



# LABOUR PARTY MARXISTS

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# Two roads

James Marshall argues that the Sheffield conference of the Labour left faces fundamental choices



One is bold, concise and does not mirror Labour's federal structure ... guess which one

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The idea of establishing the Labour Left Alliance was first mooted last year. Why? Because of the obvious failure of Momentum. After Jon Lansman - sadly with the blessing of Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and Diane Abbott - had carried out his anti-democratic coup, to all intents and purposes Momentum became the property - the plaything - of just one man.

Consequently, the left of the Labour Party has gropingly, hesitatingly, often falteringly, moved towards some kind of unity. The crucial question, of course, is what sort of unity?

The LLA boasts of having around two thousand signatures to its appeal and a growing list of affiliates and local branches. It is, of course, a work in progress. But it will be the Sheffield conference which

will decide the basic character of the organisation. The agenda looks massively overloaded. Nonetheless, we must hope that sufficient time is allotted for serious debate. Without that we will probably get a sad repetition of past dead ends.

Essentially there are two models on offer vis-à-vis the aims and constitution. The first comes under the name of London LLA. It advocates a membership organisation and politics and structures befitting a left opposition in the Labour Party.

The other proposals come from Tees Valley Labour Left, Dulwich Labour Left, and the steering committee of Labour Against the Witchhunt (and Sheffield Labour Left). Differences between Tees, Dulwich and LAW SC/Sheffield are secondary and, from our viewpoint,

politically unimportant. They amount to variations on a lowest-common-denominator theme. Unsurprisingly all of them are politically conservative and organisationally mimic the elaborate structures of the Labour Party.

Without doubt, the approach advocated by London is far superior.

Politically it is unashamedly bold. London wants to commit the LLA to "working class rule" and a transition to a stateless, moneyless society based on the celebrated principle, "From each according to their ability, to each according to their need."

London also recognises the necessity of breaking with capitalism and its ecologically destructive cycle of production for the sake of production. Note, the International Panel on Climate Change warns that we have no

more than a couple of decades before the world's ecosystem experiences a series of devastating "tipping points".

Unfortunately, the London comrades fluffed one of Marx's most famous ... and surely urgently relevant conclusions. Hence we have: "1.2. Opposition to capitalism, imperialism, racism, militarism and the ecological degradation of the planet through the ruinous cycle of production for the sake of production or profit"

There is no problem with opposition to capitalism, imperialism, racism and militarism. It is the "ecological degradation of the planet through the ruinous cycle of production for the sake of production or profit" which constitutes the problem.

Theoretically this formulation is illiterate. Production for the sake of production and profit are split apart,

treated separately, counterposed. For the philistine this might amount to just two short words. But that is really, really stupid. It is like saying there is nothing important separating the biblical command "thou shalt not commit adultery" and the command "thou shalt commit adultery". Only a single word separates the two. But a world of difference.

Marx should be read seriously and treated seriously. In Capital he logically began by defining the commodity. It is a use-value which also has exchange-value. He then painstakingly develops the category of exchange-value and eventually arrives at the equivalent form. Gold becomes money, the universal equivalent. From here he shifts from the formula C-M-C and reverses it with what we know from everyday capitalism: M-C-M.

Yet from the viewpoint of the capitalist this makes no sense whatsoever. Why engage in the trials and tribulations of production, why take the risks of having to find a buyer, when you end up with the same amount of money that you started out with?

No, the capitalist aims to realise a profit: M-C-M'. The capitalist ends with more money than they start with. According to their whims and fancies, the capitalist spends that augmented money on all manner of 'how to spend it' luxuries.

However, capitalism consists of many capitals. Competition forces the individual to plough the vast bulk of their profits back into production. Making bigger and bigger profits becomes a necessity in its own right. Production becomes a compulsion, driving the capitalist endlessly forward.

Hence we arrive at this passage in chapter 24:

Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets! ... Therefore save, save, ie. reconvert the greatest possible portion of surplus-value, or surplus product into capital! Accumulation for accumulation's sake, production for production's sake: by this formula classical political economy expressed the historical mission of the bourgeoisie, and did not for a single instant deceive itself over the birth-throes of wealth.

Making a profit appears perfectly rational.

The worker goes to work in order to secure wages, so as to be able to secure the means of subsistence - food, clothing, housing, transport, etc. The capitalist lays out money to hire workers in order to make a profit, with which they are able to purchase luxury food, luxury clothing, luxury housing, luxury transport, etc. It would appear that all their material needs are more than satisfied.

