underpin "investment, jobs and protections for workers, consumers



Mike Ashley: nothing exceptional

and the environment". Apparently, Brexit would be an opportunity to attack workers in a "bonfire of rights" - a carnival of reaction. The obvious implication is that the level of protection and rights that workers enjoy is all down to the EU, so we must vote 'remain' on June 23 just to keep what we have.

Ruthless

Step forward, Sir Philip Green, billionaire former owner of BHS, and Mike Ashley, founder of Sports Direct.

Green, the great über-capitalist of yesterday, whose empire includes Top Shop and Dorothy Perkin, is now in disgrace after milking BHS for everything it was worth by taking out £400 million in dividends during his 15-year ownership. He then sold the company for £1 to a dodgy consortium (Retail Acquisitions), led by Dominic Chappell, who has been declared bankrupt at least three times, and has been dubbed by members of Commons select committees a "mythomaniac" and a "Premier League liar". All 164 BHS stores will close by the end of July and 11,000 will lose their jobs. Even more unfortunately for both current and former employees, who number 20,000 in total, the government-backed pension protection fund does not cover the full value of their pension - so they will get an immediate 10% 'haircut'. Money gone for ever.

In a Commons debate on BHS, MPs from every party lined up to lambaste Green, describing him as an "unscrupulous chancer", overseeing "wealth extraction rather than wealth creation". Conservative MP, David Davis, said his 'management' of BHS "can be described as little else than asset stripping", even though in August 2010 Green was asked by Cameron to carry out a review of government spending and procurement.

Showing his total arrogance and sense of entitlement, Green had

originally refused to appear before the select committees conducting a joint inquiry into the demise of BHS. He had even imperiously demanded the resignation of Frank Field, chairman of the work and pensions committee, on the grounds that he was "biased" - he was "not prepared to participate in a process" which "has as its primary objective the destruction of my reputation".⁴

Green eventually consented to appear before MPs, saying he was "sad" about the demise of BHS and was working on a solution to "fix this mess" - a new plan, being drawn up by accountancy group Deloitte, would offer BHS pensioners a "better outcome" than compensation available from the pension protection fund. However, when asked if that meant scheme members would receive the pensions due before the collapse, no more details were forthcoming. Showing how "sad" he was about the fate of BHS employees, Green has just bought his *third* luxury yacht (Lionheart) worth £100 million - maybe just to cheer himself up with a bit of retail therapy.⁵ Naturally, the yacht - like all his businesses dealings - was formally purchased by his wife, who lives in Monaco and thus does not pay British taxes. An outraged John McDonnell demanded that Green should be stripped of his knighthood, as that would "help restore public faith in the honours system".

This brings us to Mike Ashley, who also refused to be questioned by the relevant select committee for several months despite receiving a formal parliamentary summons, but finally turned up after the committee hinted it would consider finding him in contempt of parliament. Unsurprisingly, we discover that Ashley had written to the BHS administrators expressing an interest in taking over a number of the stores - but Green rebutted his advances.

Anyhow, Ashley admitted to MPs that at a "specific time" Sports Direct staff were effectively paid *less* than

the national minimum wage because they were held back at the end of their shift and brusquely searched by security guards before leaving the company's warehouse in Shirebrook, Derbyshire - locally known as "the gulag". This involved a *daily* search - all part of SD's 'zero tolerance' of theft - that required workers to obediently line up as if they were prisoners before being ordered to strip to the final layer above the waist and empty their pockets. They were then asked to roll up their trouser legs to reveal the brands of their socks and also expose the brand of their underwear. Occasionally workers are hauled into a side room for a more 'detailed' search. This was all unpaid time, of course - even though the search could take 30 minutes or more. However, if workers turned up one minute late, they were docked *15 minutes* pay.

All this came to public attention last December, when *The Guardian* undertook an extensive investigation using undercover reporters, and published an article entitled 'A day at "the gulag": what it's like to work at Sports Direct's warehouse' (December 9 2015).⁶ Some of the other horrors uncovered were that workers are given a list of 802 sports and clothing brands they are prohibited from wearing - not just SD's own brands, but labels including Nike, Adidas and Reebok. Workers were said to have urinated into bottles because they were afraid of going to the toilet lest they be 'sanctioned'. Some staff were paid through a pre-paid card that cost them £10, plus a £10-a-month 'management fee' - nor forgetting the 75p to use it at an ATM machine, and 10p when they got a text message confirming they had used it. Only about 200 warehouse workers were actual SD employees, while more than 3,000 people were supplied by various employment agencies.

Horrifically, there had been 110 ambulance call-outs to the warehouse - 38 when workers had complained

of chest pains and five that were connected to birth and miscarriage (one worker actually gave birth in the toilet). Orwellian-style, workers could occasionally get harangued by name via the tannoy system if they were deemed not to be moving quickly enough. As for behaviour the company considered punishable offences (called "strikes"), these included "excessive/long toilet breaks", "excessive chatting", "horseplay", "wearing branded goods" and "using a mobile phone in the warehouse". Six "strikes" in six months and you were out.

Ashley's wretched defence to MPs was that SD had a "hard-working culture" and was a "victim of its own success" - he had the gall to say that he did a "better job" for his employees than Unite the union. True, he said, "I'm not Father Christmas" and "I'm not saying I'll make the world wonderful" - who could disagree? Yes, he shrugged, the company had "outgrown" his ability to manage it, "probably a long time ago". But hey, a "hard-working" billionaire could not be expected to keep on top of everything - be reasonable. Unfazed, Ashley accepted that SD engaged in practices that were immoral and even criminal - like employees on illegally low wages and temporary workers offered permanent jobs in return for sexual favours. But apparently, Ashley led us to believe, similar things happen at Sainsbury's and Tesco - so what's all the fuss about?

Class struggle

So what was that about the "workers' rights" supposedly given to us by EU membership? Green and Ashley may be among the worst offenders, but companies such as Amazon or McDonalds are hardly paragons of virtue. Indeed the 'gulag' is becoming the *new norm* in workplaces across Britain. So Jeremy Corbyn is being incredibly complacent in defending the *existing* situation, basically arguing that things could get worse with a Brexit.

Obviously things can get worse, but this is not the right attitude. Rights are something you *win*, not get handed down to you from on high. The gains we have made, limited and inadequate as they are, did not result from the beneficence of either the EU or Westminster, let alone of the bourgeoisie - but from the class struggle, through the struggle of power against power.

That is what Corbyn should be saying, not spreading illusions in the progressive nature of the EU bureaucracy - remember Greece? Instead, he should be demanding the scrapping of *all* anti-trade union laws - one guaranteed way to help protect and extend workers' rights in Britain, inside or outside the EU. When do we hear him saying this? Corbyn, however, seems to be concentrating only on the very worst offenders - the 'rogue' capitalists and those who insist on zero-hours contracts. A bold programme of change, or vagaries? Alas, with Corbyn, it seems more the latter than the former ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

- <https://fig.ft.com/sites/brexit-polling>.
- www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/may/30/labour-voters-in-the-dark-about-partys-stance-on-brexit-research-says.
- <https://twitter.com/sturdyAlex/status/741301370586812420>.
- www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-36528426.
- www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/inside-sir-philip-greens-opulent-7857760.
- www.theguardian.com/business/2015/dec/09/sports-direct-warehouse-work-conditions.

EUROPE

Whatever happens on June 23, one thing is certain: Britain will not leave Europe

Our strategy and tactics

Jack Conrad looks at the referendum - and beyond that to the challenge of continental unity

How do things stand with the June 23 referendum? Surprisingly, not least for me, recent opinion polls show the 'leave' campaign edging ahead.¹ Eg, a TNS poll found that some 47% back Brexit, while only 40% favour 'remain' (because this is a survey of those intending to vote the remaining 13% are either 'don't know' ... or 'spoil your ballot paper' active boycottists).²

Moreover, as pollsters constantly remind us, those wanting to stay in the European Union tend to be both younger and less likely to vote. Therefore the 1.2 million who stampeded to register as voters in the four days before the final June 8 deadline are considered a much needed boost by Stronger in Europe, Labour In for Britain, etc. Nevertheless, according to Betfair, the probability of a 'remain' vote is 64.5% - down 14 points over just four days.³ In response to such news, jittery markets sent the value of the pound and the FTSE 100 plunging downwards. There is a real worry that June 23 could produce the wrong result.

Undoubtedly, the explanation for the renewed wind in the sails of the 'leave' campaign lies in the "dominant issue" of immigration.⁴ Many workers, especially those with a backward level of class-consciousness, misguidedly blame not global inequality, not the Tory government, not the system, but migrants, for poor housing, lack of school places, NHS queues, low wages, etc, etc. Stupidly, as always in pursuit of a short-term political gain, David Cameron once promised an annual cap on immigration and to limit it to the "tens of thousands".⁵ A hostage to fortune. He could never deliver. The release of official figures showing a near record 330,000 influx in 2015 were an unsolicited gift for

Boris Johnson, Michael Gove and Nigel Farage.

Needless to say, both camps insist that some existential choice is about to be made.

