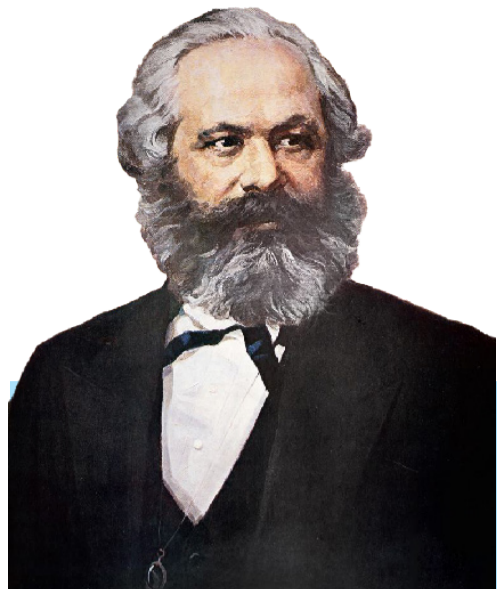


A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



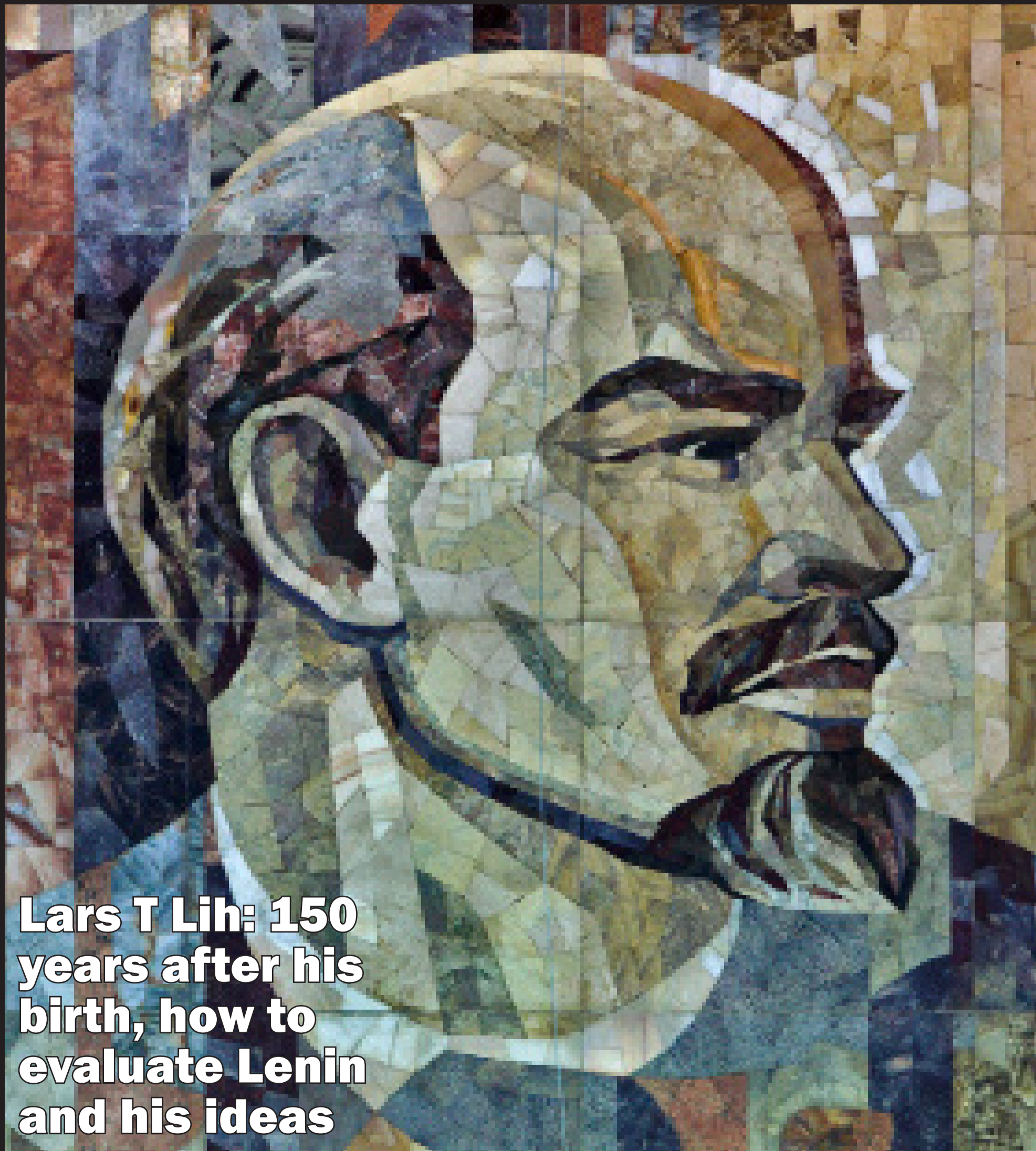
Without a comprehensive programme there is no road map to socialism and beyond

- Letters and debate
- Abbott & Ribeiro-Addy
- STWC ceasefire
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Lars T Lih: 150 years after his birth, how to evaluate Lenin and his ideas

LETTERS



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

Compliment

No sport, nothing on television; what else to do on a Sunday afternoon in self-isolation but write a letter to the *Weekly Worker*?

In his supercilious review of the left press's response to the Lenin anniversary - in which he argues everyone's out of step but us - Mike Macnair dismisses Tony Cliff's four-volume *Lenin: building the party* with a joke from John Sullivan - Cliff's work was "like a biography of John the Baptist, written by Jesus Christ" ('Lenin avatars', April 30). True, there are no jokes like the old jokes, and Sullivan was often funny and occasionally perceptive, but I assume Macnair uses this approach because he hasn't actually bothered to read Cliff's book.

A pity. Cliff is certainly open to criticism on a number of points, but there are many valuable insights in his work. For example, of the many who have written on Lenin, Cliff was one of the few who actually had experience of working in illegal conditions (in Palestine).

Macnair commends Nick Chaffey of the Socialist Party for understanding that "programme is fundamentally important", which makes him "massively more advanced" than those influenced by Cliff. Now Cliff is often accused of being obsessed with numbers, but from his own bitter experience in the 1930s and 1940s he understood one simple fact - the best programme in the world is useless if there is nobody to fight for it and put it into practice. Of course, Cliff was interested in real numbers of recruits, unlike the present-day Socialist Workers Party, which thinks claims of numbers are enough to fight its battles. But an organisation which in 30 years has not managed to recruit more than 30 members might feel some self-criticism is in order.

But the real thrust of Sullivan's criticism is that Cliff was always interested in studying the past, not as an academic pursuit, but because it helps to illuminate the present. Now there are huge dangers in this - we can't learn from the past unless we get it right and are honest about it. And maybe Cliff sometimes oversimplified the past to draw lessons for the present. But his basic purpose was surely correct - that is what socialist history is all about.

And Macnair, who also uses history for his own purposes, is not innocent. Thus he praises Comintern's "tactics of intervening in the USPD's debates" with the Zinoviev speech which led to the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) voting for affiliation at Halle. But the debate had no influence on the outcome - most delegates were mandated in advance, so Zinoviev's rhetoric did not affect the vote. The actual process whereby the majority was won was more complex and would repay study.

This may be the result of ignorance. But there is worse. He tells us that in Respect "the SWP ... preferred when canvassing to pretend to be left Labourites". Now I was heavily involved in campaigning for Respect and I never heard any suggestion of such pretence. Unless Macnair can document this claim he would seem to be guilty of fabrication.

Most important of all, Macnair trivialises the central theme in Cliff's work. He tells us Cliff "saw Lenin as a man with a 'nose' for 'turns'", leading to the "SWP's actual practice of tailing whatever moves". As far as I can establish, Cliff never used the "nose"

image - though it was sometimes used by his critics. What Cliff did argue was that a central task of the party was to learn from the class. As he wrote in *Portugal at the crossroads*, "In short they [the party] have to learn from their fellow workers as much as - or more than - they have to teach ... The job of party leadership is to generalise the experience of the party militants and to lead them as they lead their fellow workers ... [The party] has to be the most apt learner, the most sensitive ear and the firmest will."

And it is this central element of Leninism that is studiously neglected by the *Weekly Worker* and its erudite mentor, Lars T Lih. The *Weekly Worker* spends its time lecturing the rest of the left on its failings - it never imagines it has anything to learn. And when I asked Lih at a Historical Materialism conference about learning from the class he failed to reply.

Who invented soviets? Russian workers, who had probably never heard of Lenin, let alone read Kautsky. Lenin - albeit a bit belatedly - understood their importance and incorporated them into his strategy.

After all, unless the role of the party is to learn and generalise from the activity of workers, what becomes of "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves"? - and that really is the "soul of Marxism".

Macnair sneers that Cliff believed, "if it moves, salute it". The International Marxist Group in the 1980s had a neater formulation - they accused the SWP of saying, "If it moves recruit it. If it doesn't move, stick a poster on it." I always took it as a compliment.

Ian Birchall
London

Patriotism

Most comrades will be aware of the bad news that came in last week that the *Jewish News* and the *Jewish Chronicle* have both been saved from terminal collapse: not surprising, given their role in helping to rid the Labour Party of Jeremy Corbyn. They will expect, and be expected, to carry on this sterling work in ridding the party of all socialists - or 'Trots', as they're sometimes called.

Jewish Voice for Labour carried a story, 'Trouble at t'mill', dated Wednesday April 29, about a row between a Tory MP, Richard Halfon, and the Board of Deputies of British Jews. The story draws from items in the above named titles and apparently Halfon has claimed that the BoD has become a "political broadcasting service" for Labour.

JVL seemed to think that this is some sort of joke, but I reckon it's actually a lot more sinister. The BoD got the Labour leadership contenders down on bended knee on their '10 commandments' and they all claimed to be Zionists - just like Richard Spencer, Steve Bannon and Tommy Robinson, to name but a few.

Keir Starmer has made some promises and now I think the other Zionists want some results, and they're getting very cheeky. He's talked the talk - now let us see him walk the walk. And the way for him to do that is to get rid of, preferably, all of the socialists in the Labour Party. For a kick-off the call has gone out (from the above named titles) to get rid of Corbyn's ex-shadow ministers, Diane Abbott and Bell Ribeiro-Addy, for the crime of talking to, among others, Tony Greenstein and Jackie Walker.

They quote the 10 commandments: "Any MPs, peers, councillors, members or CLPs who support, campaign or provide a platform for people who have been suspended or expelled in the wake of anti-Semitic

incidents should themselves be suspended from membership." The lack of "anti-Semitic incidents" is not their concern, but anyone talking to these criminals should be shot - sorry, I mean expelled.

We know that accepting the commandments was a stupid, anti-democratic act: even a bridge club wouldn't accept this level of interference in its disciplinary procedures. But Sir Keir has done it and so, presumably, because he was elected leader we all have to accept it. You can only talk to people approved by the BoD. We can only wonder at the lack of this power given to Jeremy Corbyn on his election.

All of this nonsense is done, of course, without any input (sorry, interference) from the membership. Just like the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance lack of definition, the expulsion and/or suspension of (for instance) Tony Greenstein, Jackie Walker, Marc Wadsworth, Ken Livingstone, Chris Williamson - just to mention some of the higher-profile victims - all of this stuff has been done behind the backs of the members, though not of the press, and Sir Keir is, it seems, determined to keep it that way.

If Sir Keir dares to give them the heads of these two black, female party members, then there will be even more outrage than there is already - and there is already quite a lot. I think that most members, trade union affiliates and so on, if told that they could not talk to Tony Greenstein or Jackie Walker (or anyone else for that matter), would say, 'Fuck off!' and I note at the time of writing (May 3) that quite a lot online already have. In the face of great difficulty, party members are going to have to find ways to express this outrage within the party - maybe some demands to suspend Sir Keir?

In compensation for the loss of socialism in the party Sir Keir wants to give us patriotism! "Labour should be patriotic and proud of it, says Starmer," reads *The Guardian* headline on May 1. How better to celebrate Labour Day? He's a bit worried about people in Bury voting Conservative because Labour isn't patriotic enough. It's reminiscent of an article in *The Guardian* just after the election trying to explain why Labour lost. They came across a 92-year-old who'd been in the Durham Light Infantry or some such and the answer was clear.

Pat McFadden MP had a similar line in *The Observer* of December 29 last year: "Fundamentally it [the Labour Party] should believe that British power and influence - both hard and soft - is a force for good in the world." I'm sure his words would be echoed from India to Jamaica, from Iraq to Afghanistan and Ireland.

Sir Keir no doubt sees 'patriotism' as the way forward for his career: perhaps at some stage he may write a preface of a future edition of Johnson's Churchill biography, saying how good it is. And for the Labour Party? Perhaps we need to add the Chelsea Pensioners to the BoD in overseeing not just discipline, but policy too.

Jim Cook
Reading

Dump Trump

In his reply to us on the coming US election, Daniel Lazare argues that we show an "unduly national perspective" when we conclude that Biden's Democratic Party represents a lesser evil (Letters, April 30). He agrees that Trump and the Republicans threaten to impose a dictatorship if they win again, but argues that their extraordinary threat to democratic rights is more than matched by Biden's record of waging imperialist

war around the globe. "So," Lazare concludes of Biden, "while he'd be better in Wisconsin, he'd be worse when it comes to the rest of the world, where US power predominates."

We do not doubt Biden's record of racism and capitalist austerity policies, nor his bloody imperialist warmongering, though we take issue with Lazare's illusions that Trump is to be preferred from a global perspective. But, first, questions of method.

What Lazare mistakes for an "unduly national perspective" is actually the Marxist approach of deciding which position to take in an election, based on what will best advance the potential for working class organisation and struggle. We and Lazare agree that the Republicans threaten a sweeping overturn of democratic rights in the US, including further attacks on voting rights and the right to join a union, so the question should be simple to answer: it will be far more difficult for the working class to organise and struggle if its most basic rights to do so are eviscerated by Trump and the Republicans' authoritarianism.

Lazare expresses with remarkable clarity his abandonment of a perspective based on working class and oppressed peoples' struggles, when he responds to our warning that in their authoritarian drive the current Republicans aim to overturn long-held legal precedents: "Since when do socialists line up behind judicial precedent?" he asks. The answer, of course, is that we do so *whenever they establish democratic rights that need to be defended against reactionary attempts to overturn them.*

We understand that the Supreme Court - with justices appointed to unlimited terms and confirmed by a grossly undemocratic Senate - is not a neutral umpire over class and democratic issues. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that many established legal precedents were won by mass

struggles. The strike waves of the 1930s, for example, forced the judiciary to establish the precedent that "freedom of contract" is not inviolable and that the government and courts can intervene to protect workers' union rights and enforce the minimum wage, workplace safety and environmental protections. The current Republican Supreme Court justices are determined to overturn those precedents, and socialists should be in the forefront of struggles to defend them. By defending democratic rights, we can help the working class learn to use them to organise and win struggles. Otherwise the working class will never achieve the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state.

It's a sad state of affairs when someone like Lazare, who has established a reputation as a Marxist scholar of the US constitution, fails to see why socialists take sides concerning legal precedents that entrench democratic rights. But such are the consequences of abandoning a perspective based on working class struggle. Lazare further demonstrates those consequences in his views on imperialism and global struggles.

Lazare should recognise that American militarists would have a far freer hand to wage imperialist wars around the world if the masses at home were deprived of the right to protest and to vote them out of office. Instead, he relieves himself of the burden of facing that reality by nurturing illusions that Trump is some kind of dove.