Upon investigation, however, capitalism turns out to have an irrational rationale. Because of competition, the desire to make a profit becomes a necessity which, by its own logic, crashes through every social, every natural barrier. Workers are subject to constant and unremitting attack; their trade unions and political parties are controlled through numerous restrictive laws, neutered through corruption or simply overpowered using brute force.

Nature is pillaged, raped and used as a latrine. Ecological degradation is inevitable.

This has nothing to do with the evil intentions of individual capitalists. Capitalists prove not to be masters of their own system. No, they are merely personifications of capital. The system controls them. As such capitalists are subject to externally imposed laws of accumulation. They are compelled to accumulate for accumulation's sake.

Clearly, therefore, the London formulation requires a little, but vital, cut.

Theoretically it only makes sense if it reads: "1.2. Opposition to capitalism, imperialism, racism, militarism and the ecological degradation of the planet through the ruinous cycle of production for the sake of production." Fortunately, a number of comrades have submitted an amendment to that effect.

That problem aside, London understands the necessity of linking the future we strive to achieve with the immediate programme needed to bring it about. The battle for democracy must be won. Abolish the monarchy, the standing army and the House of Lords. Establish a single-chamber parliament and disestablish the Church of England. In the same spirit of extreme democracy London calls for proportional representation and annual elections (one of the central demands of the Chartist movement). In short, the "democratic republic".

London is no less bold when it comes to the Labour Party. Conference must be sovereign. Labour MPs should no longer be self-serving career politicians. Towards that end, they must only take the average skilled workers' wage. A principle enshrined by the 1871 Paris Commune. LLA must oppose the very idea of career politicians. Nor must LLA itself become a vehicle for aspiring career politicians. A real and present danger.

Moreover, MPs must be subject to automatic reselection. The Parliamentary Labour Party must be brought to heel. Subordinate the PLP to the national executive committee.

London not only envisages fighting for all pro-working class organisations to affiliate to the Labour Party: trade unions, political groups and campaigning organisations. The symbolic importance of equipping the Labour Party with a new clause four is also fully appreciated. Not, it should be emphasised, an attempt to raise, Lazarus-like, Sydney Webb's Fabian clause four from its grave. Let it rot. No, instead, a clause four inspired by the teachings of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.

Another excellent set of proposals from London: the LLA's annual conference must be the source of all authority. It decides policy, it elects a leadership. It can also change policy. It can also change the leadership. True, London allows for trade union and other such affiliates to the LLA. But their role is strictly limited. The LLA is envisaged as a membership organisation firmly controlled by the membership.

No less relevant, the constitution presented by London is not prescriptive. What officers are needed, what they are expected to do, the setting of membership fees, how big branches should be before being given an official imprimatur - all such details are all left open-ended. Besides being clear, simple and easy to grasp, London's proposals have the great virtue of being mercifully short (690 words).

### Long and limited

By contrast, what is on offer from Tees (1,870 words), Dulwich (1,550 words) and LAW SC (1,245 words), is long-winded and already nearing its sell by date - eg, "opposes the witch hunt against Jeremy Corbyn". And Corbyn has had a dreadful record

when it comes to the witch-hunt. Not only has he maintained a studied silence as his own comrades are thrown to the wolves. He has consistently sought to appease the witch-hunters.

The political aims are extraordinarily limited. There is opposition to austerity, the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' smear campaign, etc. Good, but hardly a transformative vision about what society we aspire to achieve. Capitalism, the state, wage-labour go without mention and therefore, albeit by absence, they are taken for granted, treated as natural. Nor does global warming, the climate emergency, the danger of ecological disaster rate a mention. Critics might talk of climate-change denial. Unfair surely, but the comrades are undoubtedly suffering from tunnel vision.

When it comes to the Labour Party itself, perspectives are no less limited. There is the call for democracy. Once again, however, the lack of vision is obvious. Eg, this formulation: LLA "both supports a left leadership against attacks by the right, and is independent and able to criticise our left wing leaders when necessary."

"When necessary"! LLA must not content itself with the illusory programme of running capitalism in the interests of the working class. In effect that amounts to sub-reformism, in other words common or garden social liberalism. Yet that is exactly what "our left wing leaders" - Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and Rebecca Long Bailey - have been advocating. For them the rule of the working class, the abolition of wage-slavery, a moneyless, stateless society, based on need, are foreign territory.