On the 'remain' side: the politics of fear. Stronger in Europe implies that three million jobs could be lost with a Brexit.⁶ Meanwhile, HM government's £9 million pamphlet ominously predicts a 'leave' vote will "create years of uncertainty".⁷ Similarly, Another Europe is Possible, a typical soft-left lash-up, announces that "walking away from the EU would boost rightwing movements and parties like Ukip and hurt ordinary people in Britain".⁸ For his part, Mark Carney maintains that a Brexit will put the country's vital financial sector at "risk".⁹ Moreover, the Bank of England governor is expected to break his "self-imposed purdah" and issue a damning report showing that a 'leave' vote could upend inflation, growth and interest rate targets.¹⁰ Doing her bit for the remain cause, Christine Lagarde, head of the International Monetary Fund, famously declared that withdrawing from the EU would have "pretty bad to very, very bad consequences" for Britain and could trigger another recession.¹¹ As for George Osborne he warns of a Brexit "emergency budget" that will see him "slash public spending and increase taxes" in order to tackle a £30bn "black hole" brought about by a Brexit economic downturn - this could include "raising income and inheritance taxes and cutting the NHS budget."¹²

On the 'leave' side: the politics of hopeless hope. Formally headed by Labour's useful idiot, Gisela Stuart, and incorporating various mavericks, such as Kate Hoey, Frank Field and David Owen, at its core, Vote Leave unites Tory heavyweights - crucially Boris Johnson, Michael Gove and

Iain Duncan Smith. Vote Leave says Britain must "regain control over things like ... migration, crime and civil liberties".¹³ As a loathsome auxiliary comes Migration Watch. Unless Britain quits the EU, horror of horrors, total population is set to rise to 80 million by 2035 - with "60% of migrants coming from the EU".¹⁴ Nigel Farage, fronting the UK Independence Party's Grassroots Go, now, almost triumphantly, announces: "When [David Cameron] says that we can maintain control of immigration while remaining a member of the European Union, people increasingly know this prime minister is simply not telling the truth."¹⁵ Get Britain Out - a longstanding far-right Tory outfit - seeks to "bring back UK democracy".¹⁶ In exactly the same red, white and blue spirit, the *Morning Star's* inept Ben Chacko patriotically rejects the "EU superstate project" and likewise seeks the restoration of Britain's "democracy".¹⁷ Then there is Lexit - uniting the Socialist Workers Party, Counterfire and the Communist Party of Britain. Its Thomas Barker seriously appears to believe that a 'leave' vote "would strike a mortal blow to the government, as well as the EU" and "could lead to the calling of a general election and the removal of the detested Tories from power". He giddily envisages the Tories debilitatingly split and a vague, undefined and entirely fanciful "international fightback".¹⁸

Frankly, unlike genuinely crucial questions, such as transforming the Labour Party, Greek debt bondage, Trident renewal, the danger of runaway climate change, etc, the whole referendum exercise lacks any real substance. Surely, whatever the result on June 23, "under no circumstances will Britain leave Europe".¹⁹ Eg, imagine, for the sake of the argument, that the 'leave' camp

gains a majority on June 23. Despite ringing declarations demanding British independence, an end to mass European migration and freedom from EU bureaucracy coming from Messrs Johnson, Gove and Duncan Smith, such a programme, as I have argued many times before, will never be implemented.

Britain, to state the obvious, no longer possesses a global empire. Its former position as world hegemon was taken over by the United States with World War II. The Suez fiasco in 1956 definitively saw Britain abandon its futile bid to expand its African and Middle Eastern colonies. Instead it reluctantly settled for a privileged position as America's closest ally. A position that it quickly came to treasure and as everybody knows goes under name of the "special relationship" (a phrase coined by Winston Churchill in 1946). That is exactly why general Charles de Gaulle twice said *non*. He rightly saw Britain as a pliant US satrap. Even a US Trojan horse. And, once it was inside the European Economic Community as a full member, that indeed has been the role played by Britain.

Leave aside the possibility of an "independent" Britain not being instantly granted a free trade deal by the 27 countries remaining in the EU. The likelihood is that an "independent" Britain just like the "independent" Switzerland and the "independent" Norway will have to abide by all relevant EU red tape, accept freedom of movement from the EU and be under an obligation to contribute to EU budgets. Then there is the simple fact that the US does not want Britain to leave. Something Barack Obama made abundantly clear *in public* when he visited in April - he urged Britain to "stick with the EU". David Cameron's successor

will be told exactly the same thing - only in blunter terms. And, be it Boris Johnson, George Osborne or Theresa May, the new British PM will surely follow US orders.

Illusory

Britain's second Europe referendum, in point of fact, closely matches Harold Wilson's of June 1975. It was staged not because he was unhappy with the EEC. Wilson's referendum was, in fact, a wonderfully Machiavellian "ploy" dictated entirely by "domestic politics".²⁰ Labour had a long record of supporting British efforts to gain membership, dating back to the mid-1960s. Wilson was himself responsible for submitting Britain's second, unsuccessful, membership application in May 1967. That is surely why Europe hardly featured in the 1970 general election campaign: there was a cross-party consensus.

However, against all expectations Labour lost to a Tory surge. Under those circumstances Wilson turned towards what is now politely called Euroscepticism. In 1971 opposition to the EEC became official Labour policy. A year later, conference voted in favour of supporting the demand for a referendum - till then alien to the British constitutional tradition.

It was, then, a Tory prime minister, Ted Heath, who oversaw British entry in January 1973 - with the help of the Roy Jenkins-George Thomson wing of the Labour Party, he had won a clear parliamentary majority for his membership terms and conditions. Nevertheless, Labour could steal votes by attacking Heath for getting a bad deal and by promising a "fundamental renegotiation" ... to be followed by Britain's first referendum. Needless to say, Labour won the February and then the October 1974 general elections.

Ensnared in No10, Wilson kept to his word and called a referendum. This

would also serve, he hoped, to humble Labour's 'anti-marketisers' - ie, Tony Benn, Barbara Castle and Michael Foot. The referendum campaign was, in fact, a highly unequal battle. The 'remain' camp enjoyed professional organisation, drew on considerable finances, thanks to big business, and had the backing of the entire national daily press (with the sole exception of the *Morning Star*).

On June 5 1975, 67% voted 'yes' and a mere 33% voted 'no' to Britain's continued membership. Despite that overwhelming mandate, given the fulsome promises that joining the EEC would bring substantial material benefits, it is hardly surprising that Europe has become a "scapegoat for economic malaise": for sure, the 1974-79 Labour government could do nothing to reverse Britain's relative economic decline.²¹

The illusory nature of Britain's second Euro referendum is no less obvious. The European Union Referendum Act (2015) had nothing to do with David Cameron entertaining some grand plan for a British geopolitical reorientation. By calculation, if not conviction, Cameron is a soft Europhile. And, despite tough talk about negotiating "fundamental, far-reaching change" and gaining a "special status" for Britain, just like Harold Wilson, he came back from Brussels with precious little. Apart from two very minor adjustments - a reduction in non-resident child benefits, which Germany too favoured, and a temporary cut in tax credits - all that Cameron secured was symbolic (ie, the agreement that Britain did not necessarily favour "ever closer union").

Transparently David Cameron never had any intention of Britain leaving the EU. His promise to hold a referendum was dictated solely by domestic considerations - above all, David Cameron remaining prime minister. By holding out the promise of a referendum, Cameron - together with his close advisors - figured he could harness popular dissatisfaction with the EU - not least as generated by the rightwing press. Moreover, in terms of party politics, Ed Miliband could be wrong-footed, Tory Europhobes conciliated and Ukip checked.

However, Cameron's expectation was that he would never have to deliver. Most pundits predicted a continuation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition after the May 2015 general election. With Nick Clegg, Vince Cable and Danny Alexander sitting around the cabinet table, there would be no referendum. They would have blocked such a proposal with threats of resignation. Yet, as we all know, despite the opinion polls, the Tories secured a narrow House of Commons majority. So Cameron was lumbered with his referendum.

I still expect a 'remain' vote on June 23. Surely, backing from big business and international institutions, celebrity endorsements ... and fear of the unknown will swing popular opinion at the 11th hour. Nevertheless, establishment critics are undoubtedly right: Cameron has gambled on an often fickle electorate. Referendums can go horribly awry for those who stage them, especially when issues such as mass migration, international terrorism and general dissatisfaction come into the mix.

The danger of a 'leave' vote would genuinely panic the ruling class, "if the referendum really mattered".²² Sure, David Cameron "would not last 30 seconds" after a Brexit vote (Ken Clarke).²³ But he would not be replaced by Nigel Farage ... or Jeremy Corbyn. There will still be a Tory government. It could be headed by Boris Johnson, Theresa May, George Osborne ... or, as of now, some less likely contender. Note: the next Tory leader/prime minister will be elected on a 'one member, one vote' basis. The chances

are, therefore, that, whoever is the next Tory prime minister, Britain would do just what other EU members have done - Denmark, France, Ireland and Holland. After a referendum has gone the wrong way, the government would negotiate "a new agreement, nearly identical to the old one, disguise it in opaque language and ratify it".²⁴ Amid the post-referendum shock and awe, the population would be scared, fooled or bribed into acquiescence. There would follow a second referendum.

Boris Johnson has surely already given the game away. He is now using the standard 'leave' rhetoric: eg, the sunlight of freedom, breaking out of the EU jail, a once-in-a-generation opportunity to "take back control over our borders and control over our democracy".²⁵ But he readily admits that his support for Brexit only came after Cameron's final EU deal failed to include his proposed wording enshrining British "parliamentary sovereignty". Just the kind of meaningless drivel that could easily be conceded in future negotiations and be successfully put to a second referendum - an idea originally mooted by former Tory leader Michael Howard. Naturally, Cameron dismissed the second referendum option. He is in no position to do otherwise. But if Johnson were to become prime minister we know exactly what to expect. At US bidding he would get an EU agreement to a highfalutin phrase that he could sell to the British electorate. As with Harold Wilson in 1975, the chances are that there would be a clear, two-thirds majority.

Boycott

In general communists take a negative view of referendums. We unapologetically prefer representative, indirect democracy, to so-called direct, plebiscitary democracy. Rigorous debate, fielding detailed amendments, the prolonged struggle of parties is replaced by an atomised electorate and the easy appeal of bigotry. Hence Swiss citizens voted in 2009 to ban the construction of any further minarets (there were actually only four of them at the time). Reducing politics to a simple 'yes' or 'no' choice encourages people to ignore history, complexity and unexpected consequences.

Especially under capitalism referendums tend to disunite the forces of the working class and bring sections of it under the hegemony of petty bourgeois and bourgeois politicians. They are also the favourite devices of dictators and would-be dictators. During their resistible rises Louis Bonaparte, Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler and Charles de Gaulle all used referendums to provide themselves with overarching powers.

Of course, June 23 has nothing to do with putting a dictator into the saddle. What is really at issue is a blue-on-blue power struggle. Assume a 'remain' vote, then David Cameron will probably stay on as prime minister for the next couple of years. Assume a 'leave' vote, then we will probably get Boris Johnson. Given that palpable reality, the dumbest thing to do is to take the referendum at face value, to obediently say that we must answer the question on the ballot paper. No, instead communists advocate an active boycott. Go to the polling station on June 23 and spoil your ballot paper: write 'For a socialist Europe'.

Does that mean that we constitute ourselves an irrelevance, or that we have nothing to say when it comes to Europe? That is a charge that has been repeatedly thrown against us by a range of critics. Suffice to say, nothing could be further from the truth. The CPGB opposes the 'leave' camp not simply because to associate with it puts us in the obnoxious company of Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage and Frank Field. No, there is another, far

more important, reason. Communists positively favour a united Europe - even if that comes about under the conditions of capitalism. Yet that hardly commits us to supporting the existing EU. Far from it.

The fact of the matter is that the EU is only quasi-democratic. It is a creaking confederation of often fractious capitalist states, run by an arrogant, remote, appointed body of commissioners. The directly elected parliament exercises no real power. As for the euro, it is clearly malfunctioning. Hence the long term danger of a Prussian solution.