Biden, Lazare reminds us, is "an arch-imperialist who's been neck-deep in every major US crime of the last 30 years, from the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan to the destruction of Libya, Syria and Yemen, covert assistance to al Qa'eda, and support for the neo-Nazi-spearheaded coup in the Ukraine. If his first major campaign ad was an attack on Trump for not being tougher on the Chinese,

Fighting fund

In the kitty

As I reported last week, we comfortably made our April fighting fund target of £2,000 with a day to spare. But that still left the last day of the month and on April 30 three more donations came our way.

Two were end-of-the-month standing orders from VP and RL (both for £10), but the third was a rather handy PayPal contribution from one of those keen supporters of the *Weekly Worker*, comrade TB - for £50! So that extra £70 took our final total for April up to £2,170.

And our May fighting fund has started reasonably well too - mainly thanks to all those start-of-the-month standing orders. There were 15 of them, of which I'll mention the most generous. Thank you, comrades AC (£50), CG (£30), NR (£18), MD (£16) and MT (£15). In addition, there were two PayPal contributions - another £50, this time from comrade MF, plus a fiver from BO.

However, despite my promise last week to include anything received by post in this week's column, unfortunately we weren't so lucky when it came to cheques and postal orders - none at all, I'm afraid. But that's hardly surprising, is it? The lockdown affects people in all sorts

of different ways - even going out to buy a stamp or post a letter!

But it's incredible how loyal and patient our readers have been. Even though this is the seventh issue of the *Weekly Worker* that is online-only, only one person has been forced to cancel their subscription! Mind you, as we've previously made clear, once we resume printing, all subscriptions will be extended by the appropriate length of time.

But it's slightly different if, instead of paying in advance for six months or a year, you make regular uninterrupted payments - either by standing order or PayPal. In those cases it'll be up to the readers themselves to say what they want to happen. But, from the reaction we've had so far I think we could get more comments along the lines of comrade HJ's instruction this week - "Take it as a donation!"

That's another fiver towards May's fighting fund then, meaning that we start the month with £276 in the kitty. ●

Robbie Rix

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

it's because American aggression is in his bones," whereas Trump "won in 2016 because he opposed US misadventures in Syria and the Ukraine."

Trump's bluster against US wars abroad was hardly a significant factor in his stealing the 2016 election. Nor was it truthful about his own past attitudes or indicative of his policies since taking office. He famously claimed to have been an early opponent of Bush Jr's Iraq war in 2003, but this is no truer than most of his self-serving boasts; in fact he supported the US invasion and hailed its military success at the time. As to Afghanistan, there are now slightly more US troops there than when Trump took office, and the Pentagon plans to deploy more this summer. Overall, Trump has increased US troop numbers in the Middle East and has dramatically escalated its use of drone missile attacks, leading to skyrocketing numbers of civilian deaths.

Now that he is in charge of the Iraq war, he continues the US's crimes. The bloody slaughter of civilians in the recapture of Mosul under Islamic State continued under Trump's watch. Most recently, after he engineered the assassination of Iranian general Soleimani in Baghdad in January, the Iraqi Council of Representatives voted that all foreign forces should leave the country. Trump, offended, responded by threatening to impose sanctions against Iraq and by deploying 3,500 more troops to the region.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, the people of Iran, Yemen and Palestine would hardly welcome a continuation of Trump's policies. Trump tore up Obama's treaty with Iran (imperialist though its conditions were), intensified sanctions against the country and openly threatens war. As if asserting US imperialist hegemony, he has also pressured the European Union to restore sanctions against Iran. Trump and his adjunct, Kushner, warmly befriended the Saudi ruler, MBS - butcher of his domestic opponents, as well as the Yemeni people. And Trump has openly sided with Israel's apartheid rule and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians, breaking with the bipartisan hypocrisy of a separate, nominally sovereign Palestinian state.

A word or two on Ukraine. Here Trump looks like a moderate when it comes to the west-versus-Russia rivalry over the imperialist exploitation of that country. That's because of his devotion to, and often slavish apologetics for, Putin. Lazare cites the Democrats' support for "the imperialist war effort in Ukraine's eastern provinces", as if Trump had withdrawn military aid to Kiev, and as if Nato had invaded and seized those provinces, not Russia. He refers casually to "the neo-Nazi spearheaded coup in the Ukraine", overlooking that the Maidan movement in 2014 rested on a mass, anti-oligarchical mobilisation despite the influential rightwing elements in it, and that there were far-right (Russian) nationalist elements on the other side as well. And in the war in eastern Ukraine, there are fascistic forces like the Azov Brigade on the government side. But there are also Nazis on the pro-Moscow side, and the bulk of Nazis across Europe are enthusiasts for that side as well as for Putin.

As to China, as Lazare points out, Biden is attacking Trump "for not being tougher on the Chinese". But Trump is doing the same; he wants to make China the scapegoat for his disastrous handling of the pandemic and is attempting to rally support for a conflict by promoting the conspiracy theory that the Covid-19 virus was produced by a Chinese laboratory.

In short, Trump is as much an imperialist as any Democrat; socialists have no business preferring him on that score.

Lazare agrees that electing Biden over Trump would "buy time for working class and oppressed people to use their rights to vote and to organise in unions", but he assumes that calling for a vote for Biden and the Democrats "will bind [the masses] all the more securely to one such party and hence to the 'Repocratic' duopoly as a whole". On the contrary, nothing will bind the masses more tightly to the Democratic Party than Trump and the Republicans establishing authoritarian rule and denying working class and oppressed people their right to vote and to organise struggle.

That is why it's important to reject nonsense ideas of a duopoly that ignore the fundamental difference that has opened between the two major ruling class parties. The Republicans are now a party of white nationalist authoritarianism, determined to eviscerate voting rights, union rights and more. The Democrats are no less a party of imperialism, but they can hope to hold political power only if people of colour have the right to vote and have their votes counted; and they do not generally want to wipe out the unions they rely on for their electoral efforts. Socialists should encourage the working class to take advantage of the opportunity to choose its opponent for the next four years, and to use their surviving democratic rights to organise and challenge the capitalist class and all its political representatives.

Walter Daum

Matt Roberts

New York

New International

In his article, 'Only choice we have', Rex Dunn is surely right to suggest that Marxists can learn much from studying Trotsky's *Transitional programme* of 1938 (April 30). Rex argues that Trotsky's chief insight was that, without a socialist revolution, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of humanity. This now appears more relevant to today's circumstances than ever. Rex mentions ecocide, the inability to eradicate disease, inequality and social disintegration as aspects of global catastrophe. This threatens the continued survival of civilisation worldwide. He could also have mentioned continued wars, deepening depression, unemployment and the threat of nuclear extinction.

Comrade Dunn thinks a global socialist revolution based on the overthrow of the capitalist class and the establishment of democratic planning worldwide is the only effective means of preventing this catastrophe. This means that socialists need to focus their attention on building a new Marxist International that can support and coordinate the development of class consciousness and the spread of revolutionary activity wherever and whenever the working class engages in collective action. If Rex's response to catastrophe is correct, certain questions come to mind.

Firstly, does this mean that a new Marxist International is likely to be built in the present period? Not if socialist and communist groups and individuals do not attempt to develop a political economy that explains the contemporary epoch of decline and transition.

This epoch is highly contradictory. It requires organised and disciplined study within and outwith institutions of higher education and activist groups. Moreover, a rigid preoccupation with targeting and blaming past revolutionary leaders, such as Trotsky, for workers' defeats is likely to continue to be an effective barrier to the re-emergence of a socialist and communist consciousness. Many socialists and communists still seem to be unaware of the impact that Stalinism has had

on their understanding of Marxist theory and practice. Thankfully this is changing. For example, writers and researchers for this newspaper have made a sharp distinction between the "bureaucratic centralism" of most groups that remain loyal to the Third and Fourth Internationals and the "democratic centralism" of the Second International, Lenin and Trotsky. The substitution of the one for the other is a direct result of the Stalinist doctrine that Bolshevism consisted of a party of a new type.

Secondly, does it mean that a new International will be built on the basis of Trotsky's programme? Yes and no. If there are elements within the programme that are still relevant to today's conditions, they can be preserved in any new document. Calling for the establishment of workplace committees and other forms of workers' control such as soviets might be examples of this. Overall, however, I am inclined to think that the best way to preserve the rational elements within the programme would be to supersede it. This means the creation of a new programme that addresses the problems of socialist revolution today, including the role of the culture industry and social media. It entails making as sharp and clear a distinction between socialism and communism, and social democracy and Stalinism, as possible. It means demonstrating the non-utopian nature of the socialist and communist project.

For example, 'going back' to the transitional programme will involve a critical evaluation of the notion of transitional demands. What did Trotsky mean by stating they act as a bridge between the minimum and maximum programmes? Is there any relationship between the accommodation of many Marxist groups to left social democracy and transitional demands? Or is the root of their support for reformism in Trotsky's notion of a degenerate workers' state? For example, it is arguable that Trotskyists' defence of the USSR's nationalised property relations explains their adaptation to Stalinism.

Finally, how inclusive should a new Marxist International be? Should it be like the First International and include class-struggle anarchists or Marxist/anarchist hybrids, such as people who identify with the Italian autonomist school of Marxism? Or should it include only those socialist and communist groups that embrace the electoral sphere as part of the class struggle? Should it include individuals and groups that characterise regimes such as the former Soviet Union as in some sense 'socialist' or 'communist'? Certainly I could never be in the same political organisation as George Galloway and his allies from the Stalin Society, such as Joti Brar.

Comrade Dunn suggests that a new Marxist International should win over the most advanced workers to the idea of socialist revolution. He gives the example of workers in the 'big tech' companies. These workers are not only potentially powerful because they are productive of value, but because they have the knowledge and skills to disable the repressive apparatus of the state. Trotsky's call to arm workers and create militias is now limited by the development of powerful productive forces. Military technology is now so advanced that armed workers and militias can be rendered helpless and eliminated from the air. Constant aerial bombardment of civilian targets destroys any and every move towards transforming the class struggle into a civil war.

A goal of a new Marxist International may therefore be to end all forms of civil war - including the class war.

Paul B Smith
Ormskirk

Year zero

I have to query the continued indulgence of Rex Dunn.

The latest article on Trotsky's *Transitional programme* is another appalling effort, although I am grateful for the comrade's unerring ability to cut through any insomnia problems his readers may be experiencing.

It is not only the patronising and boring mode of presentation (where the reader is constantly prodded into shrugging their shoulders and saying, 'So what?'). Or the feeling that I'm reading a comedian who can't deliver a punchline. The real problem is that the *Weekly Worker* has featured many articles down the years criticising and contextualising the transitional method in great detail (Dunn should probably look up the word 'archive' when the terrible urge to write takes hold). An article that then merely takes us back to a kind of dogmatic Trotskyist year zero, where all the intellectual labour of the past 20 years has been erased, or probably unnoticed, is bound, comrade editors, to provoke a certain amount of indifference or even resistance on the part of readers.

When I first came across the CPGB in the mid-1990s, it was engaged in a rapprochement process with a group of far-left fragments. The *Weekly Worker* archive from that period is instructive, as it had muscular editorial debates, reminding comrades from other groups that the paper was not a bulletin board for any ephemeral musings that these groups put forward at times. There was even a denial to some of an automatic right to reply if debates got tedious and circular. The point being that contributions were judged on their contribution to the reforging of the CPGB. The editorial parameters of this were very broad and inclusive, and it didn't always go perfectly. I remember one printed contribution on the 'ontology of Paul Weller' by the long-extinct Trotskyist Unity Group that was actually quite distressing.

It does strike me that some of this interventionist culture has disappeared and we have instead at least some of the facets of a passive bulletin board that people such as Rex Dunn pin posters on. The comrade editors may, of course, have reams of correspondence to hand from Dunn's many fans out there. But I somehow doubt it.

Lawrence Parker
London

What pandemic?

Piers Corbyn, the brother of the former Labour leader, has been taking part in anti-lockdown protests. His view is that there is no pandemic, and he has led demos in Glastonbury, Somerset. Jeremy Corbyn's brother has argued that there are more sinister forces at play behind the present crisis. In a previous demo he referred to the microchip agenda, which aims at bringing people under the total control of the elite. I am also far from convinced that the present crisis is only about the pandemic.

Some time ago I wrote a letter to the *Weekly Worker* which made reference to the transhumanist, microchip agenda, which is about fusing humans with technology under the control of those who rule us. Most of the left seem to be unaware of this secret agenda. The human microchip - the first stage of transhumanism, symbolised by 'the Borg' in fiction - is obviously aimed at preventing the socialist transformation of society: that is, real socialism. Transhumanism is therefore the lockdown which we should be worried about. With everyone under technological control, it would mean game, set and match to the ruling class: that is, fascist totalitarianism brought to perfection.

One writer who has done a lot to expose the elite's microchip and transhumanist agenda, is David Icke. However, while Icke does a good job in exposing the inner elite's agenda, he doesn't do so from a leftwing point of view; rather he does so from what I would describe as a liberal, semi-conservative standpoint. This is why, up to now, he has failed to openly challenge the private ownership of the means of production by the very elite he is exposing and condemning. Icke calls for revolution and the downfall of the ruling class, but doesn't seem to understand that the downfall of capitalism logically leads to social ownership of the means of production, on which communist society, humanity's natural state, is based.

Piers Corbyn appears to be familiar with David Icke's writings. The latter is certainly right to expose the microchip and transhumanist agenda of those in the shadows. Hopefully, Piers Corbyn will not make the same mistake as Icke, who embodies the strange contradiction of exposing, condemning and calling for the downfall of the ruling class by revolution, while at the same time demonising communism.

Tony Clark
Labour supporter

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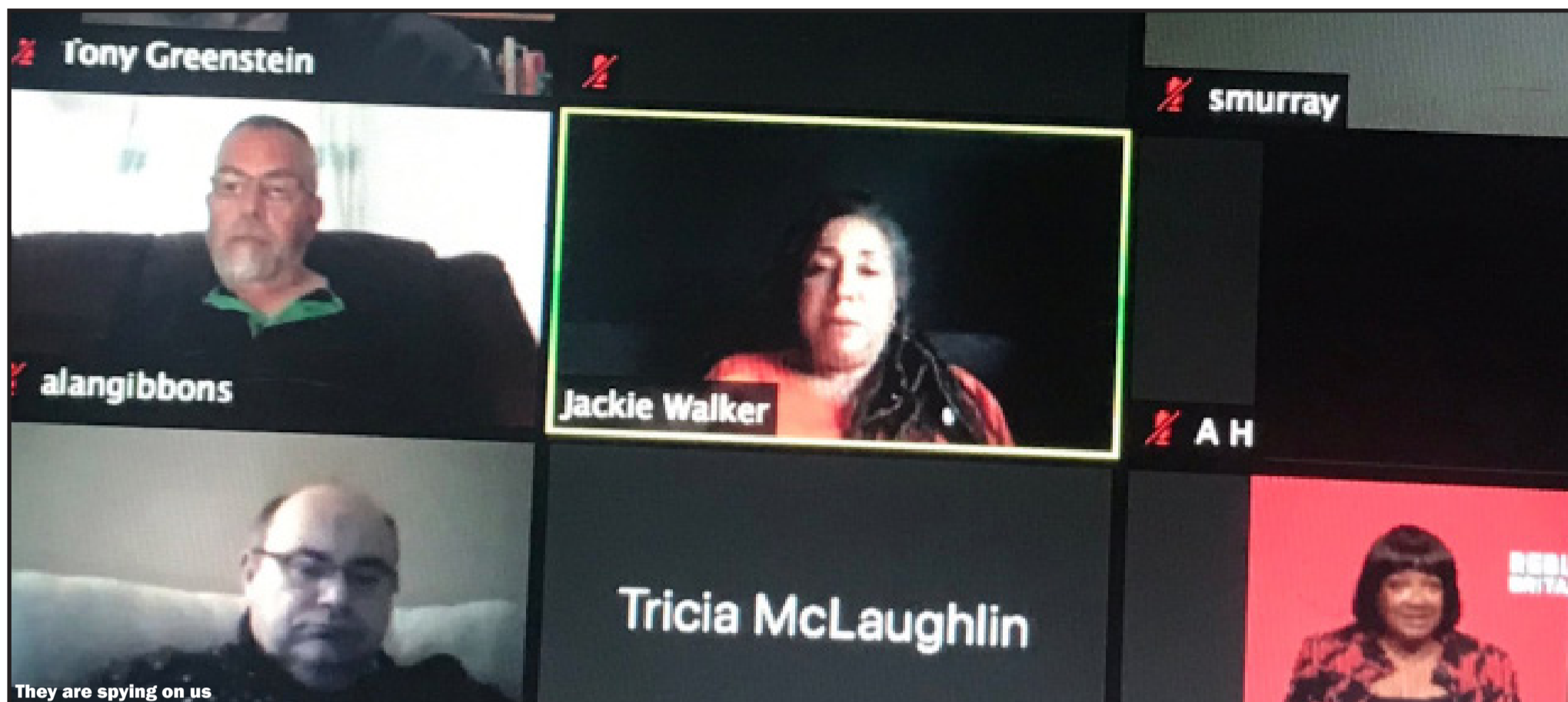
Speaker: **Mike Macnair**

from the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee

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LABOUR



Stand up to witch-hunters

Those who fail to show solidarity should not be given solidarity, writes David Shearer of Labour Party Marxists

While Jeremy Corbyn was still Labour leader, there was much speculation on the left that, once the right had managed to remove him and recapture the party, we would see an abrupt end to the weaponisation of anti-Semitism. That was, of course, a campaign that saw the Labour left, and Corbyn supporters in particular, absurdly targeted as 'anti-Semites' and the party itself accused of having become 'institutionally anti-Semitic'.