The LAW SC proposal - like those of Tees and Dulwich - in effect mirrors the Labour Party apparatus and its organisational fetishes. Inappropriate and totally myopic. Why should a left opposition in the Labour Party copy the elaborate federal structures, intricate rules, bureaucratic checks and balances and accept the ideological boundaries set by the contemporary Labour Party? Frankly though, this is the habitual approach of too much of the British left. It reveals an internalisation of the attitudes, assumptions and interests of the labour and trade union bureaucracy.

We must explain this constantly repeated pattern of behaviour in materialist terms. It cannot be put down to individual oddity,

personal weakness or some congenital tendency to betray. The Labour Party, as presently constituted, is a bourgeois workers' party. The Labour left is the natural home for trade union militants, socialist campaigners and those committed to working class liberation. But Labour's position as the alternative party of government means that the Labour left is also a breeding ground for careerists who, slowly or swiftly, evolve to the right.

Common sense easily becomes that politics are about winning elections. Policies are put forward because they can be 'sold' to the electorate. Ultimately it is, of course, the press, the media, that decides what is sensible and what is to be dismissed as sectarian craziness. Anything that appears to get in the way of winning elections must therefore be avoided like the plague. Hence debate has to be restricted, bureaucratic controls imposed and awkward minorities sidelined or otherwise silenced.

Worryingly then, LAW SC insists that groups can only affiliate if they are "broad left" or represent "special interests". Code for excluding what we might call 'far left' organisations. Tees LLA is explicit: members of "other socialist political parties" should be barred. Do we really want to impose our own version of the 1920s anti-communist bans and proscriptions? Dulwich even proposes a "conduct and compliance unit". No, no, no. By contrast, London wants all good communists and socialists to join the Labour Party ... and the LLA.

LAW's proposals can be taken as the main object of criticism. Tees and Dulwich are just longer, more complex, variations on the same dismal theme.

To all intents and purposes LAW's steering committee wants to see LLA as a two-tier, two-chamber organisation. Conference can pass whatever resolutions it wants. Meanwhile the organising committee - made up of delegates from all manner of local branches and political and trade union affiliates, does the actual business ... and goes its own way. A recipe for confusion, conflict and failure.

In other words, conference is to be a talking shop. LAW proposes a cabinet, but one neither elected nor accountable to parliament (conference). London proposes no bifurcation, no split in the lines of authority. Conference must be sovereign ●

# The one to back

London LLA's constitution provides the solid foundations we need. Apart from the silly formulation "or profit" in 1.2, it is theoretically sound, politically ambitious, concise and untainted by the pernicious politics of witch-hunting. Fortunately amendments have been submitted correcting the error. We urge delegates to reject attempts to composite, obscure and fudge. Compare the London proposal to those presented by the LAW steering committee, Tees and Dulwich. It is clear which one is the best

## 1. Our aims and principles

1.1. The Labour Left Alliance brings together organisations, groups and individuals with a view to pursuing these aims.

1.2. Opposition to capitalism, imperialism, racism, militarism and the ecological degradation of the planet through the ruinous cycle of production for the sake of production *or profit*.

1.3. The replacement of Labour's existing clause four with a commitment to socialism as the rule of the working class. We envisage a democratically planned economy and moving towards a stateless, classless, moneyless society that embodies the principle, "From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs". Alone such benign conditions create the possibility of every individual fully realising their innate potentialities.

1.4. Towards that end Labour should commit itself to achieving a democratic republic. The standing

army, the monarchy, the House of Lords and the state sponsorship of the Church of England must go. We support a single-chamber parliament, proportional representation and annual elections. Labour needs to win the active backing of the majority of people and should seek to form a government only on this basis.

1.5. We seek to achieve the full democratisation of the Labour Party. All MPs, MEPs and MSPs should be subject to automatic reselection. All elected Labour Party members should be expected to take no more than the average skilled worker's wage. The Parliamentary Labour Party should be subordinated to the National Executive Committee.

1.6. We support Labour as the federal party of the working class. All trade unions, cooperatives, socialist societies and leftwing groups and parties should be brought together in the Labour Party. Unity brings strength.

1.7. We shall work with others

internationally in pursuit of the aim of replacing capitalism with working class rule and socialism.