However, the EU does provide us with the wide sphere of operations needed not only to organise the working class into a ruling class, but a class that, having come to power, can realistically expect to make a decisive, strategic breakthrough in terms of the world socialist revolution. A United Socialist States of Europe could stand up to US imperialism and spread the flame of liberation to Africa, Latin America, Asia ... and finally North America. A socialist France, a socialist Greece, a socialist Portugal could never do that. Indeed any such isolated outpost of working class power would very quickly fall to counterrevolution (either from within or from without).

So, yes, we want to sweep away the existing EU of commissioners, the council of ministers, the court of justice, etc. In its place we envisage a thoroughly democratic and thoroughly internationalist United Socialist States of Europe.

Although we programmatically distrust referendums, it would, of course, be stupid to insist upon some blanket ban on voting in them. Everything depends on concrete circumstances. Take the May 22 2015 referendum in Ireland on same-sex marriage. The ultra-reactionary right, the Catholic hierarchy and various Protestant sects called for a 'no' vote. Meanwhile, the four main parties in the Dáil supported a change in the constitution. To have advocated a boycott because of some purist wish to go unassociated with Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Labour and Sinn Féin would have been facile posturing and an obvious mistake. Our forces were and still are weak and disorganised, and expectations continue to be desperately low. Equally to have uncritically gone along with the political establishment in some rotten popular front would have been an obvious mistake. Mere tailism. The referendum should have been used as an opportunity to militantly raise the demand for the complete separation of church and state. The Catholic church's special status, fabulous wealth, tax loopholes, role in education, etc, must be ended. Ireland should be refounded as a *secular* republic.

Then there is the argument that boycotts are wrongheaded because "all referenda - and for that matter, all elections - are rigged to one degree or another". Therefore, it supposedly follows that those who advocate an active boycott of the June 23 referendum should "logically" conclude that all elections should be boycotted. It is, of course, true, that all elections under capitalism are to one degree or another "rigged". But, as argued above, that hardly leads to communists boycotting every referendum as if it were a matter of principle. Our tactics are not based on the undeniable fact that establishment politicians cheat, lie and constantly strive to deceive people. Tactics must be decided upon only after assessing class relations in the round and analysing the development of extra-parliamentary and parliamentary struggles. For example, in a referendum: what is the question, why is the government asking it, how purposeful and combative is the

working class, are the reactionaries on the rampage or retreating, does a widespread popular hunger exist for more than is on offer? All such factors must be taken into account.

As to boycotting all elections, practice surely speaks volumes here. The CPGB called for a first-preference vote for George Galloway in the May 5 mayoral election in London and a second preference for Sadiq Khan. Our intention was to simultaneously dramatise opposition to the witch-hunt going on in the Labour Party and to defend the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. Galloway condemned the witch-hunt; Khan defended it. However, a defeat for Khan would have seen Corbyn get the blame for a Labour defeat. In fact a Galloway vote cost nothing. He never stood a chance. Second-preference votes for Khan would, on the other hand, count. That was our calculation and that is what happened.

More than that, under the Provisional Central Committee, the CPGB has fielded candidates in elections going back to 1992. Why? Because we want to use "every avenue to propagate the ideas of communism".²⁶ Elections - with the growth of communist organisation and communist consciousness - can be turned from a means to lull the masses and gain their submission into a weapon of the class struggle - and one of the sharpest at that.

During a gathering revolutionary storm, communists might well decide to boycott a referendum with a heavily loaded question such as - 'Do you favour the restoration of peace, stability and good governance?' or 'Do you favour national collapse, anarchy and mob rule'? If communists dominate the Labour Party, have a large communist-Labour parliamentary fraction, control numerous local authorities, lead the important trade unions, run countless education institutes and co-ops and can count on the support of rank-and-file committees in the armed forces, etc, countenancing participation in such a counterrevolutionary stunt would surely be to betray the cause of socialism.

Under such welcome circumstances, we might be advised to demand a general election, along with ending the many shortcomings and violations of democracy that exist under the UK's constitution. Absence of proportional representation, the corrupting role of big money, an unelected second chamber, judicial review, MI5, the royal prerogative in choosing the prime minister, etc.

What about the silly notion that a boycott would "relegate" us to an "irrelevance" and allow the Tories and

Ukip to do all the running? A boycott is hardly the same as an apolitical, passive, abstention.

In this context it is worth recalling that the Bolsheviks firmly distinguished between a "passive abstention" and an "active boycott" - which implies, as Lenin explained, "increasing agitation tenfold".²⁷ The Bolsheviks, it should be stressed, were not boycottists as a matter of principle. Far from it. Nonetheless, they did organise a spectacularly successful boycott of elections to the tsar's duma in 1905. The Bulygin duma was in effect buried before it was born. However, under the changed circumstances of 1912, the Bolsheviks totally dominated the workers curia in the fourth duma.

We are not interested in saving David Cameron's bacon. Nor are we interested in giving him a bloody nose and triggering a Tory leadership contest, which would see a battle between Boris Johnson, George Osborne and Theresa May. What we are interested in is carving out a space, no matter how initially small, no matter how initially tentative, no matter how initially inadequate, for the great task of readying the working class in the EU for the socialist revolution ●

Notes

1. *The Guardian* June 13 2016.
2. *The Daily Telegraph* June 14 2016.
3. *The Week* June 13 2016.
4. www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2016/jun/13/eu-referendum-live-labour-remain-campaign-final-10-days-vote.
5. *The Daily Telegraph* January 10 2010.
6. www.strongerin.co.uk/get_the_facts#QAmHJOIGfmYbZJ.97.
7. HM government, 'Why the government believes that voting to remain in the European Union is the best decision for the UK'.
8. www.anothereurope.org.
9. *The Daily Telegraph* March 8 2016.
10. *This is money* June 11 2016.
11. *The Daily Telegraph* May 13 2016.
12. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36534192>.
13. <https://d3n8a8pro7vhmxc.cloudfront.net/voteleave/pages/98/attachments/original/1457545797/website-brochure-hq-mar16-2.pdf>.
14. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36514849.
15. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36444014.
16. <http://getbritainout.org>.
17. Editorial *Morning Star* March 4 2016.
18. www.leftleave.org/exit-left-the-socialist-case-for-britain-leaving-the-eu.
19. Andrew Moravcsik, Princeton professor of politics *Financial Times* April 9-10 2016.
20. D Reynolds *Britannia overruled* London 1991, p249.
21. *Ibid* p250.
22. Andrew Moravcsik, Princeton professor of politics *Financial Times* April 9-10 2016.
23. *The Independent* April 16 2016.
24. Andrew Moravcsik, Princeton professor of politics *Financial Times* April 9-10 2016.
25. *The Independent* March 6 2016.
26. J Conrad *In the enemy camp* London 1993, p7.
27. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 9, Moscow 1977, p182.

Fighting fund

Play your part

MF's brilliant £120 donation provided a much needed boost to our fighting fund in an otherwise sparse week. We are now halfway through the month, but the total of £836 raised so far is just a little bit behind where we ought to be, if we're going to raise the £1,750 we need each month.

Other highlights this week were a cheque for £50 from KC, a £20 standing order from DW and another £25 PayPal gift from one of our supporters in Canada, comrade SS. He was among the 2,732 online readers our counter registered last week - although, of course, the accuracy of this has often been called into question. It's a question, on the one hand, of total or unique visits and, on the other, of the effect of ad-blockers and suchlike. But currently we are studying this question and

trying to ensure we record our online readership as accurately as possible. No easy task, I'm told.

Amongst the donations this week was comrade DB's monthly £7.20 via PayPal. That's the amount he used to pay for his overseas subscription, but, even though he now reads us online and doesn't take a hard copy any more, he insists he still wants to pay the *Weekly Worker* the same amount. It's gratefully received, comrade!

But now we could do with a bit of acceleration in the second half of the month. Feel free to play your part! ●

Robbie Rix

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

ITALY

M5S is not a leftwing party

Why are elements within the left recommending a vote for Beppe Grillo's party? Toby Abse points to its links with the far right

Any notion that the Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S - Five Star Movement) is a leftwing party has to be exposed, as a matter of extreme urgency, for the complete nonsense it is.

Such a notion is being peddled in the United Kingdom by the very same people¹ who are pushing what I can only call a Schlageter line² in relation to the referendum on the European Union, so they are probably utterly indifferent to the widely known fact that M5S leader Beppe Grillo has as his principal ally at the European level none other than Nigel Farage, the man whom even David Cameron - no slouch when it comes to dog-whistle racism, as his remarks about Sadiq Khan during the London mayoral contest revealed - finds too openly bigoted for defending the use of terms such as "Chinks" and "fags" by a UK Independence Party candidate.³

As Farage has proclaimed in a very recent full-page interview with *Corriere della Sera*,

Grillo and I will destroy the old European Union. On June 19 the Five Stars candidate will be elected mayor of the capital and change Italy. On June 23 Great Britain will leave the EU and change Europe. We shall have a domino effect. After us the northern countries will leave one after the other. First Denmark, then Holland⁴, Sweden, Austria. This referendum is the most important event since 1957. The EU is about to collapse. Disintegrated into so many pieces.⁵

It is not just that Matteo Salvini, the leader of the far-right, racist Lega Nord, has called for a vote for M5S mayoral candidates Virginia Raggi in Rome and Chiara Appendino in Turin in the run-off second ballots on June 19. The links between M5S and both the racist, right-populist Lega and the neo-fascist Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy - FdI) go much, much deeper. A recent opinion poll amongst M5S voters, published in *La Repubblica* on June 9, showed that 60% of M5S voters were sympathetic to a party of the right. By contrast only 15% had such a sympathy for the left. This cannot be explained purely on the basis of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' - ie, hostility to Matteo Renzi and his Partito Democratico - since most of those polled specified the *extreme* rather than moderate right. To some extent, this sympathy is reciprocated - most markedly amongst Lega voters, 28% of whom are sympathetic to M5S. Indeed, 18% of Forza Italia and 17% of FdI voters have such sympathies for M5S.⁶

At the ideological level, the racism of the leading figures amongst the new generation of M5S leaders needs to be underlined. Raggi, the Roman mayoral candidate, said in relation to gypsies: "The camps have to be removed. We need an

economic and social census of those who live there." Not only does this display visceral hostility to the Roma and Simti, but the very idea of such a census has sinister undertones, given the way censuses of Jews in places like Vichy France or indeed fascist Italy paved the way for the Nazi genocide, even if the census-takers had a milder version of persecution in mind. And, of course, in the Roman context it is very reminiscent of the fingerprinting of all gypsy children advocated by the neo-fascist mayor, Gianni Alemanno (the man whose victory was famously greeted by fascist salutes in central Rome), with whom Raggi has greater links than her official, doctored curriculum vitae acknowledges.