Well, I think the events of last week might have knocked that one on the head. For those who have missed this story - relegated, of course, to the inside pages, thanks to the coronavirus pandemic - the latest 'scandal' occurred as a result of the April 29 online meeting of a new Labour left grouping called 'Don't Leave, Organise', which was set up following the election of Keir Starmer as the party's new (rightwing) leader.

Attended by over 500 people, the meeting was addressed by, amongst others, two Labour left MPs, Diane Abbott and Bell Ribeiro-Addy. As you might expect, their contributions focused on the recent leaked report, which revealed how the rightwing Labour bureaucracy under former general secretary Iain McNicol had not only deliberately worked to reduce the possibility of a Labour general election victory, but had sat on allegations of anti-Semitism in order to undermine Corbyn.

The big problem with this line involves the second allegation, which actually takes it as a given that there is indeed a serious problem with anti-Jewish prejudice within the party. In this way the soft Labour left, including our two MPs, has attempted to turn the tables. There is not only anti-Semitic racism: there is 'institutional racism' in general (both MPs are black, of course). Much discussion ensued about black self-organisation.

But they obviously had not reckoned on the presence of spies. A well orchestrated scandal followed. Its focus was not on what they (or anyone else) said at the meeting, but on the fact that among the dozen or so people called to speak from the audience there were two expelled Labour members: namely Jackie Walker and Tony Greenstein.

In case you have forgotten, both these comrades were originally suspended over allegations of 'anti-Semitism' (despite the fact that both are Jewish!), but were eventually booted out over totally different charges - I will return to that below.

The next day, following well crafted denunciations from several Zionist groups, the story went live. The BBC version (April 30) was headlined: 'Sir Keir Starmer is facing calls from Jewish groups to take further action over two MPs who addressed a meeting that included two expelled activists'. Of course, terms like 'Jewish groups' are used to imply that they speak on behalf of the 'Jewish community'. In reality there is a strong anti-Zionist current among Jewish people. For example, one of the founding organisations of Don't Leave, Organise is the anti-Zionist Jewish Voice for Labour (the others being the Labour Representation Committee and Red Labour, Red Britain).

So what did the Zionists allege? Well, the Board of Deputies of British Jews claimed that the MPs had 'shared a platform' with the two expellees. According to BoD president Marie van der Zyl, "It is completely unacceptable that Labour MPs, and even ordinary members, should be sharing platforms with those that have been expelled from the party for anti-Semitism."

Of course, the term, 'share a platform', usually refers only to an event's official speakers, not to people in the audience. But that does not bother van der Zyl, of course (nor the fact that comrades Walker and Greenstein were *not* 'expelled from the party for anti-Semitism'). She demanded that Keir Starmer take "swift and decisive action" against Abbott and Ribeiro-Addy in order to demonstrate that "this is a new era, rather than a false dawn" following his pledge after the leadership election to "tear out this poison by its roots", as Labour had "failed the Jewish community on anti-Semitism".

Then there was Euan Philipps of Labour Against Anti-Semitism, who said that Starmer should have given a "strong and unequivocal response" following this 'outrage' of the MPs addressing a meeting where a couple of expelled

members were present. Starmer, he said, had instead "demonstrated a disappointing level of moral and political cowardice" in not removing the whip from them. For his part, Gideon Falter of the Campaign Against Anti-Semitism said the Labour leader had shown that "his apologies are meaningless" because of his failure to take stronger action: "After half a decade of the Labour anti-Semitism crisis," said Falter, "no MP should need 'reminding' not to engage with those expelled from the party over anti-Semitism."

A Labour spokeswoman said Abbott and Ribeiro-Addy had been "reminded of their responsibilities" and had been spoken to "in the strongest possible terms". After all, "The previous comments made by some of the individuals" attending the meeting had been "completely unacceptable".

Response

So how did the two respond? Disgracefully, they issued a grovelling statement which said: "The MPs were not aware that any suspended or expelled former members of the Labour Party might contribute as audience members. They did not and would not share a platform with them."

This is appalling on so many levels. First, would you not expect that out of the 500-plus there would be all sorts of different people, some of whom might express views you totally disagreed with? Secondly, what is wrong with debating with such people - even if they had been expelled from Labour for legitimate reasons? Which brings me to my third, and most important, point: by taking this disgraceful stance Abbott and Ribeiro-Addy were placing themselves firmly in the camp of the witch-hunters and thus aiding the right, not to mention the anti-Labour establishment.

In fact neither Tony Greenstein nor Jackie Walker had done or said anything remotely anti-Semitic and the disciplinary action taken against them was completely unjustified. The initial moves against comrade Greenstein had seemed to centre - at least in terms of what was alleged publicly - on the fact that he had used the term 'Zio' as an abbreviation for 'Zionist' on social

media. So shortening the word in this way completely changes its meaning, does it? Perhaps any such usage (like 'bio' or 'eco') is unacceptable.

Secondly, comrade Greenstein was also accused of describing the rightwing Labour MP, Louise Ellman, as an "apologist for Israel's occupation forces" and a "supporter of Israeli child abuse" (the latter because she had praised the actions of Israeli soldiers, even though amongst those they had violently arrested were children). Ellman, of course, later resigned when faced with a no confidence motion in her Constituency Labour Party.

But comrade Greenstein was expelled in February 2018 - basically for 'being rude'.

What were comrade Walker's 'crimes'? In 2016 she was suspended after a private email she had sent was "uncovered" by the Israel Advocacy Movement (the name says it all). In this she pointed out that Holocaust Remembrance Day focussed almost exclusively on Jewish victims of genocide. But what about the thousands of Africans who had been enslaved and died on the other side of the Atlantic? She had (rather clumsily) pointed to the fact that in the slave trade some Jews, far from being the victims, were in fact among the slave-owners. She wrote in the email: "... many Jews (my ancestors too) were the chief financiers of the sugar and slave trade". She later said that what she had meant was: "Jews (my ancestors too) were among those who financed the sugar and slave trade."

Eventually comrade Walker was reinstated, but was suspended again a few months later for comments she made at an "anti-Semitism training event" organised by the Jewish Labour Movement at the 2016 Labour conference. Not only did she say, "I still haven't heard a definition of anti-Semitism that I can work with." But she also queried the need for special security at Jewish schools. Presumably such remarks constitute "prejudicial and grossly detrimental behaviour against the party" - the 'offence' for which she was finally expelled in March 2019.

What was the stance of Abbott and Ribeiro-Addy in relation to such cases? Like Corbyn himself, they said and did

nothing. After all, if you say that such disciplinary action is misplaced then you yourself might be targeted next. Better to go along with the action taken and pretend it was all justified. That was what they effectively did once again last week.

That is why we totally disagree with the headline above the statement issued by Labour Against the Witchhunt, which reads: "Solidarity with Diane Abbott and Bell Ribeiro-Addy" (although at least it adds: "and all those unjustly expelled!"). LAW failed to criticise 'comrades' Abbott and Ribeiro-Addy, despite their disgraceful statement issued two days earlier.

Solidarity means - if it means anything - unity, agreement, common action and mutual support. Calling for solidarity with scabs, turncoats and traitors is, to say the least, to foster illusions, to throw dust into the eyes of Labour members. We should defend Abbott and Ribeiro-Addy from any attempt to discipline, suspend or expel them. But their surrender, their cowardice, is inexcusable. And that needs saying.

While we are on the subject of solidarity, it is worth a brief comment on the May 2 'Statement on Salma Yaqoob' issued by the Stop the War Coalition. Yaqoob is another Labour member facing an investigation following a complaint by the Campaign Against Anti-Semitism. That despite her long record of fighting racism and other forms of prejudice. The STWC states: "The Campaign Against Anti-Semitism demanded the exclusion from Labour of two black women MPs, Diane Abbott and Bell Ribeiro-Addy, on the flimsy pretext that they addressed an online meeting which included expelled Labour Party members *in the audience, not on the platform*" (original emphasis).

But then it added: "Local STWC groups act autonomously in deciding their platforms, but we note that Tony Greenstein has never been asked to address a national STWC meeting. STWC rejects both anti-Semitism and abusive language in political debate."

So, unlike Salma Yaqoob, comrade Greenstein was justifiably expelled, was he? That seems to be the implication ●

STWC

Where is the strategy?

Support for a 'global ceasefire' is acceptable, argues Paul Demarty, but not if it obscures the causes of war

Amid the urgent and horrifying problems unleashed by the Covid-19 pandemic, one particularly dismal prospect is its effects on the world's multiplying war zones.

The secretary general of the United Nations, António Guterres, issued a call for a global ceasefire, to minimise the possibility of a gruesome 'multiplier effect'. It has got the sort of response that all such calls get - a wave of pious hypocrisy, in which world leaders say, 'Yes, it is very important that we have peace, which means that *that lot over there* should stop being so belligerent' - without lifting a finger on matters that they themselves have the power to effect.

It is undoubtedly the case that only the purest of motives animated Guterres's statement. He knows, as do we all, that the four horsemen of the Book of Revelation ride together. War, apart from combat deaths, brings with it enormous disruption to the economic infrastructure of society; famine and pestilence, to use the old language, are therefore never far behind. But, with a health crisis and corresponding economic slump already in train, the prospect is truly grim.

The British contribution to this misery is hardly insignificant, of course. Such was the motivation for an open letter from Labour MP Claudia Webbe to the government, demanding that the "huge distance between declarations and deeds" noted by Guterres is closed on these shores. The letter is backed by the Stop the War Coalition, of course, and is signed by 35 MPs - mostly the usual suspects: various long-time Labour peace warriors like Jeremy Corbyn and Diane Abbott; Caroline Lucas of the Greens; some Scottish nationalists.¹

The letter is copied to Dominic Raab, who - in his capacity as foreign secretary - formally endorsed the ceasefire idea. It is easy enough to demonstrate his hypocrisy. We need only look at the two matters most immediately at issue for British anti-war activists - Iraq and Yemen. In the former case, it is somehow still the case that British military operations continue. Indeed, two days after Raab's warm reception of Guterres's plan, an RAF bombing raid took place there. Joined-up government at its finest!

The British armed forces are not directly involved in the Saudi war in Yemen, instead sending 'advisors' to help the Saudis take care of maiming and massacring themselves; but the British arms industry certainly is. 'Defence' sector sales to Saudi Arabia have continued throughout the appalling conflict, which has killed hundreds of thousands of civilians through relentless bombardment, famine and cholera (the full set of horsemen, even before our recent viral misfortune). The high court ruled that granting further export licences to Saudi Arabia was unlawful last June, embarrassing the government; but the licences already granted continue to be used, with the peace-loving shareholders of BAE Systems enjoying particularly obscene profits from this chaos.

Whither Raab? We find no evidence of any concern about overseas operations in Iraq; on top of which, for example, he vociferously defended the United States assassination in January of Iranian major general Qasem Soleimani in Baghdad. As for the Saudis in Yemen, we might



War in Yemen: with full support of HMG

consider his reaction to the murder in the Saudi embassy in Istanbul of Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018. Though Raab conceded that the Saudi government's explanation for how Khashoggi came to be garrotted and dismembered were not credible, it was no reason for "throwing our hands in the air and terminating the relationship with Saudi Arabia". After all, you have to think about "the huge number of British jobs that depend on it" and the fact that "if you exert influence over your partners you need to be able to talk to them".² Stop me if you've heard this one before ...

Limits

In Raab's hypocrisy, however, we meet the limit of Webbe and Stop the War's politics. A follow-up email from the STWC, appealing for donations, perhaps expresses the thing most clearly: "... our government has claimed support for the UN global ceasefire; it is now up to us to hold it to account and ensure words become action." It is, of course, correct to demand an end to all imperialist-backed wars, just as it is to critically support pro-Palestinian motions in the UN general assembly. We need not have any particular illusions in the virtues of the UN to accept that it might inadvertently embarrass imperialist powers when they work themselves up into a fit of self-righteousness.

Indeed, this is not even merely a matter of war and geopolitics. A series of UN officials, for example, have excoriated the British government for its failure to provide adequate housing for its population. One such farrago was started off by the then special rapporteur for adequate housing, Raquel Rolnik, in 2013; periodically the matter has resurfaced in the news - usually accompanied by the furious spluttering of Tory MPs to the effect that UN officials should stay out of politics and go back to their own countries to sort out housing there. But the special rapporteur for housing dispatches no troops, and so the homelessness situation in Britain has deteriorated alarmingly in the seven years since Rolnik's broadside. Encampments of

the dispossessed multiply in London and elsewhere. This is, of course, one of the many factors exacerbating the spread and impact of Covid-19, as is - on a larger scale - the fact that our world is pockmarked with bomb sites and shell craters.

The UN, in other words, is essentially an ideological instrument. It is wielded as a weapon against one's political enemies, either on the national or the world stage. The trouble is that it is not a terribly effective weapon against certain adversaries. The Asian giant hornet, the world's largest wasp, feeds on honeybees; and it is a ferociously effective predator, because its carapace is thicker than a bee stinger is long. The capitalist world order has its own apex predators; and the thick hide of the United States has never yet been penetrated by the feeble sting of UN censure. The US and UK blithely motored on with the invasion of Iraq despite the disapproval of the UN; and no meaningful distance has been taken by the Atlantic powers from the Yemeni bloodbath - for reasons both of naked greed and Washington's psychotic hatred of Iran, which was dubiously blamed for the outbreak of civil war in the first place.

It seems, however, that I am refuting arguments that have not actually been made. Nowhere in its communications does Stop the War explicitly claim that the UN provides moral leadership *in general*, or positively propose multilateral diplomacy as a solution to the world's massacres. The positive proposals instead amount to signing a petition urging the British government to "act on the call of United Nations secretary-general António Guterres for a global ceasefire by withdrawing British armed forces from war zones around the world" - and donating money to a certain Stop the War Coalition.