## 2. Structure

2.1. The Labour Left Alliance is a membership organisation. Members are required to accept our political aims and principles and pay an annual fee (to be set by the Organising Group).

2.2. We believe in the free and open exchange of ideas and viewpoints. But, once the LLA has agreed a particular action, we seek to achieve the maximum unity. That cannot be imposed - it has to be won.

2.3. We expect all LLA members to be in the Labour Party and encourage all those not already involved in local Labour Left groups to become active in one or help set one up. Our aim is to organise all members in local and regional LLA groups and branches. We also welcome, on all levels of the organisation, those who have been suspended or

expelled as part of the witch-hunt against the left.

2.4. LLA conference meets at least once a year. Conference will consist of either individual members or delegates (at a ratio to be decided by the Organising Group). Conference debates aims and principles, agrees political strategy, votes on motions and elects a leadership.

2.5. If 30% of affiliated groups and branches or 30% of individual members so wish, there will be a special conference.

2.6. Affiliated groups, LLA branches or any 10 LLA members can submit one motion and one amendment to conference.

## 3. Organising Group

3.1. The OG functions as the leadership of the LLA. The OG is elected at conference. Conference decides on the size and functions of the OG.

3.2 The OG elects its own officers

on the basis of immediate recallability. The OG can coopt members, given particular needs. While coopted members shall have speaking rights, they will have no voting rights.

3.3. The OG should meet at least quarterly, in a face-to-face or an online meeting. It can also make decisions via email or other agreed communication channels by a simple majority of those voting within a given timeframe. It produces regular minutes/reports to LLA supporters. If possible, meetings should be scheduled well in advance (at least one month).

3.4. The OG decides on the level of affiliation fees for groups and organisations and needs to approve all requests for affiliation.

3.5. All decisions at all levels are made by a simple majority of those voting (excluding abstentions).

3.6. The OG can set up working groups and sub-committees on any particular subject.

# Climate change and system change

Amazingly neither the LAW steering committee, nor Tees, nor Dulwich have anything to say about the climate emergency. **Jack Conrad** shows why London LLA is right to link ending ecological degradation with ending capitalism

Runaway climate change is now an almost universally recognised danger. The global climate system probably sits on a razor's edge. Only the self-interested, the downright ignorant or the wilfully complacent refuse to own up to this fact. If we take temperatures in the northern hemisphere from 1000 CE to the present moment in time, we see alternating ups and downs, but then, around 1880, a sudden and very steep upward curve occurs. The result resembles a hockey stick. Already average global temperatures are 1°C above pre-industrial times - given the time span, very big in climatic terms.

Two additional points.

Firstly, while the climate constantly undergoes change, that happens within a relatively stable equilibrium, within a self-adjusting system. Till recently most scientists thought that all large-scale global and regional climate changes took place over a timescale of many centuries or millennia: ie, at rates hardly noticeable during a human lifetime. Gradualism was the ruling orthodoxy. That is no longer the case.

Climate scientists now recognise that quantitative change reaches a trigger point and then flips over into qualitative change: "All the evidence indicates that most long-term climate change occurs in sudden jumps rather than incremental changes." Such conclusions were long anticipated by Marxism. Frederick Engels in his *Dialectics of nature* described the jump or leap: "qualitative change ... is determined by a corresponding quantitative change." Given the right conditions, climate change can be triggered by some relatively "small perturbation", one system then tips over into another. New, radically different weather patterns, prevailing winds, oceanic currents, etc, kick in.

Second point. Scientific opinion is overwhelmingly agreed: the temperature rises over the last 100 years or so are primarily due to "human activity". We really are living in the Anthropocene. Industry, agriculture, transport and domestic heating release carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), methane (CH<sub>4</sub>), nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O) and other such greenhouse gases which have a determining climate impact.

## We'll always have Paris

A recent report by the International Panel on Climate Change projects that global warming will continue at the current rate of -0.2°C per decade and reach 1.5°C above pre-industrial times around 2040. However, 1.5°C could easily be exceeded in half that time - around 2030 - and 2°C reached by around 2045.

Though theirs is an inexact science, climatologists fear that 1.5°C itself represents a boundary, a tipping point. If correct, after that we could see much reduced cloud cover, an end of the ice caps, soaring temperatures, rising sea levels and the inundation of low-lying cities and fertile plains. Because this might happen within a, relatively speaking, exceedingly short period of time, it could conceivably threaten the "survival of human civilisation". Given the continuation of existing social relations, expect mass migrations, resource wars and pandemics.