Nor is this racism some idiosyncrasy of Raggi's and nor, for that matter, is M5S hostility to non-Italians confined to one ethnic group. Luigi Di Maio, the probable M5S candidate for premier at the next general election,⁷ has said: "The migratory phenomenon is an enormous phenomenon. It is for this reason that we want a citizens' income for the Italians. We must think first about making our country secure."

Thus the much bruted-about 'citizen's income', about which many trade unionists all over Europe have grave doubts, as something weakening workers' collective bargaining power by blunting the intensity of class struggle, is in fact linked to ethnic criteria of a kind that is characteristic of a wide array of European far-right parties. That includes the Front National in France, which does not currently advocate extreme neoliberalism, but a welfare state confined to the ethnically pure.⁸ The implication that the door must be firmly barred to all refugees and that all foreigners are terrorists, murderers or rapists needs little underlining - such is what 'law and order' has always meant from Richard Nixon to Donald Trump and Nigel Farage.

Alessandro Di Battista, another leading national figure within the younger generation of M5S, has boasted about how Lega founder Umberto Bossi - second to none in his prime, when it came to making racist remarks - gave him a pat on the back and Di Battista affectionately described Bossi to the press as "an old lion". Moreover, the same applies at the regional level. In

the Veneto, the Lega's traditional heartland in north-east Italy, Jacopo Berti, the group leader of M5S in the regional assembly, has on many occasions supported resolutions from the Lega, beginning with those calling for the repeal of the law protecting Roma and Simti.⁹

Potential mayor

Let us turn now to some little-known facts about Virginia Raggi, the 37-year-old lawyer standing for the Roman mayoralty, whom the world's press has glorified both for her youth and for her gender - many mainstream articles have waxed lyrical about her becoming potentially the first female mayor of Rome.¹⁰ Her support for Lazio - the football team with the most violent neo-fascist hooligans anywhere in Italy, whose players have been known to give fascist salutes and whose supporters have frequently brought banners with disgusting references to the Holocaust into the ground - is hardly endearing and not something fashionable liberals refer to. However, it is not the worst of her defects by any means.

In her official curriculum vitae it is stated that between 2003 and 2007 "she appeared in court for a well-known legal firm specialising in civil law". Significantly it is not mentioned that the firm in question was that of Cesare Previti - at the time a Forza Italia parliamentarian and a former minister of defence, who in 2003 suffered his first conviction for corrupting magistrates. That does not appear to have worried this latter-day hammer of corruption, who worked alongside him for another four years! The second extremely significant omission in this thoroughly bowdlerised CV is that she had the role of president in a company administered by the secretary of Franco Panzironi, former head of the municipal enterprise, AMA, and secretary general of the foundation set up by the neo-fascist mayor, Gianni Alemanno, currently on trial in relation to the Mafia Capitale scandal. "It wasn't a job in the company - only a duty linked to the legal practice in which I was working," she has unconvincingly explained to Fabrizio Roncone, a *Corriere* journalist. As another *Corriere* writer, Sergio Rizzo, points out, "But why omit this from her electoral curriculum? And why omit it from the one published on the council website?"¹¹ One suspects because it would link her, however indirectly, to corruption, criminality and hard-line neo-fascism.

In the light of all this evidence about the attitudes and record of M5S, it is saddening that their mayoral candidates are getting a free ride - not only in Britain from the Tariq Alis and Susan Watkins mesmerised by any force that aims to destroy the European Union, but in Italy, from many on the radical left. They include those who define themselves as communists - the most saddening instance being no less a figure than Paolo Ferrero, the leader of Rifondazione Comunista, somebody who started his political career in Democrazia Proletaria and whose Protestant Valdesian faith has generally made him much less forgiving of the corruption and compromises of Italian politics than a Catholic like Nichi Vendola of the soft-left Sinistra Ecologia Libertà. Disgracefully, Ferrero has given his backing to Chiara Appendino in the second round of the Torinese mayoral election. Whilst Dario Fo may now be drifting into senility, his avowed support for the right's mayoral candidate in Milan - a Forza Italia man, but one backed by the neo-fascist FdI - makes little sense, in view of what his late wife, Franca Rame, once suffered at the hands of such neo-fascist characters.

Ferrero certainly must bear full responsibility if he hands Turin over to the racists of M5S. Appendino, its candidate, has publicly reiterated her willingness to accept the enthusiastic support of the Lega Nord's Mario Borghezio, its most notorious and open racist, about whom Farage has recently said: "I was in the Lega group at Strasbourg. I did not ever have any problems except with Borghezio. I am not a politically correct type. However, Borghezio is too much even for me."¹² All that makes Appendino beyond the pale. It would be comprehensible, although in my view mistaken, if Ferrero had urged abstention, given PD candidate Piero Fassino's enthusiasm for the TAV (high-speed railway) and so forth, but to ally himself with somebody publicly supported by such a character is to betray the values of the Italian resistance and everything that the communist tradition has ever stood for ●

Notes

1. In particular Tariq Ali of *New Left Review*, the lead speaker at an anti-European Union rally in London on June 13 2016. Although the lead article, 'Oppositions', in *New Left Review* (March-April 2016) was written by his wife, Susan Watkins, it is hard to imagine that comrade Ali did not have a serious input into its general line.
2. Leo Schlageter (1894-1923) was a German Nazi, who, after participating in murderous anti-Polish violence in Silesia in 1921, was executed by the French in 1923 for sabotage during their occupation of the Ruhr. Karl Radek of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) made a notorious speech praising him to the skies. A later, but related, episode in the history of the KPD came at the time of the Nazi-initiated plebiscite against the Social Democratic government of Prussia in 1932, which the KPD called the 'Red Plebiscite' - the parallels with the proclamations of the supporters of the mythical left exit in the United Kingdom, with their refusal to acknowledge that this EU referendum has become a vote about immigration, are too obvious to need much elaboration.
3. See Cameron's interview in *The Observer* June 12 2016.
4. Since this Farage interview, Geert Wilders, the leader of the Netherlands far-right Freedom Party - a powerful force in Dutch politics - has called for a 'Nexit'.
5. *Corriere della Sera* June 11 2016.
6. See *La Repubblica* June 9 2016 for detailed figures. This article was written by the respected political scientist, Ilvo Diamanti, one of the greatest academic authorities on the Lega Nord, about which he was first to write a serious monograph.
7. Whilst perhaps the ageing Beppe Grillo - a mere youngster compared with Silvio Berlusconi - is tiring of front-line politics more quickly than Forza Italia's leader, the principal reason for needing another candidate for premier is that Grillo's manslaughter conviction for careless driving (killing two passengers in his car) bars him from such high office.
8. See my review of the timely and illuminating book edited by Fred Leplat, *The far right in Europe: 'Populism, nationalism and racism'* *Weekly Worker* April 21 2016.
9. These damning instances of hostility towards gypsies and immigrants by leading members of M5S are reported by Annalisa Cuzzocrea in *La Repubblica* (June 9 2016).
10. See, for example, *The Observer* June 12 2016.
11. Raggi was elected to the Roman city council in 2013. Details taken from *Corriere della Sera* June 12 2016.
12. *Corriere della Sera* June 11 2016.



Beppe Grillo: by his friends ...

REVIEW

Principles of syndicalism

Lewis H Mates **The great labour unrest: rank and file movements and political change in the Durham coalfield** Manchester University Press, 2016, pp328, £75

The period of the “great labour unrest” in the title of this book was between 1910 and 1914 - a period when conflicting ideologies and organisational forms of struggle compete and overlap. This particular work focuses on what was perhaps syndicalism’s finest hour - certainly its most influential period in its challenge to parliamentary reformism and constitutional socialism.

At this time there was an ideological scrum when liberalism - within which the working class in general and the northern miners in particular had roots - and the newly emergent forms of independent labourism and the Labour Party itself were locked in combat with dynamic industrial unionism and revolutionary syndicalism.

Lewis Mates is a tutor in politics at Durham University with a deep interest and involvement with the Durham miners both as an historical subject and an ongoing working class social phenomenon. I regard him as a fellow Tyneside anarcho-syndicalist - our fields of research and political presentations often overlap and complement each other.

As a politics lecturer the author must first establish the veracity of class-struggle perspectives to gain any headway in the prevailing winds of academic iconoclasm, which everywhere now challenge class analysis. For people like myself, born into a world in which one’s entire perspective and everything in society is premised and structured on class struggle, class identity, class history, the very notion that the existence of class can be challenged or debunked is mind-blowing. Yet we cannot simply argue it is, because it is - as though this was some form of deistic belief.

So the first chapters of the book are forced to review the various other theories of conflict in this period in a search for something other than class that motivates action and outlook, which the Marxists have overlooked. In addition to ceaseless academic searches for alternatives to class analysis there are the conflicts *within* socialist class analysis of what the movements meant, how they were motivated and directed. Anarcho-syndicalist, Leninist or social democratic - all are capable of accentuating their own particular positives, while minimising the opposing negatives.

Of necessity the book makes central reference to the Durham Miners Association (DMA) - that giant, powerful bloc of the mining proletariat - and the struggle to control it: struggles based around democratic control, branch autonomy, centralising bureaucracies and the dominant political hegemony within it.

The book demonstrates the divisions of underground labour and their strategic and sometimes conflicting aims and strengths. In the process it exposes the unique and long-standing areas of job control, jealously guarded from management and owners. It also reveals the conflicting social and cultural traditions, which sometimes weighed against more revolutionary conclusions - such as Methodism and the deeply entrenched allegiance to radical liberalism, which was to fight the emergent independent labour organisations for every foot of ground.

Eight-hour day

The question of northern miners and the eight-hour day is one which has baffled labour historians, and particularly left ones, for some time.

Indeed, myself and Lewis have argued over this question since he took up this field of research. It is an issue which prevented the Durham and Northumberland miners affiliating to the Miners Federation of Great Britain - the northern miners by and large already worked *less* than an eight-hour day, in addition to those who would soon be working fewer hours as they graduated to full-time face work.

But it was not simply the danger of longer hours which mitigated against affiliation to the MFGB. Linked to such questions were the dangerous inroads into those ancient areas of job control spoken of earlier. The northern miners’ short hewing shift usually occurred once - at some pits twice - a day, which kept a tight grip on the amount of coal being produced, and stopped the market being flooded, thus lowering the value of their wages. The eight-hour day demanded a three- and sometimes four-shift cycle. The coal may have belonged to the owners, but control of the hewing space, and who occupied it, belonged to the miners. The cavil system stopped management choosing who worked where - the union decided allocating work by lottery. In fact the legislation for an eight-hour day threw all of this custom and practice, this self-selection and control, into the air. It opened the floodgates to unlimited coaling shifts. Importantly too, surface workers, who worked the longest hours, would gain nothing from the act of parliament.