So does this silence cover over a credulous attitude to the UN and other international institutions, or a critical one? The answer is *both*. Stop the War was, from the outset, conceived as a maximally broad alliance of all those opposed to the retaliatory war on Afghanistan in

2001, and then reached its climax when the neoconservative faction in Washington pressed their advantage and proceeded to invade Iraq. It is quite true that the demonstration of one or two million in London on February 15 2003 would not have been so large if it had not been a suitable outlet for those outraged at the shabby treatment of the UN by the Americans and British (and Quakers, and Islamists, and 9/11 truthers, and ...). The total focus on one demand - that the government should not participate in military operations in Iraq - worked, at least insofar as it gave birth to a demonstration of unprecedented size and mass reach.

The problems arise from the ways in which the demonstration did *not* work. That is: Tony Blair invaded Iraq regardless. It was, at that point, inevitable that the movement would fragment into the *positive* programmes offered by its component parts. The Liberal Democrats fell back into 'support our troops' state loyalism and griped about international law from a safe distance. Divisions opened up between apologists for the Iranian theocracy and those who refused to let an anti-war stance silence criticism of the mullahs. The Socialist Workers Party, which provided the activist backbone of the operation, attempted to roll it into an electoral project, Respect, in which the SWP joined forces with George Galloway and various dubious clientelist businessmen in Birmingham and east London (the intention was to get the Muslim Association of Britain - the British wing of the Muslim Brotherhood - on board, but the MAB considered it too opportunist). But Respect split, and then the SWP itself split soon after; the wing most dedicated to the STWC 'strategy' launched Counterfire.

Hamster wheel

Under a version of its historic leadership - that is, the Counterfire top bods, 'official' communists, trade union bureaucrats and Labour lefts - the STWC has never managed to reorient itself. It has held to the only line that could work for it: that mass demonstrations on minimal

politics constitute the appropriate anti-war strategy. But truly *mass* demonstrations passed into history a while ago - a state of affairs that cannot be blamed on lockdown. That is because, however we define 'strategy', doing the same thing again and again and expecting different results ain't one.

The question of the UN, and of international law more broadly, is neuralgic enough to ensure that essentially it is never discussed in the STWC. That is because it cleaves the leadership in half - on the one side, those of a sterner Trotskyist background know very well that such institutions are dens of thieves and not to be trusted. On the other, there are well-meaning liberals, whose naivety on this score scarcely needs description; and 'official' communists and left Labourites, who inherit a faith in the UN that dates from the days when the USSR was a superpower and so the UN was an arena of cold war struggle - which lives on as a spectral vestige in their thinking.

The result is not so even-handed. Because the 'default' position of official ideology is that the UN and international law matters very much (so it can be press-ganged into the service of imperialist agendas), the liberals (and tankies) are free to frame anti-war politics in a way that envisages the UN as a kind of neutral arbiter or even a friend of peace and enforcer of international law. It is those who realise that this is false who must censor themselves, so that the movement can remain maximally broad, and continue to keep its illustrious donors and patrons on board.

Actually overcoming British militarism, however, cannot be done like this - because it is neither reducible to a single issue (or a succession of single issues - should we go to war with Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria ... ?) nor is it merely a matter for Britain. We confront instead the real structure of power in the global order, and Britain's place within it - as a hireling of the USA and a long-deceased hegemon; and the UN's, which we have already discussed. Overcoming militarism requires a *state-disloyalist* outlook: a view that the many wars carrying on in the background to this pandemic are not an unfortunate contingency of poor diplomacy or governance, but an intrinsic feature of that global order, of which Britain is a parasitic beneficiary.

The problem, then, with the STWC strategy is not - as is sometimes supposed by its left critics - that an A-to-B protest march (or, for that matter, a petition like the one set up to support the ceasefire) cannot of itself stop war. No particular tactic will bring success on its own. The issue is rather that this subset of tactics becomes, precisely, a *strategy*, which *prevents* participants from discovering the kinds of analysis that show up the extent of the mess we are in. And with the pandemic's long-term effects likely to be the very opposite of a global ceasefire, we badly need to get out of this intellectual hamster wheel.

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. stopwar.org.uk/index.php/news-comment/3676-35-cross-party-mps-join-calls-for-a-global-ceasefire-to-combat-covid-19.
2. af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFKCN1MVCU.

STRATEGY

The importance of being programmed

Without a comprehensive, fully worked out programme there is no road map to socialism and beyond.

Jack Conrad begins a short series of articles

Socialism cannot be delivered from on high. So, no socialism via a so-called good leftwinger getting their hands onto the bureaucratic state machine, winning over trade union officialdom, lifting into power a charismatic liberator or some confessional sect. Socialism is an act of self-liberation by the great mass of the working class for the sake of the great mass of humanity. The working class smashes the old state machine of the bourgeoisie, constitutes itself the ruling class and begins the transition to the communist mode of production. A necessary precondition being the fight for the most extensive democracy, a high level of class consciousness and, correspondingly, organising the working class into a disciplined political party.

Though it may appear paradoxical, that party is built top-down. Does that mean that the party we envisage - its proper name being 'Communist Party' - is going to consist of just a few thousand activists, managed, controlled and directed by a self-perpetuating central committee or an all-knowing guru? No, not at all, and that is why we consider the perspectives and political culture of groups such as the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party in England and Wales, Workers Revolutionary Party, etc, etc, so problematic.

No, what I mean by 'party' is the kind of mass organisation fought for by Karl Marx. At the Hague congress of the First International, held in September 1872, he moved a successful resolution which called for workers to form themselves "into a political party". Otherwise the "working class cannot act as a class".¹ The kind of *class party* Marx had in mind was realised, in good measure, by the Social Democratic Party of August Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht and Karl Kautsky. Although there were exceptions - such as the British Labour Party - most parties of the Second International took the German party, along with its *Erfurt programme*, as their template. Amongst them, of course, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party led by Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (aka Lenin).

Lenin, it should be stressed, was perfectly candid about the debt the RSDLP owed to the German SDP:

... a few words are in order on our attitude to the *Erfurt programme* ... we consider it necessary to ... bring the programme of the Russian social democrats closer to that of the German. We are not in the least afraid to say that we want to imitate the *Erfurt programme*: there is nothing bad in imitating what is good, and precisely today, when we so often hear opportunist and equivocal criticism of that programme, we consider it our duty to speak openly in its favour.²

Later he advises those who want to "understand the whole of our programme" to

get hold of two pamphlets to use as aids. One pamphlet is by the German social democrat, Karl Kautsky, and its title is the *Erfurt programme*. It has been translated into Russian. The other pamphlet is by the Russian social democrat, L Martov, and its title is *The workers' cause in Russia*.³

With good reason, Lars T Lih dubs Lenin a "Russian Erfurtian".⁴

The parties of social democracy



Banksy: merge socialist theory with the workers' movement

sunk deep social roots in the working class and through tireless, often heroic struggles managed to become a considerable material force in the politics of continental Europe: an achievement which rested in no small part on thoroughgoing internal democracy, the lively, frank and open debate of differences, and the considerable autonomy allowed to local districts and branches. However - and this is the main point here - these parties were built around their programmes. The first point of Lenin's draft rules of the RSDLP reads: "A party member is one who accepts the party's programme and supports the party both financially and by personal participation in one of its organisations."⁵

There are, of course, those rank opportunists who know a smattering of Marx and gleefully quote his famous statement: "Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes."⁶ But to field those words now, in a period of historic defeat, organisational fragmentation and theoretical confusion - well, that is to actually hold the movement back. No less to the point, these words of Marx are taken from the letter to Wilhelm Bracke - commonly attached to his *Critique of the Gotha programme* (1875) - where Marx eviscerates the compromising, the backtracking, the trading away of principled programmatic formulations by his comrades in Germany.

Needless to say, Marx fully appreciated the role and importance of programme - after all, he authored the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and the *Demands of the Communist Party in Germany*. Then there was the International Workingman's Association, the First International, Marx was responsible for its rules and fundamental documents. Marx was, in fact, a consummate writer of programmes: eg, the role he played in drafting the 1880 *Programme of the Parti Ouvrier*. No, far from downplaying the need for a programme - and this is obvious with even a cursory reading of his *Critique* - Marx was striving to reorientate, to rescue, the proto-SDP programmatically.

It is doubtless true that a party should be judged primarily by what it does, rather than what its programme says. But a *new party* will be judged by its programme. And the *Gotha programme* represented a considerable retreat compared with the *Eisenach programme*.

A little background. The Social Democratic Workers Party was founded at Eisenach in 1869 under the leadership of August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht. Its programme had definite shortcomings: eg, it demanded a free people's state and universal *male* suffrage. But there were also calls for the liberation of the working class, abolition of the standing army, establishing a people's militia and the separation of church and state. It also constituted the SDWP as "a branch" of the First International - "to the extent that the associational laws permit".⁷ Bebel and Liebknecht, note, both served lengthy prison sentences for membership of the International.

Contemporaries regarded the SDWP as a Marxist party. So everything the SDWP said and did in Germany reflected on the reputation of the Marx-Engels team in London. A reputation they were determined to uphold. Eg, Mikhail Bakunin attacked what he called Marxism in his *Statism and anarchy*, in no small part by laying hold of the real and imagined failings of the "duumvirate of Bebel and Liebknecht" and the "Jewish literati behind or under them".⁸ The Slavophile Bakunin hated Germans and Jews with a horrible passion.

Anyhow, put together jointly by Bebel and Liebknecht, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the followers of the state socialist, Ferdinand Lassalle, the programme was to be presented to the unity congress of the two groups meeting in Gotha. After much haggling Marx's comrades agreed a series of rotten compromises. Not only the "iron law of wages", but other Lassallean drivel, such as "state"-financed industry and the claim that "all other classes are only a reactionary body".⁹ The justification for making such compromises? The opportunist dictum of beginning where people are at and

pursuit of the holy grail of 'unity for the sake of unity'.

Disobeying doctor's orders, Marx took to his desk to compose a furious commentary. He also offered the advice that, unless his alternative formulations - or something very much like them - were adopted, then it would be better, far better, for the SDWP and the Lassalleans to remain separate organisations and find issues where they could engage in common action. Rather disunity and maintaining principle than unprincipled unity. That was the thrust of Marx's criticism, and yet, despite that, there still are those today - in the name of Marx - who seek to belittle the importance of establishing firm programmatic principles. Pathetic.

Unity and unity

Without a revolutionary programme there can be no successful socialist revolution. This truth cannot be insisted upon too strongly, especially at a time when: (1) the numbers committed to building a mass Communist Party remain tiny; (2) single-issue, anarchistic, ephemeral campaigns flourish; (3) much of the left remains trapped in confessional sects; (4) that, or with the soft left and refugees from the confessional sects, prime energies, loyalties and hopes are invested in Momentum, Forward Momentum, Momentum Internationalists, Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, Left Unity, Labour Left Alliance, Labour Representation Committee, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and other such broad-frontist organisations.

Communists aim for nothing short of an explicitly Marxist party - a mass Communist Party that is fit for the burning tasks of the 21st century: breaking the hold of the labour bureaucracy; transforming the trade unions; delegitimising the existing constitution in the popular mind; securing an active majority for socialism; winning working class state power and superseding the malfunctioning, ecologically destructive, historically exhausted system of capitalism on a global scale.

The working class has a vital

interest in fighting capitalism and realising a communist society. The instinctive struggle for improved wages and conditions, the struggle for self-respect, the struggle for a better way of living propels, drives or at the very least *tends* to move the working class in that direction. So, looking to the future, we have every reason to be confident. Millions upon millions can be won to the cause of communism. In 1932, Bertolt Brecht put things like this in his marvellous little poem, 'In praise of communism':

It's sensible, anyone can understand it.

It's easy.

You're not an exploiter, so you can grasp it.

It's a good thing for you, find out more about it.

The stupid call it stupid and the squalid call it squalid.

It's against squalor and against stupidity.

The exploiters call it a crime but we know:

It is the end of crime.

It is not madness, but the end of madness.

It is not the riddle, but the solution.

It is the simplest thing, so hard to achieve.

Yet Marxism, rightly, is spoken of as a science. After all, another term for it is 'scientific socialism'. Marxism richly deserves that title, because it is solidly founded, rigorously logical and painstakingly developed.

Marx himself had to - and did - penetrate through the outer appearance of the capitalist mode of production, revealing its inner laws of motion and historical tendencies. It took him a lifetime to write *Capital*. (In fact, he was unable to complete even that study. Volume 3 was put together by Engels with only a few mistakes and, much more problematically, *Theories of surplus value*, volume 4, was originally compiled by Kautsky - *Capital* itself being part of a much bigger, multi-volumed project that would encompass "landed property", "wage-labour", "the state", "foreign trade" and the "world market".¹⁰)

While Marx and Engels undoubtedly possessed minds of the first order, they had to put in endless hours of study (not forgetting their leading role as practical organisers and revolutionaries, which immensely enriched their theory). As with Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Darwin and Einstein, their genius was 99% sweat. Likewise, explaining finance capital, the permanent arms economy, the ecological destruction resulting from production for the sake of production, the betrayal of social democracy, the contradictory role of 'official communism', the collapse of bureaucratic socialism in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe ... none of that is "easy".

Such phenomena have to be studied, grasped, in all their complexity, and answers transmitted with *even more* energy and imagination than displayed by physicists, evolutionary biologists and mathematicians. I emphasise the term 'even more', because Marxism is dedicated not merely to explaining what is: the goal is to completely transform what is. A task which Brecht, ending with a neat twist, called "so hard to achieve".

So the mass Communist Party we envisage merges the working class movement with Marxist theory. Incidentally - and it must be emphasised - at this moment in time,

though there are members of the CPGB, there is no CPGB. The *Weekly Worker's* 'What we fight for' column says that, while there are "many so-called 'parties'", there "exists no real Communist Party". One of those paradoxes which exist in the real world that causes endless confusion for those mired in formal logic.

While doing our best to support key strikes and mass movements, taking a disproportionately prominent role in all manner of unity projects on the left (and not forgetting the civil war raging in the Labour Party), we put the aim of establishing a mass Communist Party at the centre of our work. Today that means not only combining political education with ongoing class struggles. It means ending the debilitating disunity of Marxists, and would-be Marxists, their instrumentalisation, their maltreatment, their dumbing down by the countless confessional sects.

Instead we must secure solid, worthwhile, meaningful unity in a viable project for a mass Communist Party. Of course, it is no good just calling for 'unity'. It is necessary to have a definite political programme. Without that there can only be unprincipled lash-ups, empty phrase-mongering and then, usually within a very short time, the inevitable floundering, break-up and bitter recriminations.

Purpose

We have devoted some considerable time and effort to drawing up a *Draft programme*.¹¹ Not to present others with an ultimatum, but as a contribution, a means of provoking thought, stimulating debate and, hopefully, facilitating serious negotiations. Nonetheless, we are proud of what we have produced.

There is nothing faddish, doctrinaire or myopic about our *Draft programme*. It is neither a litany of unfulfillable Keynesian nostrums - eg, Labour's *For the many, not the few* (2017) or Tusc's May 2010 general election manifesto¹² - nor is it a sectarian confession of faith: eg, the Socialist Party of Great Britain's *Our object and declaration of principles*¹³ or the Spartacists' *Declaration of principles*.¹⁴ Nor is it a trite commentary that has to be constantly updated: eg, the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and its *Britain's road to socialism*.¹⁵

No, the communist programme stems from the needs of the real movement. Hence, firstly, the communist programme is a guide to action: ie, how to go about organising the working class into a political party. Secondly, the programme represents the crystallisation of our principles - spun not out of thin air, but derived from the accumulated theoretical knowledge and practical experience of the global working class.