True, there is the 2016 Paris climate agreement. Its 195 signatories pledge to limit emissions, so as to ensure that temperatures do not exceed a 1.5°C increase. But the Paris agreement is voluntary, vague and contains all manner of get-out clauses.

And, suffice to say, the leaders of all countries are in thrall to the mantra of economic growth. Typically this is done in the name of ensuring the wellbeing of all. But in reality outcomes are extraordinarily unequal. The mass of the world's population barely ekes out a living. Meanwhile, the few accumulate staggering riches. Forbes reports



Overcoming climate change means fighting the logic of capital

that 1% of the world's population own 45% of the wealth.

Then there is Donald Trump. He threatens a US withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement this year. The 45th president has already rolled back the Obama administration's environmental measures and is on record as saying that global warming is a hoax concocted by the Chinese government in an attempt to hold back US industry. He is, of course, one of many influential climate-change 'sceptics' operating in high politics.

Jair Bolsonaro, Matteo Salvini, Marine Le Pen, Nigel Farage, Hungary's Viktor Orbán and Jaroslaw Kaczyński in Poland come from the same mould. All view action on climate change as an imposition on national sovereignty and a barrier to growth. These counterrevolutionary revolutionaries seek to undo the 'evils' of the October Revolution, roll back democratic rights, stoke up blood-and-soil national chauvinism and extinguish even the possibility of socialism. That is the meaning of the so-called populist right.

So should the left rally to the defence of Paris and seek allies amongst greens, NGOs, liberals and 'progressive' capitalists, such as Bill Gates, George Soros, Richard Branson, Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg? Absolutely not. Two main reasons.

Firstly, we have already demonstrated the criminal inadequacy of the Paris agreement. Its maximum goal could actually represent the tipping point that brings civilisational collapse. Why uphold that? We must stand for working class political independence. That requires developing our own programme - not calling for a Jeremy Corbyn government, a general strike or the formation of soviets so as to ensure the implementation of the Paris agreement.

Secondly, it should not be assumed that protests, declarations and speechifying against the danger of runaway climate change automatically leads to progressive conclusions. Environmentalism usually comes with an ingrained acceptance of capitalism as the natural order and easily leads to demonising the urban and rural poor, especially females, in the so-called third world. This is decidedly the case when it comes to the so-called 'population problem'.

## Population

In fact, each society possesses its own population laws. Put simply, the reproduction of the human species takes place within different social formations and under different historical circumstances

- something the reverend Thomas Malthus palpably 'forgot'. His theory of population floats outside a theorised history and therefore took no account of the fundamental distinctions that exist between one society and another. Eg, 11th century feudalism had significantly different population dynamics compared to present-day capitalism.

The peasant family - indeed broadly speaking patriarchal production as a socio-economic system - has an interest in maximising the number of children. Put more accurately, maximising the number of male children - a vital distinction. Sons are treasured because they remain within the family and through marriage bring in extra wealth in the form of dowries, wives, inheritance and in due course their own children. Girls leave the family and marrying them off costs a small fortune ... their birth is often the cause of mourning in pre-capitalist social formations. Female infanticide was therefore frequent.

The peasant family is a unit of production. Boys and girls alike labour in their father's fields from the age of five or six and, of course, not in return for money wages. Food, clothing and shelter are provided - little more. After the age of 10 it is reckoned that children are fully paying for their upkeep. From then on it is gain. Male heirs are also expected to maintain parents into old age. Children are therefore unpaid labourers and a form of social insurance. Given high infant mortality rates, it can easily be appreciated why it is a case of 'the more, the better'.

Under capitalism - apart from its more primitive, unrestrained and brutal forms - children are an enormous expense for the proletarian family, from the cradle and now well into adulthood. During the industrial revolution, it is true, parents sold their children into work from a tender age. Children of eight or nine did 12 and 14 hour days (until the factory acts). Families could only survive if all available members brought in some kind of wage package (the wife was frequently pregnant - and, lacking reliable birth control and with the peasant mentality still lingering on, she was also typically burdened with a brood of young children hanging on to her breasts and skirts).

What of the present-day proletarian family? It is a unit of consumption. With universal primary and secondary education, and around half the school population expected to go on to university, the financial outgoings are considerable. Prudential,

the insurance company, estimates that on average children cost over £40,000 each. Even after graduation many mums and dads go on to help out their offspring with mortgages, etc.