Lewis seems to learn in the process of exposition and changes his position, as different factors are revealed. At first he seems to suggest that the eight-hour day is the progressive flavour of the month, which the left and the Independent Labour Party take up as their *cause célèbre* - along with affiliation to the MFGB, which effectively made the eight-hour day a condition. But it is clear it is bitterly opposed by the rank and file and by men who were to the left of the ILP - particularly the syndicalist and industrial unionist supporters. Subsequently, however, Lewis does make clear the reason for the groundswell of opposition, and the left and progressive credentials of some of those doing the opposing.

Of course, the MFGB as a national organisation could and should have approached the issue by ring-fencing those regions with terms and conditions in advance of the eight-hour demand, but its rationale was that of the lowest common denominator - rounding both up and down in terms of hours.

The advanced job controls held in the northern coalfields were not enjoyed elsewhere, and it was these which ought to have been the standard. Amongst the ILP activists in the coalfield arguing for the MFGB and its eight-hour policy, there seems to have been some naivety as to what it would mean in practice - they appear to have believed that safeguards for existing northern conditions would be negotiated. On p87 Lewis expresses his surprise that leading socialists in the coalfields campaigned against the eight-hour legislation and urged all Labour representatives in parliament to oppose it, but by p121 he concludes:

The eight-hour imbroglio had profound outcomes for the DMA’s leadership. Their standing was undoubtedly damaged by the agreement, particularly their failure

to take the issue to DMA council before signing, and their subsequent inability, first to appreciate, then to mitigate any of its damaging consequences.

The book indicates in great detail how the issue of the eight-hour agreement caused widespread industrial strife, which raged through the coalfield for years and was never really resolved.

Lewis comments:

Significant though the 1910 Durham and South Wales disputes were, they came too early for syndicalism in Durham to capitalise on greatly. The eight hours agreement strikes ended some months before the Cambrian combine strike began and before Mann’s *Industrial Syndicalist* had been launched ... More generally there seems to have been no relationship between the lodge revolt against the owners and their own agents and explicit syndicalist ideas (p136).

Real syndicalism

I would need to take issue with this line of reasoning. Syndicalism was not invented with the term itself, any more than anarchism was invented when someone chose to adopt that title for their political outlook. Similarly, ‘communist’ was invented neither by Karl Marx by giving analysis and context nor by people consciously identifying with that particular term. A rose by any other name must surely smell as sweet, and it is the substance of what perspectives and actions workers engaged in which mark their political and tactical direction and strategy, not the title someone later invents.

The revolt of the miners in the 1830s of course predates the title ‘syndicalist’, but the press and owners of the period reported the miners were talking of seizing the pits from the owners, working them in common for themselves - and, what is more, as popular, industrial democratic lodges. That surely *is* syndicalism. The rejection of the pomp and circumstance, the grand rules and bureaucracy of the Durham Miners Association, in favour of rank-and-file direct action organised through democratic miners’ lodges (or sometimes even without formal lodge sanction), the rejection of the courts and labour laws - these were surely features of the age-old miners’ direct democracy and rejection in action of more constitutional or parliamentary routes: syndicalist in everything but formal title. The radical unions and rank-and-file workers’ organisations which sided with Bakunin in the first international were *de facto* syndicalist formations. The Levellers practised a form of agricultural ‘syndicalism’. These perceptions predate the invention of formal organisational and programmatic labelling.

I appreciate, of course, that Lewis is talking here of formal, self-identified ‘syndicalism’ as a conscious political current and alternative to other strands of the workers’ movement, rather than the *de facto* form I am referring to. But the tendency to look for form (or self-declared ‘leaders’) rather than essence manifests itself again with the Durham miners’ mass rejection of the settlement and vote to continue strike action. Lewis asks how influential was ‘syndicalism’ in terms of this mood

of militancy and looks to the militant lodges which returned the highest votes. Many of these were the home base of the significant syndicalist activists of the region. Chopwell, Will Lawther’s militant lodge, returned, for example, a 95% vote for ongoing action. Lewis discounts this though, as Lawther was studying in London by then. The lodge led by George Harvey (who was an industrial unionist in contradistinction to “a syndicalist”), Handon Hold, returned a 78.3% majority, while South Pelaw, where a Socialist Labour Party caucus operated, registered 94.8%.

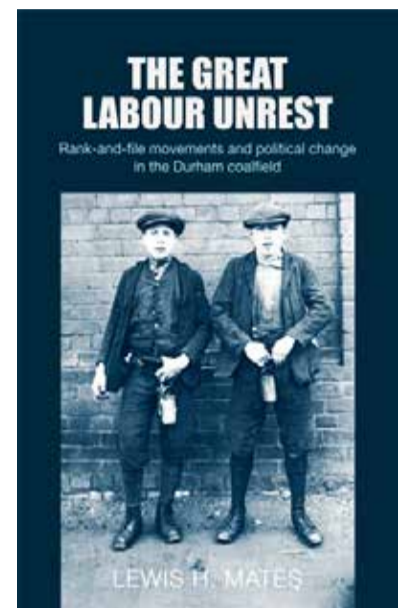
Lewis concludes that there is no easily discernible relationship between syndicalism as such and the militant support for continuing the strike, but I tend to see the question the other way round. It was not Lawther who had swung Chopwell behind syndicalist ideas, or Harvey who did something similar at Handon Hold, but the militant, class-combative culture of those lodges which influenced the leaders toward syndicalism and industrial unionism. The ideas of formal syndicalism would not have come as a novel suggestion to the rank-and-file miners of these lodges, who had advocated for generations just such perceptions, conclusions and methods of struggle.

Lewis actually unconsciously makes this point himself later in the book, when discussing the election at Follonsby lodge of George Harvey to the prestigious post of checkweighman, a position he had applied for on an explicitly revolutionary platform. Concluding in his letter that he was “strongly opposed to the kind of men we have so long kept at Durham and whom we in our ignorance believe are tin gods”, he declared: “If you want a gentle Jesus or temperance preacher, for God’s sake don’t consider me as likely to suit” (pp230-31). Lewis notes that his election was quite an achievement. Harvey had no experience as a lodge official, and was standing in opposition to the political and union outlooks of the current DMA leadership against conciliation. Lewis concludes that the vote was an obvious endorsement of his politics and stance. But this demonstrates that Follonsby’s political culture (and that of the older Wardley, to which it was connected) was *de facto* syndicalist and industrial unionist, *predating* the formal foundation of those political currents.

Excels

Where this book excels is in the detailed description of the struggle for the minimum wage, and the campaign in Durham to secure support for the demand, and for a national strike. It is truly ground-breaking in describing the complex arguments about who should be able to claim it, and at what level it should start. It follows the controversy over the exclusion of the lowest paid men from the agreement, thus crippling the demand from the start.

Lewis’s coverage of the vote which brought about the largest ever strike for a single industry in the world - with over one million miners downing tools and stopping not only the coalfields, but much else through knock-on effects - is also excellent. He is able to trace the attitudes of the Durham lodges, along with the changing national and county responses, as the government steps in to pre-empt collective bargaining by bringing in the Eight Hours Act. The act specified no details concerning



grades or sums of money, which meant that everything was referred back to district bargaining, thus negating the main purpose of the strike: to win a national common pay structure.

The MFGB then conducted a second national ballot on whether to defy parliament and the law in order to force through the original demands and Lewis masterfully traces the various reactions to the new ballot. As far as I know, no other work has remotely looked at this period in such minute and fascinating detail. As it turned out, the Durham miners voted by a two-thirds majority to reject the parliamentary ‘solution’ and continue the strike. Nationally, however, the MFGB achieved 54.8% in favour, short of the two thirds it required.

Lewis sees the “high tide” of syndicalism in Durham as starting in the autumn of 1912, with the founding of the Durham Unofficial Reform Movement and the Miners Next Step Committee. Contrasting the relative failure of both wings of syndicalism to make any lasting gains, or win influence within the union structure, along with that of the young militants of the ILP, he cites the emergence of their Durham Forward Movement in April 1912. This organised parallel Durham miners ‘council meetings’ with more than half of the whole county’s lodges represented, discussing issues, tactics and constitutional changes. This was to impact heavily over the coming years within the political and cultural nature of the DMA.

Lewis believes that the ILP militants in fact stole the syndicalists’ clothes, adopting their rhetoric, slogans and postures, but they also had an extra string to their bow in the form of party and electoral strategies. The whole minimum wage issue, for example, was ultimately being fought out in parliament. The ILP also had a plan to take over structures and positions within the DMA itself, a course of action which anarcho-syndicalist principles precluded (although the industrial unionists softened their opposition to such a course and George Harvey, for example, did run).

This is a masterly work of scholarship, passionately researched and referenced, which addresses a key moment in the history of the miners in general, and in particular the mighty institution of the Durham Miners Association. Not for the last time would the mood of the generally conservative DMA set the pace and swing the tide for national action ●

David Douglass

REVIEW

Curious delay and publication switch

Victor Serge and Natalia Sedova Trotsky *The life and death of Leon Trotsky* Haymarket Books, 2016, pp396, £12.99

The *life and death of Leon Trotsky* was originally published in 1946 and the first English publication had to wait until 1975. But now it is back in print, thanks to Haymarket Books. But it was supposed to have been published by *New York Review of Books*. (Thanks to the *NYRB*, I started reading Serge's novels again, as well as his *Memoirs of a revolutionary*.) Midway through last year, *NYRB* flagged the upcoming *Life and death*, so I put in my order - only to find that publication was delayed. And when it finally came out, the publisher had switched to Haymarket Books.

Haymarket is a self-described non-profit book publisher and distributor. It is a project of the Chicago-based Center for Economic Research and Social Change, known for publishing 'provocative books' from the left end of the political spectrum. Founding editors Anthony Armove and Julie Fain previously worked on the *International Socialist Review*.