The programme is thereby the foundation for the Communist Party. It links the everyday work of members with the goal of communism and full, collective and individual, human development. To use a well rubbed formula: the programme represents the dialectical unity between theory and practice. It thereby constitutes the basis for agreed actions. It is the standard, the reference point, around which the unity of communists is built, tested and strengthened. Practice teaches.

The Communist Party - organising the advanced *part* of the working class - formulates, agrees and adjusts the programme. But in many ways the Communist Party is in itself an outgrowth of the programme. Recruits are attracted to its far-reaching, inspiring, but theoretically well-grounded demands. Members are then trained, encadred, made into mass leaders by the struggle to realise those goals. In that sense the programme is responsible for generating the Communist Party. For certain, the

main determination runs not from the needs of the organisation, but from the programme and its principles to the organisation and its membership.

Our *Draft programme* is as short and concise as possible. Everything that is not essential was deliberately kept out. Passing facts, prime ministers, presidents, opposition leaders, demonstrations, opinion polls and episodic alliances have no place in the communist programme. Engels, of course, himself urged exactly that approach: "All that is redundant in a programme weakens it".¹⁶

No, our *Draft programme*, rightly, concentrates on principles and strategy. Particular tactics, theoretical and historical explanations - all that should be dealt with elsewhere: party meetings, articles in our press and on the internet, seminars, pamphlets and books. As we confidently stated back in 1991, it should follow that our programme "will therefore not of necessity need rewriting every couple of years, as with the programmes of the opportunists, let alone go out of date even before it has come off the press, as was the case with the CPB's version of the *BRS*" (ie, the *British road to socialism* - the precursor of its *Britain's road to socialism*).¹⁷

For our purposes Lenin provides a pertinent back-up:

The programme should leave questions of means open, allowing the choice of means to the militant organisations and to party congresses that determine the tactics of the party. Questions of tactics, however, can hardly be introduced into the programme (with the exception of the most important questions, questions of principle, such as the attitude to other fighters against the autocracy). Questions of tactics will be discussed by the party newspaper as they arise and will be eventually decided at party congresses.¹⁸

Evidently, the communist programme has a twofold function. On the one side, it presents chosen demands, principles and aims. On the other side, it charts an overall strategic approach to the conquest of state power, based on a concrete analysis of objective socio-economic conditions. Naturally, to state what should be obvious, we seek to navigate the shortest, least costly route from today's cramped, squalid socio-political conditions to a truly human world.

Our programme owes nothing to holy script - it is not fixed, timeless and inviolate. On the contrary, given a major political rupture - eg, Brexit, the break-up of the United Kingdom and its historically unified workers' movement, the abolition of the monarchy, etc - then various passages in our programme ought to be suitably reformulated; that or new sections added.

The programme must become the political compass for millions. As I argued a few years back:

Every clause of the programme must be easily assimilated and understood by advanced workers. It must be written in an accessible style, whereby passages and sentences can be used for agitational purposes and even turned into slogans.¹⁹

We have sought to learn from the best that history provides: eg, in my opinion, the Marx-Engels *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, the *Erfurt programme* of the German SDP and the first and second programmes of Russia's communists. Of course, we have not mindlessly aped. Conditions in the UK, its history, economic peculiarities, specifics and, not least, its constitution and class structure must be taken into account.

Let me briefly describe the structure

of our CPGB *Draft programme*. There are six sections, one logically leading to the other. Form and content being closely connected.

The opening section is a brief preamble describing the origins of the CPGB and the inspiration provided by the October 1917 revolution. We also, rightly, touch upon the liquidation of the CPGB by its various opportunist leaderships and conclude with the organised rebellion staged by the Leninist forces and the subsequent struggle to reforge the party.

The next section - the substantive or real starting point - outlines the main features of the epoch: the epoch of the transition from capitalism, by way of socialism, to communism. Then comes the nature of capitalism in Britain and the consequences of its development. Following on from here comes the economic, social and democratic measures that are needed if the peoples of Britain are to live a full and decent life. Such a minimum, or immediate programme is, admittedly, technically feasible within the confines of present-day capitalism. In actual fact, though, the minimum section of the programme can only be genuinely realised by way of revolution.

There will be those who might want to call some, or all, of the demands contained in this section 'transitional' demands. I am fine with that. The real point though is the necessity of having a minimum programme. Those who reject the minimum programme, as Rosa Luxemburg did in 1918, disarm the party: "socialism", she proclaimed, "this is the minimum we are going to secure".²⁰ In the midst of a revolutionary situation it is doubtless right to raise slogans such as "all power to workers' and soldiers' councils". But if the revolutionary situation is drowned in blood and becomes a counterrevolutionary situation, what does the party then have to say?

From our minimum demands we move on to the character of the British revolution and the position of the various classes and strata. Marxists, let it be noted, do not consider non-proletarian classes to be one reactionary mass. Sections of the middle class can and must be won over. Next, again logically, comes the workers' government in Britain and the worldwide transition to socialism and communism. Here is our maximum programme. Finally, the necessity for all partisans of the working class to unite in a Communist Party is dealt with. The essential organisational principles of democracy and unity in action are stated and we underline in no uncertain terms why the CPGB must combine unity in action with internal democracy and the open expression of differences.

SWP versus Marx

Though communists treat their programme with the utmost seriousness, talk to any SWP loyalist and I guarantee you that they will adopt a completely dismissive, even a hostile attitude, if you dare suggest that it would be a good idea to adopt a programme. There have been, thankfully, various members of the SWP who have agreed with us on this subject. But now, of course, they are ex-members.

Anyway, in justifying the SWP's bizarre aversion to adopting any kind of rounded programme, its loyalists typically insist that a programme would be too rigid, inflexible and constricting. Chains and manacles are even referred to. Therefore, it supposedly follows, a programme is a horrible danger that must be avoided at all costs. To provide themselves with the sanction of 'orthodoxy', SWP loyalists will, yes, invoke the ghost of Marx and the "Every step of the real movement" statement. That is meant to clinch the argument. In fact, it does no such thing.

Neither Marx nor anyone standing in the authentic Marxist tradition has ever denied the necessity of a programme. It was the revisionist, Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932), who openly scorned the maximum programme and tried to theoretically justify elevating the organisation of the party into a thing for itself. Unconsciously this was echoed and turned into dogma by the SWP's Machiavellian founder-leader, Tony Cliff. He routinely warned against adopting a programme. Gaining recruits and factional advantage was his sole guide.

Yes, a democratically agreed programme would have created intolerable difficulties for the SWP central committee and its many and sudden about-turns under Cliff. True, in the early 1950s, when his Socialist Review Group was deeply ensconced in the bowels of the Labour Party, Cliff agreed to a pinched, 12-point programme of "transitional demands", which were meant to attract and recruit "individual" Labour and trade union activists:

1. The complete nationalisation of heavy industry, the banks, insurance and the land.
2. The renationalisation without compensation of all de-nationalised industries.
3. Suspend interest on the national debt. Compensation to ex-owners only as a result of an income test administered by elected workers' committees.
4. A majority of workers' representatives on all nationalised and area boards, subject to frequent election, immediate recall, and receiving the average wage obtaining in the industry.
5. Two or more workers' representatives to sit on boards of all private concerns employing 20 or more people with access to all documents.
6. Workers' committees to control hiring and firing and working conditions.
7. Abolition of payments for national health service and of private beds.
8. Establishment of principle of full work or full maintenance.
9. Sliding scale of adequate pensions, based on new and realistic cost-of-living indices.
10. Interest-free housing loans to local authorities and drastic powers to requisition and rent free, state-owned land.
11. A foreign policy based on independence of both Washington and Moscow.
12. Withdrawal of British troops overseas; freedom of colonial peoples and offer of economic and technical aid.²¹

It was Duncan Hallas who wrote and submitted the original "transitional programme" to the SRG. Cliff, however, ensured that it was stripped, shorn, of anything too radical: eg, the "overthrow of the Tory government by all the means available to the working class" and "defence of socialist Britain" against Washington and Moscow.

The inspiration was clearly provided by Leon Trotsky. Here, though, the 'transitional method' is taken to the point where democratic questions, both in the workers' movement and society at large, go ignored, along with the attitude towards the middle classes. The tasks of the working class movement are reduced to trade union politics. As to the "final aim" of working class rule, socialism and the transition to communism, that is left to spontaneity. Hallas explains the duplicity involved. The "programme of demands" must be "made to appear both necessary and realisable to broad sections of the workers, given their present

(reformist) level of understanding, but which in reality pass beyond the framework of bourgeois democracy. Naturally... [this is] only part (a fairly small part) of what we advocate."²²

With the Clifflite turn away from Labour Party deep entryism in the mid-1960s, economic minimalism was abandoned for a heady brew of eclectic Luxemburgism and the International Socialists. Cliff sought distance from what then passed as Leninism and Trotskyism.

It is rumoured that in the early 1970s Cliff's loyal lieutenant, Chris Harman, penned a draft programme. Needless to say, it never saw the light of day. From then on afterwards Cliff wanted nothing to do with anything that smacked of a programme - including a dishonest, severely limited, truncated, "transitional" one (that is, until two years before his death and the now totally forgotten and thoroughly minimalist 1998 Action programme).

I shall discuss this *Action programme*, along with Trotsky's transitional programme (*The death agony of capitalism and the tasks of the Fourth International*, 1938), in the second part of this article.

Meanwhile, suffice to say, what went for Cliff went double for his chosen heir and successor, John Rees, especially with his Respect popular-front adventure. The *modus vivendi* of Respect was, of course, to unite "secular socialists with Muslim activists" on the basis of whatever it took to get local and national candidates elected.²³ Much to the discredit of the post-Rees SWP, it has steadfastly refused to conduct any kind of autopsy into the Respect popular-front debacle. Indeed, the SWP central committee continues to blithely pursue an ever narrowing expediency.

Programmatically the organisation remains unencumbered - well, apart, that is, from its 'What the SWP stands for' column in *Socialist Worker* (and the slightly different 'About us' which appears in 'SWP online'). Except for the most narrow-minded loyalists, it is clear that this thumbnail sketch contains little more than a few selected SWP shibboleths - there is no overall strategy ●

Notes

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2. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 4, Moscow 1977, p235.
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4. LT Lih *Lenin rediscovered: What is to be done? in context* Chicago IL 2008, p111.
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7. ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=688.
8. libcom.org/files/statismandanarchy.pdf.
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10. K Marx *Theories of surplus value* part one, Moscow 1969, p14.
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12. tusc.org.uk/policy.php.
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15. *Britain's road to socialism* (2020) is credited with being "up to the minute". Therefore, almost by definition, like all previous versions it is instantly made outdated by the course of events. Take the November 1989 version. Its Labour Party road to socialism was premised on what was supposed to be the "decisively" shifting international balance of class forces. "Socialism" in the Soviet Union, eastern Europe and China would allow a peaceful road to national socialism in Britain through the election of Labour, CPB and progressive MPs. Needless to say, when the CPB rewrote its programme in 1992, though the Soviet Union and the "socialist countries" in eastern Europe had to be crudely airbrushed out, the parliamentarism remained.
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ECONOMY

Prepare for the scarring

After the lockdown ends we should expect the worst, warns Michael Roberts

Optimism reigns in global stock markets, particularly in the US. After falling around 30% when the lockdowns to contain the Covid-19 virus pandemic were imposed, the US stock market has jumped back 30% in April. Why?

Well, for two reasons. The first is that the US Federal Reserve has intervened to inject humungous amounts of credit through buying up bonds and financial instruments of all sorts. The other central banks have also reacted similarly with credit injections, although nothing compares with the Fed's monetary impulse. As a result, the US stock market's valuation against future corporate earnings has rocketed up in line with the Fed injections. If the Fed will buy any bond or financial instrument you hold, how can you go wrong?

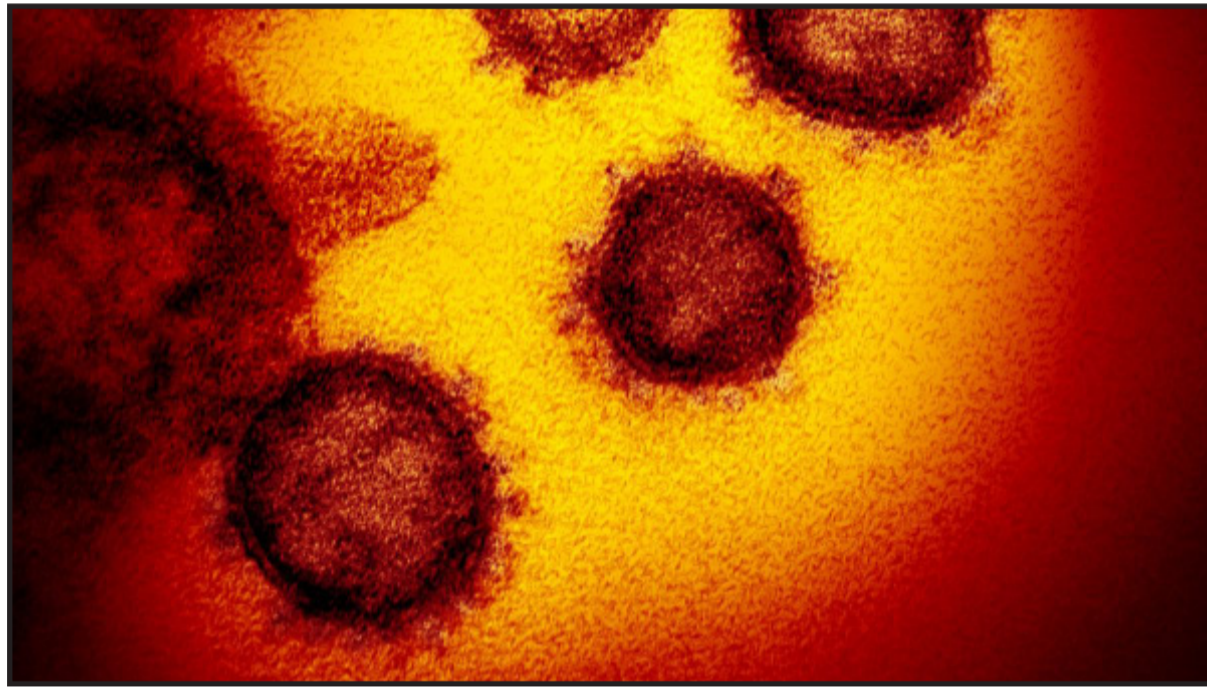
The other reason for a stock market rally - at the same time as data for the 'real' economy reveal a collapse in national output, investment and employment nearly everywhere (with worse to come) - is the belief that the lockdowns will soon be over; treatments and vaccines are on their way to stop the virus, and so economies will leap back within three to six months and the pandemic will soon be forgotten.

For example, US treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin reiterated his view, expressed at the beginning of the lockdowns, that "you're going to see the economy really bounce back in July, August and September". And White House economics advisor, Kevin Hassett, reckoned that by the fourth quarter the US economy "is going to be really strong, and next year is going to be a tremendous year". Bank of America's chairman and CEO, Brian Moynihan, reckoned that consumer spending had already bottomed out and would soon rise nicely again in the fourth quarter, followed by double-digit growth in gross domestic product in 2021!

The claim that US personal consumption has bottomed out seems difficult to justify when you look at data for the first quarter. Indeed, in March, personal spending in the US dropped 7.5% month over month - the largest decline in personal spending on record.

But it is not just the official and banking voices who reckon that the economic damage from the pandemic and lockdowns will be short, if not so sweet. Many Keynesian economists in the US are making the same point. Previously I pointed to the claim by Keynesian guru, Larry Summers (former treasury secretary under Bill Clinton), that the lockdown slump was just the same as businesses in summer tourist places closing down for the winter. As soon as summer comes along, they all open up and are ready to go just as before.¹ The pandemic is thus just a seasonal thing.