Certainly nowadays the simple reproduction - not expansion - of the proletarian family requires two adult incomes. True, average individual hours have been forced down - in 1846 parliament passed the first 10-hour act (for what was a five and a half-day week). Full-time male workers in Britain now notch up an average of 39.2 hours. But the workforce has expanded significantly, not least by drawing in more and more women. The total number employed is now over 32 million. Roughly a threefold increase over the 1930s. At the beginning of the 20th century females made up 29% of the workforce. Now it is 48%. Women workers today do on average 34.3 hours. Adding those figures together, the family unit nowadays is more exploited and certainly under more psychological pressures. There has been an intensification of labour and of relative exploitation. Not least due to these extra drains and life-limiting pressures, on average women have children later and fewer in number compared with the recent past.

In 2018 the average woman in Britain had 1.7 children - down from 2.6 in 1960. What is true of Britain is also true of other so-called developed capitalist countries. Even India is down to 2.3 children per family and is clearly heading to the 2.1 replacement rate.

## Techno solutions

There are many brilliant scientists, engineers and technologists who are furiously working, using their considerable talents, to bring about the so-called 'third disruption' (the first was agriculture and the neolithic counterrevolution, the second was the machine age, in particular the use of fossil fuels). The high tech utopians of Silicon Valley fetishistically worship artificial intelligence, quantum computers, gene editing, nanotechnology, 3-D printing, electronic aeroplanes, driverless cars, solar energy, etc. Amongst their more modest claims is that technology "can save the Earth by 2030".

However, as shown by William Stanley Jevons back in the mid-19th century, such innovations, no matter how revolutionary, lead to a paradox. Increased efficiency results in cheaper commodities, which in turn results in increased demand, and with that comes the increased use of resources. The Jevons paradox is his one and only worthwhile contribution to human knowledge. Amazingly, early Fabians, such as Sidney Webb, George Bernard Shaw and Herbert Somerton Foxwell, considered Jevons and his marginal utility economics far superior to Karl Marx's labour theory of value. Deservedly, however, Jevons is now nothing more than an obscure historic footnote.

Nonetheless, the point has been made. Capitalism treats increased efficiency merely as an opportunity to increase demand. Exchange-value rules. Not use-value. Capitalism moves according to a simple formula: M-C-M'. Money is laid out in order to secure materials and labour-power with a view to one objective and one objective alone: gaining more money. That law of political economy controls the capitalists themselves - even the greenest of greens amongst them - and makes capitalism the most uncontrollable, the most rapacious, the most polluting, the most short-termist system imaginable. Frankly, if one wanted to design a system with the intention of wrecking nature, it would be capitalism. Capitalism is a mode of destructive reproduction ●

## AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

1. The central aim of Labour Party Marxists is to transform the Labour Party into an instrument for working class advance and international socialism. Towards that end we will join with others and seek the closest unity of the left inside and outside the party.

2. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, waste and production for its own sake. Attempts to rescue the system through Keynesian remedies are diversionary and doomed to fail. The democratic and social gains of the working class must be tenaciously defended, but capitalism must be superseded by socialism.

3. The only viable alternative is organising the working class into powerful and thoroughly democratic trade unions, co-ops, and other schools for socialism, and crucially into a political party which aims to replace the rule of the capitalist class with the rule of the working class.

4. The fight for trade union freedom, anti-fascism, women's rights, sexual freedom, republican democracy and opposition to all imperialist wars are inextricably linked to working class political independence and the fight for socialism.

5. Ideas of reclaiming the Labour Party and the return of the old clause four are totally misplaced. From the beginning the party has been dominated by the labour bureaucracy and the ideas of reformism. The party must be refounded on the basis of a genuinely socialist programme as opposed to social democratic gradualism or bureaucratic statism.

6. The aim of the party should not be a Labour government for its own sake. History shows that Labour governments committed to managing the capitalist system and loyal to the existing constitutional order create disillusionment in the working class.

7. Labour should only consider forming a government when it has the active support of a clear majority of the population and has a realistic prospect of implementing a full socialist programme. This cannot be achieved in Britain in isolation from Europe and the rest of the world.

8. Socialism is the rule of the working class over the global economy created by capitalism and as such is antithetical to all forms of British nationalism. Demands for a British road to socialism and a withdrawal from the European Union are therefore to be opposed.