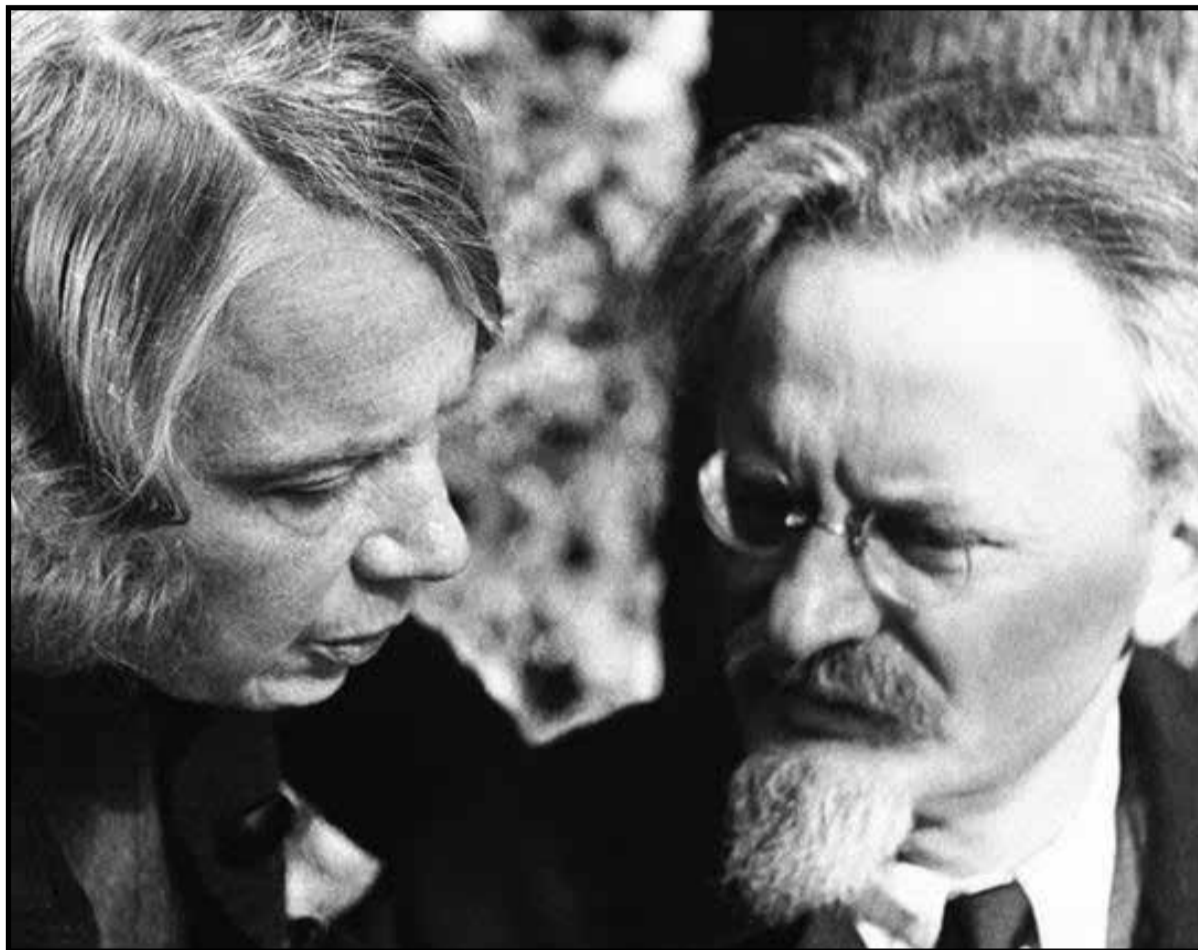
The fact that the editors worked on the *ISR* suggests that Haymarket is a project of a group of intellectuals who harbour anarcho-sindicalist sympathies: viz, the remnants of the old International Socialist activist tendency. This goes hand in hand with a state-capitalist position as to the class nature of the Soviet Union: the Bolshevik regime never broke with capitalism; therefore the Workers' Opposition was right, and so on.

Not happy with just republishing Serge and Sedova's attempt to write the first biography of Trotsky, Haymarket Books have also included an unpublished article by Serge, written in 1940, in response to Trotsky's 1938 *Their morals and ours*. This appears as appendix B, while appendix A, on the other hand, is a eulogy of Trotsky by Serge, first published by *Partisan Review* in 1943. The two are completely antithetical. The previously unpublished article is a damning attack on Trotsky, which is deeply flawed, as we shall see. I can only conclude that the publishers chose to do this in order to push their own agenda. Whilst they are free to do so, this is a scurrilous way to do it, not least because it does a disservice to both Trotsky and Serge.

I refuse to make wild accusations about individuals. Therefore I shall confine myself to the facts as much as I can. But I assume there must have been a dispute between *NYRB* and Haymarket Books over things like the foreword and afterword to Serge's and Sedova's book: ie, how should it be contextualised? Perhaps the *NYRB* disagreed with the initial proposal. Was this anything to do with the Marxist-humanist, Richard Greeman, its go-to man in relation to the publication of Serge's works? I do not know. But it is he who provides the contextualisation.

Contextualisation

Of course, the question of contextualisation is unavoidable, given the disagreement which emerged between Serge and Trotsky in 1937-40. In his 'afterword', Greeman reminds us that this boiled down to two main issues: firstly, Trotsky's responsibility for suppressing the Kronstadt rebellion in 1921 and, in relation to this, "the creation of the Cheka secret police with its inquisitorial methods"; secondly, Trotsky's attack on the role of the POUM (Workers Party of Marxist Unification) in Spain during the civil war, which he regarded as reformist.



Natalia Sedova and Leon Trotsky

Should one remain neutral about these questions (as if this were possible) or should one come down on the side of Serge? Greeman or anyone else from the Haymarket editorial board have a right to come down on Serge's side, if they want to. But they should have made the case themselves, as well as defer to Serge's published work, for which there is ample material (eg, his *Memoirs of a revolutionary*). Instead they chose to publish his private response to Trotsky's *Their morals and ours*, despite the fact that, in the end, Serge decided not to publish this; which is not surprising.

He starts out by saying of *Their morals and ours*:

The tone of the book, the domineering role of Bolshevik speech of the great years, along with its echoes of the imperious and uncompromising style of Karl Marx, the polemicist, ... is essentially one of intolerance, [because it] implies the claim to the monopoly of the truth (p295).

Wearing his new hat, Greeman tries to be even-handed. On the one side, he points out that, on the 10th anniversary of the revolution, Trotsky talked about "the need to democratise the party and industrialise the country". On the other, he refers to the moment in 1939 when Trotsky's "collaboration with Serge exploded" into an "ad hominem" attack, although this was based on a misunderstanding. The 'old man' was referring to an article that he "had not bothered to read" and that he "erroneously attributed to Serge":

Trotsky castigated Serge in a sarcastic polemical article entitled 'Moralists and sycophants against Marxism'. In it, Trotsky called Serge a "disappointed bourgeois intellectual who writes poems about revolution, but is incapable of understanding it" (p285).

Strong stuff!

In his previously unpublished article Serge reminds us that "psychology exists", which can alter our subjective standpoint, *vis-à-vis* objective reality. This is true, although it is often overlooked by Marxists themselves. It is a pity Serge was not mindful of this fact himself when he joined in a public attack on Trotsky over Kronstadt. This took place just when the latter was girding himself up to defend his old Bolshevik comrades, who were about to be executed - on the basis of forced confessions - at the infamous Moscow trials (or they already had been).¹

Likewise Greeman should have pointed out Trotsky's overall situation here. He had seen his whole family wiped out by Stalin's assassins and, as someone in exile, he knew he was living on borrowed time: ie, once he had served his purpose (as the alleged leader of the 'conspirators' against Stalin), then an assassin would come for him. Apart from Trotsky's ordeal, Serge himself had not long escaped from the gulag and a GPU (State Political Directorate) death squad. Both men were fighting a losing battle against the counterrevolution. But it was only later that Serge realised they were living through "the midnight of the century". Neither were immune to such psychological factors, which are, by their very nature, destabilising in terms of any individual's ability to maintain an equilibrium between heart and mind.

Greeman fails to remain neutral regarding Trotsky's theory and practice. In a section on 'Serge and Natalia Sedova', he goes out of his way to point up Sedova's growing differences with the Fourth International, which concerned the class nature of the Soviet Union, and led to her ultimate break with the organisation in 1951. Apparently she erred on the side of the state capitalist argument. Grist for Haymarket Book's mill, whatever Greeman's intentions!

But Serge plays a 'straight bat' as

regards his old friend and comrade. On the one hand, he defers to Trotsky's own works: eg, his *History of the Russian Revolution, My life, The new course, The revolution betrayed - even Their morals and ours!* On the other hand, of course, there is the restraining hand of Trotsky's widow, Sedova. Her own contributions are attributed in single quotes. So there is no need to defer at length to the text itself (at least for the time being).

But why did Haymarket Books want to get their hands on the publishing rights of the Serge/Sedova biography? Without being in possession of the facts, I can only say that somehow they were in a position to use Serge's articles on Trotsky - in particular the unpublished one of 1940, which is so critical of the "old man" - in order to counterbalance the Serge/Sedova biography: ie, in a book which they could publish under their own steam. It fits into the group's contradictory agenda (it has always been contradictory). On the one hand, they sentimentalise Trotsky's role as a great revolutionary; on the other, they adhere to the - by now - thoroughly discredited state-capitalist argument on the class nature of the Soviet Union. In a word, the position of the editors of Haymarket Books is fundamentally anti-Trotskyist!

Serge's article

As I have said, Serge's previously unpublished article should not have been published without criticism. Therefore I am obliged to comment on it. In the article he tries to generalise from what he sees as a basic "error" in Trotsky's *Their morals and ours*, in order to explain why he got things "wrong" over Spain *vis-à-vis* the role of the POUM. By so doing, Serge raises some important questions, such as, is it enough just to say that the end justifies the means? How does the subject change the object in the real world? These questions are also relevant to today's debates: eg, on the question of how small revolutionary groups relate to things much bigger

than themselves - like Corbynism or the EU referendum, etc. Opportunism is not the answer. The left is split and weakened as a result of getting these questions wrong.

Serge bases his defence of the POUM against the charge of reformism by pointing out that Trotsky and the Left Opposition were guilty of the same offence: ie, in 1930-31 they were slow to condemn the Thermidor in Russia; in particular the first faked trials and false confessions, such as the case of the technicians in the 'Industrial Party Affair'; the affair of the 'Menshevik Centre', as well as the execution without trial of 48 alleged saboteurs involved in meat supply. At that stage, western socialists too were unable to understand the "mystery of confessions on demand". Instead they used the same argument as Stalin's inquisitors of 1928, who, as Serge reminds us, told the accused:

subjectively you are convinced revolutionaries. But objectively, by discrediting the leader of the party, you are playing the game of the class enemy, of fascism ... Years later I was saddened to see Leon Trotsky, who knew better than anyone Andres Nin's devotion to the working class, denounce him as a traitor (objectively, alas), only to posthumously recognise his revolutionary probity (subjective, no doubt) ...