Now the Keynesian guru of them all, Paul Krugman, reckons that this slump - so far way worse on its impact on the global economy than the 2008-09 great recession - was not an economic crisis, but "a disaster relief situation".² Krugman argues that this is "a natural disaster", which "like a war is a temporary event". So the answer is that "it should be met largely through higher taxes and lower spending in the future rather than right away, which is another way of saying that it should be paid for in large part by a temporary increase in the deficit". Once this spending had done the trick, the economy would return just as before and the spending



Tiny virus, mega consequences

deficit would only be "temporary". And Robert Reich, the supposedly leftwing former labour secretary (again under Clinton), reckoned that the crisis was not economic, but a health crisis and, as soon as the health problem was contained (presumably this summer), the economy would "snap back".

You would expect the Trump advisors and Wall Street chiefs to proclaim a quick return to normal (even though economists in investment houses mainly take a different view), but you may find it surprising that leading Keynesians agree. I think the reason is that any Keynesian analysis of recessions and slumps cannot deal with this pandemic. Keynesian theory starts with the view that slumps are the result a collapse in 'effective demand' that then leads to a fall in output and employment. But, as I have explained before, this slump is not the result of a collapse in 'demand', but from a closure of production - both in manufacturing and particularly in services.³ It is a 'supply shock', not a 'demand shock'. For that matter, the 'financialisation' theorists of the Minsky school are also at a loss, because this slump is not the result of a credit crunch or financial crash, although that may yet come.

So the Keynesians think that as soon as people get back to work and start spending, 'effective demand' (even 'pent-up' demand) will shoot up and the capitalist economy will return to normal.

But, if you approach the slump from the angle of supply or production, and in particular the profitability of resuming output and employment, which is the Marxist approach, then both the cause of the slump and the likelihood of a slow and weak recovery become clear.

Great recession

Let us remind ourselves of what happened after the end of the great recession. The stock market boomed year after year, but the 'real' economy of production, investment and workers' incomes crawled along. Since 2009, US per capita GDP annual growth has averaged just 1.6%. So at the end of 2019 per capita GDP was 13% below trend growth prior to 2008. That gap was now equal to \$10,200 per person - a permanent loss of income. And now Goldman Sachs is forecasting a drop in per capita GDP that would wipe out even those gains of the last 10 years!

The world is now much more integrated than it was in 2008. The global value chain, as it is called, is now pervasive and large. Even if some countries are able to begin economic recovery, the disruption in world trade may seriously hamper the speed and strength of that pick-up. Take China, where the economic recovery from its lockdown is underway. Economic activity is still well below 2019 levels and the pace of recovery seems slow - mainly because Chinese manufacturers and exporters have nobody to sell to.

This is not a phenomenon of the virus or a health issue. Growth in world trade has been barely equal to growth in global GDP since 2009, and way below its rate prior to then. Now the World Trade Organisation sees no return to even that lower trajectory for at least two years.

The massive public-sector spending (over \$3 trillion) by the US Congress and the huge Fed monetary stimulus (\$4 trillion) will not stop this deep slump or even get the US economy back to its previous (low) trend. Indeed, Oxford Economics reckons that there is every possibility of a second wave in the pandemic that could force new lockdown measures and keep the US economy in a slump and in stagnation through 2023!

But why are capitalist economies (at least in the 21st century) not jumping back to previous trends? Well, as I have argued, there are two key reasons. The first is that the profitability of capital in the major economies has not returned to levels reached in the late 1990s, let alone in the 'golden age' of economic growth and mild recessions of the 1950s and 1960s. And the second is that, in order to cope with this decline in profitability, companies increased their debt levels, fuelled by low interest rates, either to sustain production and/or to switch funds into financial assets and speculation.

But linked to these underlying factors is another: what has been called the scarring of the economy, or hysteresis. Hysteresis in the field of economics refers to an event in the economy that persists into the future, even after the factors that led to that event have been removed. Hysteresis is the argument that short-term effects can manifest themselves into long-term problems, which inhibit growth and make it difficult to 'return to normal'.

Keynesians traditionally reckon that fiscal stimulus will turn slump

economies around. However, even they have recognised that short-run economic conditions can have lasting impacts. Frozen credit markets and depressed consumer spending can stop the creation of otherwise vibrant small businesses. Larger companies may delay or reduce spending on research and development.

As Jack Rasmus put it well in a recent post on his blog,

It takes a long time for both business and consumers to restore their 'confidence' levels in the economy and change ultra-cautious investing and purchasing behaviour to more optimistic spending-investing patterns. Unemployment levels hang high over the economy for some time. Many small businesses never reopen and when they do with fewer employees and often at lower wages. Larger companies hoard their cash. Banks typically are very slow to lend with their own money. Other businesses are reluctant to invest and expand, and thus rehire, given the cautious consumer spending, business hoarding and banks' conservative lending behaviour. The Fed, the central bank, can make a mass of free money and cheap loans available, but businesses and households may be reluctant to borrow, preferring to hoard their cash - and the loans as well.⁴

Scarring

In other words, an economic recession can lead to "scarring" - that is, long-lasting damage to the economy.

A couple of years ago, the International Monetary Fund published a paper that looked at 'scarring'. Its economists noted that after recessions there is not always a V-shaped recovery to previous trends. Indeed, it has been often the case that the previous growth trend is never re-established. Using updated data from 1974 to 2012, they found that irreparable damage to output is not limited to financial and political crises.

All types of recessions, on average, lead to permanent output losses:

In the traditional view of the business cycle, a recession consists of a temporary decline in output below its trend line, but a fast rebound of output back to its initial upward trend line during the recovery phase ... In contrast, our

evidence suggests that a recovery consists only of a return of growth to its long-term expansion rate - without a high-growth rebound back to the initial trend ... In other words, recessions can cause permanent economic scarring.⁵

And that does not just apply to one economy, but also to the gap between rich and poor economies: "Poor countries suffer deeper and more frequent recessions and crises, each time suffering permanent output losses and losing ground."

The IMF paper complements the view of the difference between 'classic' recessions and depressions that I outlined in my book of 2016, *The long depression*. There I show that in depressions, the recovery after a slump takes the form not of a V-shape, but more of a square root, which sets an economy on new and lower trajectory.

I suspect that there will be plenty of scarring of the capitalist sector from this pandemic slump. Min Ouyang, an associate professor at Beijing's Tsinghua University, found that in past recessions the 'scarring' of entrepreneurs from the collapse of cash flow outweighed the beneficial effects of forcing weak companies to shut down and 'cleansing' the way for those who survive:

"The scarring effect of this recession is probably going to be more severe than of any past recessions ... If we say that pandemics are the new normal, then people will be much more hesitant to take risks," she says.

Households and companies would want more savings and less risk to protect against possible future shutdowns, while governments would need to stockpile emergency equipment and ensure they could rapidly manufacture more within their own borders. Even if the pandemic turns out to be a one-off, many people will be reluctant to socialise once the lockdown ends, extending the pain for companies and economies that rely on tourism, travel, eating out and mass events.

And this slump will accelerate trends in capitalist accumulation that were already underway: Lisa B Kahn, a Yale economist, has found that after slumps companies try to replace workers with machines and so force workers returning to employment to accept lower incomes or find other jobs, which pay less.⁶ After all, that is one of the purposes of the 'cleansing' process for capital: to get labour costs down and boost profitability. It scars labour for life. As US investment advisor John Mauldin says,

This experience is going to leave deep scars on the economy and on consumer/investor/business sentiment. This is going to scar a generation just as deeply as the great depression scarred our parents and grandparents.⁷ ●

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.com.

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OUR HISTORY

The centrality of hegemony

150 years after his birth, how to evaluate Lenin and his ideas? Lars T Lih emphasises his consistency

Lenin has been identified in many ways. His admirers might describe him as the father of the Soviet Union, the founder of the international communist movement or a great Marxist theorist. His detractors might weigh in with 'fanatical sectarian' and/or 'supremely cynical elitist' and/or 'demagogue supreme' - or perhaps simply founder of the Soviet Union. But let us work on a new and original plan: let us consider how Lenin himself consistently defined his own political identity, and then try to put that identity into historical context.

For most of his political career, Lenin self-identified as a leader of "revolutionary social democracy" in Russia. "Revolutionary social democracy" was the name given to the left wing of international social democracy during the era of the Second International in the decades before World War I. In 1917-18, Lenin rejected the label 'social democrat' in favour of 'communist', because he felt that the banner of social democracy had been dragged in the mud by the western European parties who supported the war effort of their respective governments. However, this name-change was not a rejection, but rather an anguished affirmation of his political identity. In Lenin's mind, *he* was the one who remained true to the tenets of pre-war revolutionary social democracy, while the leaders of most other parties in the Second International were renegades who had betrayed the faith. As a consequence, his wartime writings aggressively insisted on his own originality, claiming that his case was based firmly on the pre-war consensus of revolutionary social democracy.

In order to understand Lenin's political identity, then, we should not be too hasty and focus just on what was individual to him alone. We should start in the early 1890s, when the young Vladimir Ulyanov was forming his political identity, and look with his eyes at the socialist movement in western Europe. Marx and Engels stood out from other socialist currents - not so much in their conception of the nature of socialist society as in their conception of the path to socialism. While other socialists saw socialism as something brought to the workers to relieve their suffering, Marx and Engels saw it as something created by the workers, acting as a class. The core of Marx's legacy to revolutionary social democracy is the idea of the world-historical mission of the proletariat to achieve state power as a class and use this power to construct a socialist society.

A number of crucial implications flowed from this vision. First, the proletariat had to be made ready for its historical mission through enlightenment about the nature of the mission and through organisation, enabling it to act as a class. The practical, concrete forms used to bring enlightenment and organisation to the proletariat were worked out on the ground by generations of activists, particularly in Germany. The result was the immensely influential SPD model: that is, the array of techniques employed by the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands. The centrepiece of the SPD model was an enormous socialist press, with hundreds of newspapers that fostered a distinctive class identity for the workers. Other tools featured in the SPD model were face-to-face agitation, rallies, leaflets, election campaigns, party-affiliated trade unions, all sorts of voluntary cultural organisations, such as choral societies, and even a widespread use of taverns as a meeting place. The logic of the SPD model can be summed



Lenin with Trotsky and Kamenev

up as a *permanent campaign* to instil a sense of mission into the everyday life of the workers.

Kautsky

The SPD model depended crucially on the existence of some measure of *political freedom* in society as a whole - that is, freedom of press, of assembly, of organisation and the like. Thus another fundamental implication of the world-historical mission of the proletariat was that socialism had a vital stake in anti-absolutist 'democratic' revolutions - a commitment that distinguished Marxists from most other 19th century socialist currents. Another implication became more apparent as the century progressed. In the 1840s, when the *Communist manifesto* was written, the bourgeoisie was given the role of leader of the anti-absolutist forces, with the proletariat as junior partner. But the bourgeoisie grew less and less interested in thorough-going democratic reform, while the proletariat grew out of its previously primitive state and formed parties such as the SPD. As a result, the proletariat was given a new, if subsidiary, historical mission: to act as leader of the *democratic revolution*, standing at the head of the *narod, das Volk, le peuple* - that is, the lower 'democratic' classes in society as a whole. In the early 20th century, the Russian social democrats gave this leadership role the name of *hegemony*, but the basic logic was part and parcel of revolutionary social democracy.

The principal spokesman of revolutionary social democracy was Karl Kautsky - a fact which explains his extraordinary importance in Lenin's outlook and writings. Of course, Lenin formed his own independent judgment on the various topics he read about in Kautsky's writings (Marx, the SPD model, colonialism, and on and on), but he almost always agreed with Kautsky's take. Kautsky was able to express the essential principles of revolutionary social democracy in a number of pithy formulations. The idea of historical mission is implicit in his definition of social democracy as "the merger of socialism and the worker movement": that is, the necessary role of the

militant workers in turning the ideals of socialism into reality. Lenin paid Kautsky an extravagant compliment when he remarked that Kautsky's famous formula "reproduced the foundational ideas of the *Communist manifesto*".

Kautsky also insisted (in a formulation immediately taken up by Russian social democrats) on the primordial importance of political freedom:

These freedoms [of association, of assembly, of the press] are light and air for the proletariat; he who lets them wither or withholds them - he who keeps the proletariat from the struggle to win these freedoms and to extend them - that person is one of the proletariat's worst enemies.

Finally, the idea behind hegemony - proletarian leadership of the people at large - was also set forth by Kautsky in the early 1890s, when he claimed that social democracy must become "the representative not only of the industrial wage-labourers, but of all the labouring and exploited strata - and therefore the great majority of the population, what is commonly known as the *Volk*."

All of these principles had immense relevance for Russia, as we shall see. And to fully grasp what Kautsky's writings meant for Lenin, we need to know that Kautsky not only enunciated general principles, but he also played a direct role in working out their application to Russia. His contribution was particularly important in the case of hegemony - and, as all factions in Russia understood, his interventions generally favoured the Bolsheviks. All this explains Lenin's titanic rage when he felt that Kautsky had betrayed his own principles after 1914: Lenin obsessively contrasted the "renegade Kautsky" to "Kautsky when he was a Marxist".

Let us now return to the young Russian revolutionary working out his political identity in the early 1890s. By 1894, Lenin had thoroughly assimilated the cutting-edge logic of revolutionary social democracy and had sketched out its application to Russia in particular.

His first major political writing ended with the following carefully constructed sentence (Lenin's emphases):

When the advanced representatives of this class assimilate the ideas of scientific socialism, the idea of the historical role of the Russian worker - when these ideas receive a broad dissemination - when durable organisations are created among the workers that transform the present uncoordinated economic war of the workers into a purposive class struggle - then the Russian worker, elevated to the head of all democratic elements, will overthrow absolutism and lead the *Russian proletariat* (side by side with the proletariat of all countries) by the *direct road of open political struggle to the victorious communist revolution*.

All of the constitutive elements of revolutionary social democracy are here clearly expressed and put into a specifically Russian context: the role assigned by history to the Russian workers, the need for enlightenment and organisation, the imperative of overthrowing absolutism and the proletariat's position at the head of all democratic elements. Remarkably, Lenin lived to see all of these elements put into practice - but not without some bitter disappointments and significant adjustments.

First decade

A useful simplification divides Lenin's political career into three decades, each with its particular major focus. The focus of the decade 1894-1904 was the creation of a society-wide social democratic party in Russia. Some observers at the time (and still today) thought that Marxism - the analysis of capitalism and the vision of socialism based on advanced industry - was barely applicable to tsarist Russia, with its backward economy and rudimentary working class. At most, it seemed, Marxism promised a better society in the distant future. The logic of revolutionary social democracy, however, gave Russian Marxists a positive and uplifting role to play

even in backward Russia. They could start enlightening and organising even a nascent working class, and indeed they had some early and encouraging success in leading strikes. Russian social democrats also had an immediate political goal: the overthrow of tsarist absolutism and the conquest of political freedom. They could even lay claim to a central role in Russian political life by asserting proletarian hegemony in the upcoming anti-tsarist revolution.

Revolutionary social democracy thus offered a way out from the dead end faced by the Russian revolutionary tradition in the 1880s. An informed British observer, writing in 1905, describes the 1880s as the Russian socialists themselves remembered it:

We thus arrive at the beginning of the 80s. Consider the situation - the People's Will Party [*Narodnaya Volya*] lying on the ground broken and exhausted, reaction rampant, all that was but a short time ago hopeful, disheartened and embittered. Where shall we turn for light and guidance? To the people? It is mute. To the working class? There is none. To the educated classes? They are all full of pessimism in the consciousness of their weakness. What, then, next? Is all hope to be given up? Is there no salvation for Russia? At this moment of darkness and despair a new and strange voice resounds through the space - a voice full of harshness and sarcasm, yet vibrating with hope. That is the voice of Russian social democracy.