9. Political principles and organisational forms go hand-in-hand. The Labour Party must become the umbrella organisation for all trade unions, socialist groups and pro-working class partisans. Hence all the undemocratic bans and proscriptions must be done away with.

10. The fight to democratise the Labour Party cannot be separated from the fight to democratise the trade unions. Trade union votes at Labour Party conferences should be cast not by general secretaries but proportionately according to the political balance in each delegation.

11. All trade unions should be encouraged to affiliate, all members of the trade unions encouraged to pay the political levy and join the Labour Party as individual members.

12. The party must be reorganised from top to bottom. Bring the Parliamentary Labour Party under democratic control. The position of Labour leader should be abolished along with the national policy forum. The NEC should be unambiguously responsible for drafting Labour Party manifestos.

13. The NEC should be elected and accountable to the annual conference, which must be the supreme body in the party. Instead of a tame rally there must be democratic debate and binding votes.

14. Our elected representatives must be recallable by the constituency or other body that selected them. That includes MPs, MSPs, AMs, councillors, etc. Without exception elected representatives should take only the average wage of a skilled worker, the balance being donated to furthering the interests of the labour movement ●

# Twenty-two theses

1. Our attitude towards the Jeremy Corbyn leadership of the Labour Party was worked out in advance: that is, well before his actual election, and with far greater foresight, and with far greater worth and precision than any other campaign, committee, group or party on the left.

2. We are committed to the complete transformation of the Labour Party, forging it into a permanent united front of the working class and equipping it with solid Marxist principles and a tried and tested Marxist leadership. Such a perspective can only be realised with a mass Communist Party. Needless to say, we envisage once again opening up the Labour Party to the affiliation of leftwing groups and parties - crucially the affiliation of the CPGB.

3. Whatever the rightwing media claimed, Corbyn is not, and never was, a Marxist. He was and remains a sincere, but dithering, left reformist. His Straight Leftist advisors proved to be a source of weakness, not strength. The common sense of 'official communism' is to bring on board, to placate, to tack to the right. A proven recipe for defeat.

4. We never expected the election of a Corbyn-led Labour government. There was, though, an outside possibility of such a scenario. Such a government would not have been able to deliver the very modest promises contained in *It's time for real change*, the December 2019 election manifesto. The Corbyn leadership was committed to reversing austerity, increasing the economic role of the state, repealing some anti-trade union laws and introducing some minor constitutional reforms. At best that amounted to an illusory attempt to run British capitalism in the interests of the working class. Meanwhile, in the name of *It's time for real change*, wage-slavery would continue, Britain would remain a monarchy, subject to judge-made law, one of the 'Five Eyes', a core imperialist power, a member of Nato and armed with US-controlled nuclear weapons. To call such a programme 'socialist' is to violate the commonly accepted language of the left.

5. If by chance a Corbyn government had happened, we predicted there would have been a run on the pound, sabotage by the Labour right, a constitutional coup, an army mutiny, a US 'push back', etc. Given the continued hold of constitutionalism, narrow trade unionism and ephemeral protest politics, resistance would surely have proved feeble and ineffective, and ended in a demoralising defeat.

6. The results of the December 2019 general election were no surprise. Opinion polls always showed a clear Tory lead. Boris Johnson and Dominic Cummings skilfully played the election as being about 'Getting Brexit done'. The Brexit Party's support crumbled and predictably went over to the Tories. Labour lost votes in the north and the Midlands. Labour's share of the poll was greater than in 2010 and 2015. Nonetheless, compared with 2017, it dropped by 8%. A shaft of light amidst the gloom: Labour won by far the biggest share of the 18-24-year-old vote. The Tory vote increased by just 1% - enough though,

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Now there are just three: vote RBL as the lesser evil

given the 'first past the post' system, to give them a commanding 80-strong majority in the House of Commons. We should expect Brexit negotiations to drag on for years. It is unlikely, however, to become the kind of issue it was between June 2016 and December 2019: we saw huge mobilisations on both sides, the fall of prime ministers, repeated government defeats in parliament and the purging and splitting of parties.