[This is] disdain for the psychological fact, disdain of the moral fact, which is also an objective reality of primary importance. [It is] contempt for different convictions, ... exaggerated judgements, unjust and hence as clumsy politically as they are to revolutionary morality (p297).

Yet in the Serge/Sedova biography, with regard to the events in Barcelona in 1937, Serge - still with his straight bat - attacks the POUM for being in the reformist government, because one of its leaders, Largo Caballero, had refused to outlaw it as a revolutionary party. But, once he was removed, "the POUM was crushed and the Spanish Republic, with its back to the wall, was at once hideously defiled by a string of crimes" (p223).

But in his 1940 article, Serge commits the same error as Trotsky and the Left Opposition in 1930-31 (which echoed that of Stalin's inquisitors), in order to justify the POUM's strategy and tactics during the Spanish Civil War: ie, "subjectively" they saw themselves as "convinced revolutionaries". But "objectively", as a result of a reformist strategy and tactics, "they were playing the game of the class enemy, of fascism".

Serge should have learnt the lesson, which Trotsky later did, regarding the "mystery of confessions on demand". Therefore, with the benefit of hindsight, in *Their morals and ours*, on the question of means/ends, he argues:

the use of any means, which by itself may be morally indifferent, must be justified or condemned according to the nature of the end it serves. To fire a shot is morally indifferent; to shoot a mad dog threatening a child is a good deed; to shoot to murder is a crime ...

All means are permissible which genuinely lead to mankind's

What we fight for

emancipation; but such is the dialectic of ends and means that certain means cannot lead to that end.²

The means/end argument is the same, whether we are talking about show trials and executions or how revolutionaries should relate to reformism and bourgeois initiatives that affect the working class. It is a question of ends. Of course, as Lassalle points out, there is always a danger of losing one's way:

Show not only the goal; show also the road.
So inseparably grow goal and road into each other.
That the one always changes with the other;
Another road brings another goal into being.³

To return to Serge's article, he goes on to point out how much harder things got for revolutionaries in the 1930s. In the face of the twin repressive collectivities (Stalinism and fascism), the gap between subject (revolutionaries) and object (reformist/Stalinised parties, etc) just got bigger. But this leads him to a defence of reformism and the role of the POUM. It also reveals a lapse into subjective idealism, thanks to the betrayals of German Social Democracy and, he argues, in particular,

Noske's order to kill Karl and Rosa and along with them 15,000 revolutionary proletarians, "Stalinism has succeeded in killing the Russian Revolution"; in 1919-20 the Italian socialists renounced the seizure of power for fear of a blockade ... the Austrian socialists were much less responsible, for they were placed in an extremely disadvantageous historical and geographic situation and fought when it was too late, when all they could do was save their honour - I mean their dignity as the vanquished, which still counts (p299).

But maybe the German uprising in 1918 was also a mistake (compare the Austrian socialists); German Social Democracy's betrayal in 1914 was by far the greater; because it led to the defeat of 1918, wherein the German masses, despite the slaughter in the trenches, failed to rise up in support of the Spartacists. This is the real tragedy. Serge continues:

But in extenuation of the Spanish socialists it must be said that the decisive element in all this is Stalinist intervention. They knew to take up arms in Asturias in 1934, showing that they had learned the lesson of Germany. Largo Cabellero considered forming a worker-union government, [but] the pressure of the Soviet ambassador, Rosenberg, ... dissuaded him ...

... working class reformism seems to me to be too grand a thing to be subject to summary judgements and even less to vehement condemnations in the form of insults ... since the vertical fall of Stalinism into falsehood and blood the old reformist socialism has demonstrated moral stability far greater than that of the communist parties, and that the socialist spirit of the masses has taken refuge there. *It maintains its traditions and effectiveness everywhere* ... (my emphasis, p 299).

But in the next sentence he says: "In Germany we saw that a million unemployed vote alternatively for communists and Nazis; in Sarre and in Austria communist functionaries

went over to Nazism!"

Serge ignores Trotsky's analysis of fascism (in his *Struggle against fascism in Germany*), which must have been available to him. Thus he fails to understand Trotsky's point, that the leaders of German Social Democracy or the Spanish socialists "are only distinguishable from the GPU by the fact that for the moment they are not spilling blood" (p300).

How could Serge forget what really happened in Germany? Consider the Comintern's crazy, sectarian left turn, which meant that the Communist Party of Germany eschewed a united front from below - even though this was essential to unite the German working class, to arm it, as well as form alternative organs of power. The reformist Social Democratic leaders had to be isolated and cast into the dustbin of history. That was the only way to defeat fascism in Germany, and it could have been done. Instead, by 1933, once again the reformists found themselves stuck in the Reichstag. Only this time, they did not vote for war credits; rather they were hapless witnesses to their own demise! Fascism came to power via the ballot box and then abolished it! Here Trotsky has every right to be angry and vehemently sarcastic!

Two Serges

A bit further on, Serge returns to the role of the POUM. Its leader, Andrés Nin, refused to follow Trotsky and the Fourth International's strategy, based on a clear revolutionary programme and independent organisation, opting instead to enter the Socialist Party and joining the Popular Front, which was dominated by the Stalinist Comintern.

This led to a breach, with the POUM accusing the FI of 'sabotaging the Spanish Revolution'. Serge acknowledges that Trotsky was right, but then excuses the POUM by adding that Trotsky failed to understand the objective situation: the fact that the majority of the Spanish working class were imbued with the ideas of anarcho-syndicalism and therefore did not understand the difference between Stalinism and Bolshevism. They showed a "lack of historical understanding and method"; but they were an example *par excellence* of "moderation in polemics, loyalty in organisational methods, absolute devotion to combat". Moreover, argues Serge, the POUM did much to repair the damage caused by the way in which the Bolsheviks had treated the anarchists during their own civil war.

Once again, he relates this to moral questions, which stand alongside that of the class struggle itself - concretely Trotsky's responsibility for the suppression of Kronstadt and the role of the Cheka. But this completely contradicts Trotsky's own position, with which Serge concurs in the Serge/Sedova biography. This is, of course, consistent with what Trotsky says in *Their morals and ours*:

I am ready to admit that civil war is not a school for humane behaviour. Idealists and pacifists have always blamed revolution for excesses. [But these] spring from the very nature of revolution, which is itself an excess of history.⁴

However, in the Serge/Sedova biography, following Trotsky, he places Kronstadt in its proper context. It was the arsenal of the Baltic Fleet, crucial to the defence of Petrograd. The naval base was no longer a hothouse for revolutionary ideas. The rebellion itself was incited by a new layer of anarchists and left Social Revolutionaries, who were able to exploit the situation. Food shortages and rationing led to the demand for new elections to the Soviets and for "soviets without Bolsheviks".

Elsewhere the revolution was threatened by Makhno's bands in the Ukraine. South of Moscow a Social Revolutionary army of 50,000 was shooting communists and calling for elections for a new constituent assembly. Once it rejected Trotsky's overtures for negotiations, Kronstadt had to be suppressed quickly before the winter thaw set in. Otherwise a rebel fleet could sail in and capture the fortress, opening the door of reaction to the Whites. Wherever the Whites had triumphed, they installed a military dictatorship which "had visited bloody vengeance on the poor" (p107).

But in his 1940 article, Serge's idealist humanism gets the better of him. Once again, he turns to the question of the Cheka. Not only does he take this out of context; he separates the moral question from the struggle to defend the revolution:

[Is] it possible to consider founding a republic of free workers by establishing the Cheka - I mean an extraordinary commission judging in secret based on case files, outside of any control than that of the government, [the] accused it doesn't see, who have no right to defence and can be executed in the shadows? (p304).

Compare this to the Serge /Sedova biography:

The red terror was still mild compared with the White terror in Finland ... Dzerzhinsky, the president of the Cheka, did his best to discipline the local commissions, many of which had been infiltrated by sadists and criminals. He frequently telephoned Trotsky to discuss the fate of suspect officers (p91).

The Serge of 1940 omits Trotsky's key point in *Their morals and ours*: "All means are permissible which genuinely lead to mankind's emancipation; but such is the dialectic of ends and means that certain means cannot lead to that end."

As for the Cheka, here Serge is on firmer ground. Yet, even in his *Memoirs*, which is critical of the Bolsheviks, Serge is still mindful of the actual situation:

[The] formation of the Cheka was one of the gravest and most impermissible errors that the Bolshevik leaders committed in 1918, when plots, blockades and interventions made them lose their heads ... [But] was it necessary to revert to the procedures of the Inquisition? [By 1919 the local Chekas had been infiltrated by men who were perverted and corrupt.] ...

I know for a fact that Dzerzhinsky judged them to be "half-rotten" and saw no solution to the evil except shooting the worst Chekists and abolishing the death penalty as soon as possible ... Meanwhile the terror went on, since the whole party was living in the sure inner knowledge that they would be massacred in the event of defeat, and defeat remained possible from one week to the next.⁵

Serge is right about one thing: communists must learn from history. In a future revolution there will be no excuse for the methods of the Inquisition.

In 1940, when he wrote his attack on Trotsky's *Their morals and ours*, Serge was still in denial *vis-à-vis* the fact that the tide of history had turned against the world revolution at least 15 years before. He refers to the defeat of Trotsky and the Left Opposition between 1923 and 1928, as well as to 1936, when Stalin and

the bureaucracy were able to "use the gears of power that were forged before their arrival in power" to start massacring the old Bolsheviks; then to falsify this by means of "legal ideas"; so that the dictatorship of the proletariat had become synonymous with the bureaucracy's "bloody dictatorship over the proletariat". As a consequence, given their small size, neither the POUM nor Trotsky's Fourth International - regardless of who was right about the means/end argument - were able to counteract Stalinism's betrayal of the Spanish revolution. Once again, that is the real tragedy.

One final word on Serge's unpublished article. He concludes this by saying that the revolution has a double duty:

to simultaneously... stand firm against the principal enemy, and defend the movement against its own maladies, against the polluting of organisations, against dumbing down, against petty interests, our own errors, our own failings ... Bolshevism, despite its unity of thought and discipline, was always prey to contradictory tendencies. While some of them opened the way to history's most beautiful futures, others clearly led to its destruction (p306).

No-one would quarrel with that! But I disagree with his following sentence: "It must be said: the seeds of death [Bolshevism] bore within itself were always visible." Wrong analogy! What he should have said is that the seeds will wither and become deformed, if they are left to grow in poor soil. That is more consistent with historical and dialectical materialism.