The immediate challenge to applying revolutionary social democracy to Russian conditions was the complete lack of political freedom. How could the SPD model of a permanent campaign be applied without legal newspapers, legal rallies or legal election campaigns - to sum up, without a legal social democratic party? The answer - as in Germany, one that was worked out on the ground by a long series of activists, but then given eloquent exposition in Lenin's *What is to be done?* (1902) - was to create an underground party that combined, to the greatest extent possible, stable contacts with the mass worker base with protection from police harassment and arrest. The result can be called a *konspiratsiia* party, since the Russian word *konspiratsiia* does not mean 'conspiracy' (and indeed is usually translated as something like 'secrecy'), but rather the set of rules that allowed the party to *escape* from the self-imposed isolation of a genuine conspiracy (*zagovor* in Russian). Indeed, *konspiratsiia* can be defined as "the fine art of not getting arrested".

The role of 'professional revolutionaries' was to make this kind of underground party workable - Lenin put this term into general circulation, but it was adopted by the entire socialist underground, because it pointed to a familiar and necessary type. The common idea that Lenin invented a 'new type of party' that aimed at a conspiratorial caste of professional revolutionaries, recruited solely from the intelligentsia, is the opposite of the truth. In fact, the ideal of the *konspiratsiia* party and the role of the professional revolutionary were functional necessities for *any* underground political party (and before 1905 all Russian parties were underground) and as such they were fully accepted across the socialist spectrum.

The *konspiratsiia* party thus represented the SPD model as applied to the very uncongenial conditions of

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tsarist absolutism. Because of tsarist repression, the *konspiratsiia* party had to be an illegal, underground party. But, as far as possible, it would imitate the German SPD in particular. For example, Lenin made a *political newspaper* - *Iskra* - the centrepiece of his plan for a Russian party. Far from worrying about workers and their alleged reformist tendencies (the heart of the standard textbook interpretation of Lenin), his whole plan depended on his confidence that the workers would respond to the social democratic message *even when* the message was conveyed in a hard-to-get, hard-to-read underground newspaper. And in fact, *Iskra* did become a very influential newspaper.

The near-term political goal of this party was the revolutionary overthrow of absolutism in order to achieve the political freedom that was needed for what Lenin's 1894 sentence called "open political struggle". Lenin's political programme can therefore be summarised as follows: let us build a party as much like the German SPD as possible under tsarist conditions, in order to overthrow tsarism and build a party even more like the German SPD.

Second decade

The second decade of Lenin's career (1904-14) focused on *hegemony*: the socialist proletariat's duty of providing political leadership to the peasants in Russia's upcoming democratic revolution. Of course, 'hegemony' has a lot of other meanings today, most of them rather negative - but in the Bolshevik case, it is really a synonym for *leadership*. According to the hegemony tactic, the peasants would accept proletarian leadership, because they were rational enough to see how this leadership would help them attain their own aims.

The logic behind the hegemony tactic in Russia was as follows: National political leadership in the revolution can only be provided by urban-based parties. In practice, this leadership role falls either to the party of the anti-tsarist bourgeoisie (the Constitutional Democrats, or Kadets) or to the party of the socialist proletariat (Social Democracy). If the liberals successfully take over the leadership role, the revolution will fall far short of what it can and should achieve. Only social democratic leadership can ensure that the revolution would be carried "to the end" (*do kotsa*). The deeper Marxist logic of the hegemony tactic was the claim that the socialist proletariat was the most effective champion of partial aims, such as democratic revolution, *precisely because* it saw these partial aims as means to the ultimate goal of a classless society.

A full democratic revolution was within reach because there existed a solid "community of interest" between worker and peasant. By the same token, however, the necessity of the peasant ally meant that a strictly *socialist* revolution was off the agenda - unless an international socialist revolution reshuffled the cards. The socialist revolution could only be the work of a proletarian party carrying out its own full class interests without compromise ('dictatorship of the proletariat'). This conclusion about the peasant ally was axiomatic for all Russian social democrats (including Trotsky).

To jump ahead a bit: the hegemony tactic of proletarian class leadership of the peasants, became the basis of Bolshevik victory in 1917 and during the civil war. The Red Army was hegemony in action: a peasant army, fighting to protect the revolution that gave them land and eliminated the gentry class, but taking orders from an urban-based worker socialist party. And this means - to jump ahead yet another decade - that Lenin's attitude toward the peasantry was the *opposite* of Stalin's forced mass collectivisation in the 30s. In fact, during the civil war, Lenin denounced in colourful terms any effort by local Bolsheviks to use force

as a way of getting the peasants to join collective farms.

Third decade

In his last decade (1914-24), Lenin focused on socialist revolution in both western Europe and Russia as a practical task. We need to proceed carefully, as we trace the evolution of Lenin's views on this topic, if only because a number of widespread misconceptions (discussed below) hinder an accurate view. We can begin with what we can call Lenin's October theses: a short, semi-official party document entitled 'Several theses', issued in October 1915. After the February revolution, Lenin himself endorsed his theses by claiming that they did not have to be amended in any way to fit the new situation. In the October theses, Lenin put the upcoming Russian Revolution into the following narrative framework:

The task confronting the proletariat of Russia is to bring the bourgeois-democratic revolution to the end *in order* to kindle the socialist revolution in Europe. The latter task [socialist revolution] now stands very close to the former [democratic revolution], yet it remains a special and second task, for it is a question of the different classes who are collaborating with the proletariat of Russia. In the former task, it is the petty-bourgeois peasantry of Russia who are collaborators; in the latter, it is the proletariat of other countries.

The two class allies correspond to the two aspects of the Russian socialist working class: Russian peasants as fellow fighters for the democratic revolution, and European workers as fellow fighters for the socialist revolution.

The October theses also affirmed continuity with the hegemony tactic that defined pre-war Bolshevism:

Only a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry can form the social content of the impending revolution in Russia ... The monarchy and the feudal-minded landowners cannot be overthrown unless the proletariat is supported by the peasantry.

Lenin's slogan, 'Revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry', summarises the hegemony tactic: strive to create a worker-peasant *vlast* (state power) that will carry the democratic revolution "to the end" on the basis of the shared interests of Russian workers and peasants.

When he looked forward to the Russian revolution that he confidently saw approaching, Lenin claimed that the proletariat and its party could play a "leadership role" if "the petty bourgeoisie [aka peasants] swing to the left at the decisive moment" (as actually happened in 1917). Throughout his wartime writings, Lenin also argued that his confidence about the impending socialist revolution in western Europe was based on the pre-war consensus of revolutionary social democracy.

The wartime environment added two relatively new elements to Lenin's thinking. We can conveniently discuss this from the vantage point of 1917, especially *State and revolution*. The economic imperatives of wartime mobilisation led to extensive state regulation, which Lenin called "steps toward socialism", even when they were undertaken by 'bourgeois' governments. In *State and revolution*, he stated his vision of the final destination of these steps toward socialism:

The vital and burning question of *present-day* politics [is] the expropriation of the capitalists, the conversion of *all* citizens into workers and other employees of *one* huge 'syndicate' - the whole state - and the complete subordination of

the entire work of this syndicate to a genuinely democratic state, the state of the Soviets of Worker and Soldier Deputies.

In his day-to-day political message to Russian workers, soldiers and peasants in 1917, Lenin emphasised that he advocated only those steps toward socialism, only those policies acknowledged to be necessary by all parties. Lenin argued that such 'steps' were straightforward and even easy to put into practice; furthermore, they would be able to gather majority support from the Russian population as a whole. He proved to be wrong about the ease of effectively implementing such measures - for example, nationalisation of the banks - but he was justified in saying that there existed a widespread consensus about the need for very ambitious state regulation.

Political freedom

The other new element - or rather, the conspicuous absence of a familiar element - is the disappearance of political freedom as an imperative goal. The topic barely arises in *State and revolution*. Lenin lauded "soviet democracy" mainly because it encouraged mass participation in the work of government - certainly not because it extended political freedom. What we do find in these pages is a categorical denial of any value whatsoever in bourgeois democracy: "Freedom in capitalist society *always* [emphasis added] remains about the same as it was in the ancient Greek republics: freedom for the slave-owners." What is the point, then, to fight to transform tsarism into democracy, or to extend democracy where it is established?

Coupled with such sentiments is a clear foreshadowing of repressive policies in the Russian civil war and later. Any attempt by "the gentry who wish to preserve their capitalist habits or by the workers who have been thoroughly corrupted by capitalism" to escape from social control will be accompanied by "swift and severe punishment, [for] the armed workers are practical men and not sentimental intellectuals, and they will scarcely allow anyone to trifle with them".

After the February revolution in 1917, the Bolsheviks ran on the platform, 'All power to the soviets!' Crucially, the goal of soviet power did *not* imply any break with the scenario outlined in the October theses of 1915 about democratic revolution in Russia. In the revealing article, 'A basic question', written in late April 1917, Lenin makes this point in his usual emphatic way:

In whose hands should 'the political *vlast*' be, *even* from the point of view of a vulgar bourgeois democrat? ... In the hands of the majority of the population. Do the 'Russian toiling masses' ... constitute the majority of the population in Russia? Undoubtedly they do - the overwhelming majority! How then, without betraying democracy - even democracy as understood by a Miliukov [leader of the liberal Kadet party] - *can* one be opposed to the 'seizure of the political *vlast*' by the 'Russian toiling masses'?

Thus the post-February situation in Russia did not in any way constrain Lenin from reaffirming the vision set forth in the October theses of a 'democratic' (worker-peasant *vlast*) revolution in Russia sparking off and eventually merging with a Europe-wide 'socialist' (proletariat-only) revolution. The new theme of steps toward socialism did not change the basic contours of Lenin's predictive narrative, as shown by this passage from 'A basic question':

After such measures, further *steps* towards socialism in Russia will

become fully possible, and - given the aid to the workers here that will come from the more advanced and experienced workers of western Europe, ... Russia's *genuine* transition to socialism would be *inevitable*, and the success of such a transition would be *assured*.

We may thus paraphrase the outlook of Lenin and his fellow Bolsheviks as follows: technically speaking, the 1917 revolution that created a worker-peasant *vlast* is not a 'socialist revolution', as we Marxists understand the term. But this fact is irrelevant, because events - international revolution abroad, steps toward socialism at home - will quickly put Russia *on the track* of a fully-fledged socialist revolution. We therefore do not have to revise our earlier conceptions about the nature of socialist revolution.

As late as the end of 1918, Lenin could still believe (as he put it) "things have turned out just as we said they would." The German Revolution of November 1918 was viewed as the prologue to a Europe-wide socialist revolution. At home, Lenin thought he saw the beginning of a revolutionary wave in the villages based on the rural proletarians, thus moving the Russian Revolution past the stage of the "alliance with the whole peasantry" that was a defining feature of a democratic revolution. And steps toward socialism, as embodied in the economic policies of the Soviet state, while certainly uninspiring to date, had been started and would no doubt go further. This outlook finds expression in *The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky*, written during Lenin's convalescence from a gunshot wound in late 1918.

By 1919, this hopeful scenario had to be discarded, at least for the foreseeable future, and a new rationale had to be found to justify the socialist credentials of the Bolshevik revolution. First, one ally, the European proletariat, failed to carry out its own revolution (although the Bolsheviks credited this ally with preventing full-scale military intervention in Russia). Second, the Bolsheviks realised that they could not rely on effective support from the rural proletarians - in fact, the survival of the revolutionary state depended on cementing the alliance with the majority of the peasants. This realisation found expression in the 1919 campaign to affirm a partnership with 'the middle peasantry' - a discursive category hitherto little used. This major Bolshevik campaign has been completely forgotten by historians and replaced by a myth of a 'Bolshevik war against the peasantry'.

Finally, the original logic behind steps toward socialism had been undermined. In 1917, Lenin argued in effect that steps toward socialism *must* be taken now, due to the economic crisis. But, more and more, the Bolsheviks were put on the defensive and forced to argue that steps toward socialism *cannot* be taken now, due to the economic crisis. As the Bolsheviks strove to overcome an unending series of crises, they were forced into compromise after compromise - and they were very aware of the fact. This development has also been obscured by a myth of the historians: namely, that during so-called 'war communism', the Bolsheviks were filled with 'euphoria' at the prospect of an immediate leap into full socialism.

The Bolsheviks were thus faced with a stark challenge to their ideological self-definition as a *de facto* socialist revolution: *either* remain true to the pre-war axiom of revolutionary social democracy and drop the claim to a *socialist* revolution; *or* drop the axiom by declaring the *compatibility* of socialist revolution with a worker-peasant alliance. This second claim amounted to retaining the logic of the hegemony tactic - proletarian leadership of the

peasants - but ignoring its previous limitation to democratic revolution. Lenin more and more explicitly chose this second course and in his final articles of 1923 set out a scenario of leading the peasants *all the way* to socialism.

'Rearming'

Once more, a crucial development has been obscured by a historical myth that we can label the rearming narrative, to use a term from Lev Trotsky, one of its originators. According to this narrative, the pre-1917 outlook of the Bolsheviks was completely inadequate to the challenges of the post-February situation, so that Lenin had to 'rearm the party'. He did so in his April theses of 1917, which baptised the Russian Revolution in 1917 as 'socialist', thus providing the logical and political underpinning necessary for the October victory. Among a host of other inaccuracies, the 'rearming' narrative denies the continuity with the previous Bolshevik outlook (the link between the October 1915 and the April 1917 theses, so to speak); it falsely states that proclaiming the socialist nature of the revolution was a logical and practical prerequisite for the October victory (Trotsky's own writings from 1917 amply document the fact that the socialist character of the Russian Revolution was *not* proclaimed); it overlooks the post-1919 adjustment that combined continued loyalty to hegemony with a grudging reimagining of 'socialist revolution'.

The actual evolution of Lenin's view of the path to socialism is much more accurately set out in a 1925 article by another top Bolshevik leader, Nikolai Bukharin. Bukharin puts the hegemony tactic at the centre of Lenin's whole approach. He portrays Lenin as constantly asking: what is the peasant saying? And

this is no accident. On the contrary, this reveals a great revolutionary clear-headedness that is typical of the proletarian leader [*vozhd*]. [Lenin insists that the Bolsheviks must act] so that they will *not to be severed from the peasant base*, so that they will rely on gradual measures to *pull the muzhik* along behind the working class.

Bukharin then usefully outlines the various avatars of hegemony at different stages of the revolution:

Prior to the seizure of power, the working class must have the support of the peasantry in *the struggle against the capitalists and landlords*.

After the seizure of power, the proletariat must secure for itself the support of a considerable section of the peasantry *in the civil war*, right up to the moment when the proletarian dictatorship has been consolidated.

And after that? Can we really limit ourselves to regarding the peasantry *only* as cannon-fodder in the fight against the capitalists and the large landlords? *No* ... It must be realised that the proletariat has *no* choice in this. It is *compelled*, as it builds socialism, to carry the peasantry with it. The proletariat *must learn* to do this, for, unless it does so, it will not be able to maintain its rule.