Human

I am a deep admirer of Serge as a man, who evolved from anarcho-syndicalism to Bolshevism, before moving to his final position as a Marxist-humanist. (Rather a Marxist-humanist than a Stalinist or a reformist! What about a humanist-Marxist?) I applaud his principles, his courage and his ability to withstand extreme suffering and the threat of death, his revolutionary optimism - not to forget his undoubted literary talent, so clearly evident in his brilliant political novels: eg, *The case of comrade Tulayev* and *Midnight of the century*. But at the end of the day I have to be critical, because his idealist tendencies got the better of him. Thus he ends up defending reformism, because the subject is unable to change the object (compare Lassalle's poem!).

On balance, I am not surprised that Serge - after sober reflection - decided not to publish his attack on *Their morals and ours*. It is possible that he himself realised just how bad it was. He had succumbed to the very psychology that he accused Trotsky of, which leads to subjective idealism. Therefore he was only too happy when, a year or so later, Sedova sent him those warm greetings, which led to their collaboration in writing *The life and death of Leon Trotsky*. It gave him a chance to come to his senses and write something which he would not be ashamed to see in print.

That is why the decision of Haymarket Books to publish Serge's attack on Trotsky's *Their morals and ours* without criticism is reprehensible and shows the poverty of its particular brand of Marxism ●

Rex Dunn
rex.dunn@rexdunn.co.uk

Notes

1. Deutscher *The prophet outcast* London 2003, p353.
2. *Ibid* pp354-55.
3. Quoted in *ibid* p356.
4. *Ibid* p354.
5. V Serge *Memoirs of a revolutionary* New York 2012, p 94.

■ 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.

weekly worker

**Orchestrated
witch-hunt must
be resisted, not
joined**

Blundering ineptitude

There are furious objections to the *Morning Star* giving Ken Livingstone a regular column. Peter Manson reports

Ken Livingstone, of course, is still suspended from the Labour Party as part of the campaign to undermine the Jeremy Corbyn leadership through false accusations of 'anti-Semitism'. As readers will know, Livingstone's crime was to state that Adolf Hitler had supported Zionism "before he went mad and ended up killing six million Jews". This clumsily phrased statement, made off the cuff during a radio interview, was not entirely accurate, but it cannot be described as anti-Semitic by any rational person. The former mayor of London was referring to the cooperation between the Nazis and Zionists in encouraging German Jews to emigrate to Palestine.

Last month Liz Davies and Sue Lukes stated in a *Star* article that Livingstone's remarks were equivalent to "blaming victims for their fate", which they said was "another form of racism" (May 27). How can the claim that Hitler "was supporting Zionism" imply that it was therefore the Jews' own fault that Hitler later slaughtered them in Nazi death camps? This nonsense was published even though the authors had had exactly a month to consider their reaction to Livingstone's remark, made on April 27.

The following day, the *Star* editorial blunderingly attempted to put matters right. "[T]o wade into a row over anti-Semitism and compare Zionists to Nazis was a serious misjudgement and could have been predicted to whip up the storm now battering the Labour Party". Of course, Livingstone was rightly defending those under attack from an orchestrated witch-hunt. That was not a "serious misjudgement", but an elementary principle. If there is a "serious misjudgement", then it is that of *Star* editor Ben Chacko. Moreover, Livingstone did not "compare" Zionists to Nazis in the sense of putting an equals sign between them. Nor did he "whip up the storm now battering the Labour Party." That is indeed an inexcusable case of blaming the victim. However, thankfully the editorial did at least make clear that "Livingstone was attacking the political ideology of Zionism, not Jewish people" (April 28).

Clearly then, the *Morning Star's* initial coverage of the Livingstone incident and his subsequent suspension was confused, to say the least. Regular columnist Solomon Hughes actually dubbed Livingstone's remarks anti-Semitic and I recall a news item that referred to his suspension "for anti-Semitism" (without so much as an 'alleged'). However, both Hughes's original article and that report now seem to have been removed from the *Star* website.

On May 2, another regular columnist, Charley Allan, agreed that Livingstone's remark was not anti-Jewish, but noted: "there are some things you simply can't mention in modern politics". Amongst such "taboo" statements, he said, is "drawing attention to the fact that some Nazis made deals with some German Zionists in the 1930s to move



Ben Chacko: faulty editorialising

Jews to Palestine".

However, in the same issue, Chelley Ryan commented: "If anyone, particularly anyone Jewish, was offended by Ken's comments, I take that seriously, and am glad Jeremy acted swiftly to suspend him." What? She was pleased that Corbyn bowed before the rightwing campaign alleging that Labour is stuffed full of anti-Semites, on the basis that some - unreasonable - people might be "offended"?

And Hughes himself, while moderating his earlier condemnation, nevertheless commented:

Cheap remarks like Ken's look just like the 'Swastika = Star of David' posters: the person holding the poster might think they are pointing to some Israeli hypocrisy, but to the crowd it just looks like they are belittling the holocaust - or, worse, celebrating it.

Calling for a just settlement for Palestinian people is very important, and most emphatically not anti-Semitic. But carelessly talking about "existence" is a very bad idea, when the Nazis really did try and stop Jewish people existing at all. We should be calling for the creation of something better in the Middle East, not for "destruction" (May 6).

Hughes was clearly referring to the "existence" and "destruction" of the state of Israel, not of Jews - in his mind the two are synonymous, it seems.

Reaction

While Hughes is obviously a left

Zionist, how should one describe Mary Davis, a former national chair of the *Star's* Communist Party of Britain? On June 8 the paper published her letter protesting against "the decision to give Ken Livingstone a regular column".

Davis described this as "a very impolitic move ... in view of Livingstone's suspension from the Labour Party and Shami Chakrabarti's inquiry into anti-Semitism" - so she thinks the setting up of an inquiry into an imaginary problem was a good move, does she? Making a pointed reference to the *Star's* "alleged opposition to anti-Semitism" (my emphasis), she claimed the decision "to offer Livingstone this lifeline" was "hugely embarrassing". In other words, Ken deserves to be thrown to the dogs.

After all,

Livingstone has not been a friend of this paper in the past. He and the group supporting him did not support former *Star* editor John Haylett when he was wrongly sacked and furthermore he has a chequered history of making injudicious comments bordering on the anti-Semitic.

Presumably, she was referring to a comment also brought up by another letter-writer, Phil Katz, who stated: "It was wrong to castigate even the most reactionary and crappy reporter as a 'concentration camp guard' just because one thinks he is Jewish" (May 13). Once again I am left puzzled as to why throwing such an insult at someone, however crude

and exaggerated, should be considered "bordering on the anti-Semitic" if that person happens to be Jewish.

Only the likes of comrade Katz know why. He complains: "Until now, the *Star* ... was the only newspaper that never let the anti-racist movement down. Sadly, now there is a column I won't read." He also raises all sorts of failings on Livingstone's part, including that he "supported the illegal Nato intervention in the Balkans and the mass bombing of Serbia".

Yes, that gives strong grounds for criticism, but right now Livingstone is amongst those targeted by the rightwing witch-hunt and in such circumstances the *Star* decision to make its opposition to that absolutely clear by offering him a column should be applauded. As John Haylett himself wrote in a letter published on June 9, "We have to be aware that the current furore about anti-Semitism in the Labour Party has been largely confected as a device to undermine Jeremy Corbyn and demean his record of supporting Palestinian national rights."

Absolutely correct - instead of sanctioning the inquiry, Corbyn should have insisted that the allegations against Livingstone, not to mention Naz Shah, Jackie Walker, Tony Greenstein *et al*, were blatantly false.

While a subsequent letter - from Brian Precious - calls the *Star* decision "typically brave and principled" and asks, "Are those sections of the media pointing the finger at Ken the same ones who ridiculed the way the Greater London Council bent over backwards to challenge racism under Ken Livingstone's leadership?" (May 15), comrade Haylett concludes his own letter by stating: "Having, as political editor, discussed the issue with our editor, Ben Chacko, I support his decision to give Ken a regular column."

What he means is that the old hand has helped to put his young and inexperienced successor on the straight and narrow - "Make sure that from now on the paper comes over clearly and consistently against the witch-hunt, Ben, and show everyone what we think of the allegations against Ken."

And CPB general secretary Rob Griffiths has made his own position clear by circulating on Facebook a statement from the Jewish Socialists Group, which reads in part:

Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism are not the same. Zionism is a political ideology which has always been contested within Jewish life since it emerged in 1897, and it is entirely legitimate for non-Jews as well as Jews to express opinions about it, whether positive or negative. Not all Jews are Zionists. Not all Zionists are Jews.

Accusations of anti-Semitism are currently being weaponised to attack the Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour party with claims that Labour has a "problem" of anti-Semitism....

We stand against anti-Semitism, against racism and fascism and in support of refugees. We stand for free speech and open debate on Israel, Palestine and Zionism.¹

Despite this, the *Star's* coverage of Ken Livingstone's suspension has been confused and inconsistent. And unfortunately its position on imperialist intervention on Syria is equally stupid, weak and blundering. Last week a *Morning Star* editorial, headed 'Tide turning against Isis', said this:

Only after Moscow directed the Russian airforce to back the Syrian government last year ... did the US government authorise similar attacks. *As welcome as US aerial involvement has been*, especially in support of [the Kurdish-led Syria Democratic Forces] along the Turkish border, Washington's hostility to president Bashar al-Assad still trumps its desire to see Isis and the al Qa'eda-affiliated Nusra Front defeated" (my emphasis, June 7).

Perhaps the *Morning Star's* editor is retrospectively siding with Hilary Benn, not Jeremy Corbyn, over support for the RAF joining US airstrikes in Syria.

Nowadays strange things are happening at William Rust House, London E3 ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/news/item/statement-on-labours-problem-with-antisemitism-from-the-jewish-socialists-g.

Subscribe			
	6m	1yr	Inst.
UK	£30/€35	£60/€70	£200/€220
Europe	£43/€50	£86/€100	£240/€264
Rest of world	£65/€75	£130/€150	£480/€528

New UK subscribers offer: 3 months for £10

UK subscribers: Pay by standing order and save £12 a year. Minimum £12 every 3 months... but please pay more if you can.

Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' at:
Weekly Worker, BCM Box 928,
London WC1N 3XX

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel: _____

Email: _____

Sub: £/€ _____

Donation: £/€ _____

Standing order

To _____ Bank plc _____

Branch address _____

Post code _____ Account name _____

Sort code _____ Account No _____

Please pay to Weekly Worker, Lloyds A/C No 00744310 sort code 30-99-64, the sum of _____ every month*/3 months* until further notice, commencing on _____ This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete)

Date _____

Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____

Address _____