Bukharin then makes explicit that Bolshevik loyalty to hegemony required serious modification of the previous axioms of revolutionary social democracy. He disingenuously portrays Lenin as rising majestically above "the usual view of socialist revolution", while failing to mention that Lenin himself was in his day a fierce and aggressive defender of "the usual view" and that his post-1919 adjustment was made grudgingly

OBITUARY

Transcending convention

Neil Davidson: October 9 1957-May 3 2020

under the pressure of circumstances. Nevertheless, Bukharin well states the underlying issues:

What is the common, book-learned [knizhnyi] view of the socialist revolution? It might be formulated something like this: if the proletariat is relatively small in number, if it exists in a country with an overwhelming majority of peasants and, consequently, with an economy based on small-scale private ownership [melkoe khoziaistvo], then this proletariat, should it come to power, will never be able to cope with the enormity of the tasks, and this proletariat will inevitably perish - one way or another. This is the viewpoint that emerges from the common, book-learned, schoolboy explanation of the question of socialist revolution; we have to say that this explanation resides - alas! - in the minds of a very wide circle of the members of our own party ...

Lenin did not see the peasantry as an inevitable foe intent on smashing all our skulls, but as a potential ally who will sometimes grumble and will now and then cause the working class some unpleasantness, but who must potentially be brought around to the proletarian cause, so that it is one of the component forces in our struggle for a proletarian economic regime.

Another central component of Lenin's pre-war identity as a revolutionary social democrat was the struggle to bring political freedom to Russia. In power, Lenin founded a state that eliminated all political freedom, that is, any unfettered individual and group activity aimed at independent participation in political life. He not only carried out (in the words of *State and revolution*) "suppression by force - that is, exclusion from democracy - of the exploiters and oppressors of the people", but in practice he did the same for all Soviet citizens: workers, peasants, intellectuals included.

In a thin claim for continuity it might be argued that Lenin fought for political freedom only in the case of bourgeois democracy, where the socialist workers were a marginalised minority. A more relevant link shows itself when we consider why Lenin had earlier put such a store on the struggle for political freedom: he wanted to put into practice the SPD model of a permanent campaign to spread the socialist message. In power, the Bolsheviks realised that they could mount even more effective state-run campaigns if they used their command over coercive resources to eliminate any competition. The result - which might be called 'state monopoly campaignism' - was a key feature of Soviet socialism to the very end.

Looking back, we see that the adjustments made by Lenin from his original political identity as a revolutionary social democrat were in aid of preserving his central and unwavering loyalty to hegemony - in the words of the 1894 sentence quoted earlier, the vision of "the Russian worker, elevated to the head of all democratic elements". Thus a fitting summary of Lenin's view of the path to socialism is found in the words of his widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya, speaking at his funeral in 1924:

His work [in the early 1890s] among the workers of Piter [St Petersburg], conversations with these workers, attentive listening to their speeches, gave Vladimir Ilyich an understanding of the grand idea of Marx: the idea that the working class is the advanced detachment of all the labourers and that all the labouring masses, all the oppressed, will follow it: this is its strength and the pledge of its victory. Only as *vozhd* [leader] of all the labourers will the working class achieve victory ... And this thought, this idea illuminated all of his later activity, each and every step ●

The death was announced on May 3 of Neil Davidson, perhaps the greatest historical sociologist of contemporary Scotland. It is a cliché of obituaries to write, 'He will be greatly missed', but in this case we are describing a thinker of exemplary scope, learning and eloquence, who is truly irreplaceable.

I first met Neil at a conference in Glasgow on neoliberalism, when he was still teaching at Strathclyde University. I noticed his openness and willingness to work with others to undertake publications that would start to register the momentous shift from a Keynesian-influenced, mixed-economy capitalism to the financialised capitalism and neoliberalism of today. From this conference he, Patricia McCafferty and David Miller produced *Neoliberal Scotland: class and society in a stateless nation* (2010). The conference impressed on me that I should read more of his writing, so I started with his books on Scottish history, which seemed to me refreshingly different from anything else I had read in that area. He had written many of his initial publications on the history of Scotland - including its agrarian history - and deservedly won the Deutscher Prize for *Discovering the Scottish revolution* (2003).

It was a pleasure to be at his presentation to staff when he had been shortlisted for a lectureship in sociology, in the University of Glasgow. Neil spoke with great fluency and passion about his plans for future research - and what plans! In the few years after his appointment he went on to publish more books than many academics and writers do in a lifetime. Reflecting subsequently on the appointment, I thought that he should have been immediately upgraded to a professorship. But at least Glasgow got him, whilst it had notoriously failed to appoint Christopher Hill to one of the history departments, when he applied for a post in the late 1950s ...

Neil had already shown himself to be an effective teacher. He had been given an award for teaching at Strathclyde, being appreciated particularly by working class students, but by no means by them alone. In Glasgow, he proved also to be a highly collegial member of staff - giving seminar papers to the department and, more unusually, to the economics students' Real World Economics Society, which they had set up after the financial crisis, as an alternative to the mainstream economics of the Adam Smith Society. He launched his latest books as each one appeared, opening himself up to criticism by getting discussants to appraise his work, sometimes critically, and responding brilliantly, off the cuff.

He organised a postgraduate conference on class and co-organised another on racism in Scotland; he participated in the Centre (now Network) for Socialist Theory and Movements and on the University and College Union local committee. I have also been at *Historical Materialism* conferences in London, where Neil gave papers: indeed, in 2018, as many as three in a single conference! The recent Uneven and Combined Development Conference at Glasgow University, which he organised single-handed in 2019, was a *tour de force*, with lectures given by the foremost international scholars in this area, such as Robert Brenner, Justin Rosenberg, Hillel Ticktin and Charles Post. It was tragic that Neil was struck down by his illness before he could deliver his keynote paper.

Neil had a background which is



An inquiring mind

still all too unusual for an academic. He was brought up by working class parents, and by grandparents who had been crofters near Aberdeen. After leaving school, he went briefly to live in London, then returned to Scotland for an administrative job - indeed he was wittily acerbic, when one of his critics remarked that he should have known of a particular strand of thought about bourgeois revolutions which was first introduced by Perry Anderson at a Cambridge talk in 1976. He responded: "Unless you were lucky enough to attend that presentation - and sadly I was working in my first post-secondary school job as a clerk with the Grampian Health Board in Aberdeen at the time - you would not have had access to Anderson's thoughts on the subject until it appeared in print in 1992."

Neil then passed a civil service exam to become a researcher for the Scottish Executive, educating himself further with a degree from the Open University. This early formation never left him - he retained a strong Aberdonian accent and liked occasionally to use Scots vocabulary: thus, in his most recent, erudite book, he comments on his critics' incompatible views: "This, in Scottish terms, is a 'guddle'."

Revolutionary theory

He went on from the civil service to be one of the most exciting thinkers of our time - his monumental 2012 book *How revolutionary were the bourgeois revolutions?* being an exhilarating analysis of the theory and practice of revolution - from Harrington, Marx, Luxemburg and Benjamin to Trotsky and dissident followers - and encompassing in his analysis the English, French, American and Russian revolutions. His main thesis in that book is that bourgeois revolutions from below ceased after the American Revolution and subsequent civil war, because the dominant classes were too frightened of these events turning into proletarian revolutions, as happened in Russia. So instead societies like Germany (under Bismarck), Italy (via the Risorgimento) and Japan (Meiji restoration) introduced capitalism as an economic and social system from above, in what Gramsci calls a "passive revolution". He evaluates whether insurrectionary events were bourgeois revolutions or not by whether they introduced capitalism, through what he terms a "consequentialist analysis".

This book has evoked full-length critical articles, to which he recently replied in the journal, *Historical Materialism* (2019): we shall perhaps come to call it 'The Davidson Debate', just as we speak now of 'The Brenner Debate'. I do not agree with

everything he wrote, particularly on the Stalinist counterrevolution as "state capitalist" or on political Marxism (Brenner, Post *et al*). But in this and subsequent books, such as *Holding fast to an image of the past* (2013), *We cannot escape history* (2014) and *Nation-states* (2015), he went on to defend and develop his distinctive historical vision. I wrote when *Holding fast* came out that it was "illuminating, authoritative and sometimes very funny ... This new collection fruitfully combines wide-ranging erudition with vivid vignettes." Indeed, this might be said of all his works.

Neil, as many will know, was a long-term member of the Socialist Workers Party, familiar with many of its leading and Scottish members. After the SWP went through two highly-divisive crises in recent years, he left, as did many other members. He went on to join Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century (RS21). He was also a strong supporter of Rise (Respect, Independence, Socialism, Environmentalism) - the organisational offspring of the Radical Independence campaign, as well as of Lexit. In these respects it should be pointed out that he became perhaps the most thoughtful interpreter of the Scottish referendum voting patterns in 2014, publishing in *New Left Review* a memorable analysis of the relation between radical independence votes and deindustrialisation, class and gender (*A Scottish watershed*, 2014).

As I reflect on his contribution, I see him as having been one of our major Scottish - and British - public intellectuals. He has written extensively on the major issues of our time. Had he not got a degree late, and had he been less of a dissident voice, he would surely have been offered earlier and greater recognition. For Neil's published work has a scope and a capacity to transcend conventional disciplinary boundaries without - in general - ever being simplistic. This is truly rare. Given his capacity to blend theory and empirical research, I would go so far as to put him in the great traditions of historians, along with Marc Bloch, Pierre Broué, EP Thompson, Christopher Hill and Eric Hobsbawm.

Neil was also remarkable for his generosity of spirit and his good humour - perhaps in part because he was so well sustained by his partner, Cathie Watkins. Despite his formidable work routine, he made time for others, not least for his postgraduate students, all of whom were devoted to him. We have lost a modest man but one who had developed extraordinary abilities ●

Bridget Fowler
University of Glasgow

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly worker

**Imperial
pushback
against
China**

Logic behind the madness

Eddie Ford reports on the many failures of the UK and US governments

Scoring an unwanted record, the UK now has the highest number of coronavirus deaths in Europe. It now exceeds Italy, previously the worst-hit country on the continent. But regardless of flattening peaks and all the rest of it, UK deaths are way beyond the 20,000 which at one stage would have been judged a "good result".

There has been the controversy last week over health secretary Matt Hancock's achievement in hitting the target of 100,000 tests a day. There seems to have been some statistical jiggery-pokery, however, as that figure includes multiple tests on the same person and about 39,000 test kits that had been sent out to households and satellite testing locations but not yet processed. It also emerged that, of the 122,347 tests claimed, one third of them - notched up in the final 24-hour period before the deadline expired - were counted, even though they had not been actually carried out. Ministers are facing ongoing criticism, as the number of daily tests, with the pressure off, has already dropped below 80,000 - care home staff in particular reporting difficulties in getting home kits delivered. This will all come back to bite the health secretary.

Having said that, though it is absolutely right to question the figures, the substantial increase in the number of tests that have been carried out shows what can be done with a concerted collective effort - the idea that the target could be met if things were just left to 'the market' is obviously absurd. Rather, it was a political decision requiring state coordination and state power. You also have to ask, if you can actually manage 100,000 virus tests a day, then why can't homelessness be tackled with the same sort of vigour? To which there is an obvious answer - if the political will was there, it would be sorted out in next to no time. As an indication of what could be done, look at the £3.2 million which magically appeared in emergency support for rough sleepers - the government has pushed for the setting up of "local coordination cells", including local councils and the NHS, charged with the task of "urgently procuring" accommodation for people on the streets and "securing access" to food and medical care for rehoused people. Such measures were previously deemed dangerously socialistic. Presumably, once the epidemic is over or has been severely mitigated, they will be kicked out onto the streets again - normal market forces restored.

Meanwhile, the number of deaths in the US is now over 72,000 - the highest in the world, though clearly America's actual death rate is lower than that in countries like the UK or Italy, given its much higher population. Nevertheless, the situation in the US is appalling, with the number of daily coronavirus deaths projected to double by June to 3,000. Alarming, cases are rising in both cities and rural areas. Yet criminally, faced with such a threat, the White House is planning to disband its virus task force. Vice-president Mike Pence said on May 5 that the Trump administration was "starting to look" at the Memorial Day window (late May) as a time when the country "could begin



Virus-heavy

to transition back" to managing affairs "in a more traditional manner", because of the "tremendous progress" that has been made - an outlook terrifyingly at odds with reality.

More than half the 50 states are now attempting to ease or escape the lockdown measures, those led by Republican governors wanting to move more swiftly. At the same time we have witnessed relatively sizeable demonstrations by the far right against the lockdown, with the aim of 'taking back' Michigan, New York, California, etc. These protests have been encouraged by Donald Trump - an extraordinary situation in many respects: could you imagine previous presidents doing such a thing? The US does show all the sign of being a malfunctioning state.

Then again, something not totally dissimilar is happening in Britain, with increased rumbling of discontent from the Tory right and the likes of Nigel Farage. They are unhappy at the

'arbitrary' coronavirus measures, which they say need to be ended as soon as possible to 'restore our liberties' - Boris Johnson having promised to unveil a "roadmap" for exiting the lockdown by the end of the week. Steve Baker, former minister and European Research Group member, has branded some of the restrictions "absurd, dystopian and tyrannical". He complained that the police had begun enforcing the restrictions before legislation had even been passed - "stopping people on trains and, in one case, overturning a barbecue".

Discontent from the right and large sections of business will surely grow, especially if the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, starts to wind down the coronavirus furlough scheme next month - the treasury is examining several options for tapering the scheme, including cutting the 80% wage subsidy paid by the state to 60% and lowering the £2,500 cap on monthly payments. Another idea actively promoted by employers'

groups is to allow furloughed staff to work, but with a smaller state subsidy. Figures released this week show that a total of 6.3 million workers have been temporarily laid off by 800,000 companies - Boris Johnson might struggle to keep a lid on the situation.

Bats

As reported before in this publication, the right on both sides of the Atlantic is trying to demonise China over coronavirus - more driven by the politics of envy than anything else, given the dismal record of Britain and America on the Covid-19 question. The latest offering, naturally enough, appeared in *The Sun*, which treated us to a "bombshell" dossier, claiming that China "lied to the world" by covering up the outbreak and laying "the foundation for a case" against the country for its handling of the deadly disease. The article also claimed that a laboratory in Wuhan, "not far from the now infamous wet market", had been "studying"

deadly bat-derived coronaviruses (May 2). All very sinister.

Everyone knows how China's instinctive reaction was to be less than candid about the true nature of the viral outbreak - ingrained Stalinist habits die hard, although, of course, governments generally find it hard to admit mistakes, as we know from Britain and the US. But we are hardly shocked or horrified about the Wuhan lab studying bat viruses - we hope to god that Imperial College London, or a similar institute, is doing the same right now. We know that bats are teeming with viruses, but do not get affected, making them ideal storehouses for transmission to other species and from there to humans.

But, of course, the deliberate inference is that the 'Wuhan study' was in order to develop biological weapons - an absolutely ludicrous idea. We did not need the current pandemic to be aware that the spread of such viruses cannot easily be controlled and restricted to a given state. But keep stirring things up anyway - like the ignorant US secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, saying on May 3 that there is "enormous evidence" that the coronavirus outbreak originated in a Chinese laboratory. Not that he provided a shred of evidence. Trump himself made a similar unsupported claim a few days earlier. He was, he said, "privy" to evidence of the pandemic beginning in a Chinese lab, but was "not permitted" to share it. Talk about desperation. You would not use something like Covid-19 as a weapon, as it would end up killing your own population as well. Of course, the intelligence agencies know that - they have informed Trump and Pompeo that there is no evidence whatsoever to back up such claims.

Clearly, given the appalling way the virus has been handled by the US government, Donald Trump wants to divert attention from home - that is why the "Chinese virus" and the Democrats' 'softness' on China is going to be the line from now on. Whether that clinches it for Trump in the election, assuming it goes ahead, is another matter - but for convenience sake in this period, China is going to be public enemy number one.

Trump's behaviour may be regarded as pure irrationality and nothing else, but that would be a mistake. Behind all this is the logical imperative for an imperial pushback against China and the need to manage the relative decline of the US - he is just doing it an entirely different way from Obama ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

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