7. Meanwhile, we should expect legislation against trade union action on the rails, moves to outlaw local councils supporting BDS and maybe official regulations characterising anti-Zionism as violating official anti-racism, closely associated with terrorist tendencies and therefore notifiable to the Prevent bureaucracy. War in the Middle East, especially if it involves Israel, can only but increase the intensity and scope of the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' smear campaign. Anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism could easily fall into the net too. To a large extent this is the result of the hugely successful international campaign to label as anti-Semitic anything critical of Israel - a campaign that has been most thoroughly and visibly implemented in Britain's Labour movement. But it is also bearing fruit in Germany (where the BDS movement has been declared anti-Semitic), France and the US presidential race.

8. Labour's results in December 2019 were in parliamentary terms on a par with 1935. Except, of course, in 1935 Labour faced a national government. It should also be added that in 1935 Labour's share of the vote increased. In some ways the 2019 vote should have been expected in 2017. The reasons for the comparatively good results in 2017 can be guessed at: (a) propaganda directed against Jeremy Corbyn (eg, he is a Marxist, pro-terrorist, part of the metropolitan elite) proved largely ineffective; (b) Corbyn genuinely inspired some sections of the population: he appeared to many, especially younger, voters as a 'man on a white horse'; (c) Brexit was not the overriding issue it was to become.

9. Boris Johnson swept to power in the Tory Party with the promise to deliver on the 2016 referendum result. He subsequently showed a ruthlessness utterly alien to the dithering Jeremy Corbyn. Labour's step-by-step adoption of a hard 'remain' position, its call for a second referendum, the humiliating parliamentary defeats inflicted upon the May government, crucially with the help

of Labour MPs - none of that was going to retain Brexiteer voters. Quite the opposite. They felt cheated, betrayed, by a Labour Party pledged to uphold the referendum result. For many of them Brexit served as a substitute for class politics. Needless to say, like Scottish nationalism, Brexit is a form of bourgeois politics. The same, of course, goes for 'remain'. Hence the working class has been unnecessarily split and placed under the influence of either 'remain' or 'leave' demagogues. Labour should have rejected David Cameron's referendum from the start. It should have organised an active boycott. Labour should reject referendums as a matter of principle and develop a positive vision for European unity.

10. Labour's poor performance in 2019 is not only explained by Brexit. Because of the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' campaign, because of the constant attacks from the Labour right, because of wall-to-wall media hostility, Jeremy Corbyn became a highly unpopular figure amongst many traditional Labour voters. But to have expected anything else would have been naive. The Labour right openly represents capitalist interests. The same goes for the mainstream media. Without a powerful alternative mass media in the hands of the labour movement, Corbyn was forced to undergo trial by the bourgeois establishment's newspapers and radio and TV stations. He was never likely to win.

11. Would adopting a Lexist position have won the election for Labour? Hardly. What would have been retained in the north and the Midlands would have been lost in London. Nor would Labour have won the general election if Corbyn had opposed the witch-hunt, organised open-air rallies, called for a general strike against austerity, etc. All such nostrums are illusory. Of course, his silence over the witch-hunt amounted to complicity. But opposing the witch-hunt could well have produced a rebellion amongst his Campaign Group allies. Look at the disgraceful role of John McDonnell, Jon Lansman's Momentum, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Owen Jones, etc. In other words, the odds were always heavily stacked against a Corbyn-led government.

12. That was not the case with internal Labour Party rules and structures. Whereas Tony Blair carried out a (counter) revolution, tinkering change is all that Corbyn managed to achieve. That need not have been the case. With a stronger, more determined,

politically clear-sighted left, there could have been a Corbynite revolution.

13. Criminally, significant sections of the left stayed clear of the struggle in the Labour Party. They were content to comment from the sidelines. Even worse, there were those - most notably, the Socialist Party in England and Wales - who actively opposed the affiliation of left-dominated trade unions to the Labour Party. A criminally irresponsible stance.

14. The Tories caught the Labour Party in a trap. First by getting Labour to front the 'Better Together' campaign in the 2014 Scottish referendum. That lost Labour Scotland, where there remains just one Labour MP. Second, by getting Labour to accept the legitimacy of the 2016 EU referendum. That lost Labour swathes of seats in the Midlands and the north.

15. The reformist left - and not only in the Labour Party - has suffered a body blow. With Jeremy Corbyn they had their ideal leader, with John McDonnell they had their ideal shadow chancellor, with *For the many, not the few* and then *It's time for real change* they had their ideal manifesto. And yet Labour went down to a bad defeat.

16. The reformist left in the Labour Party has always been committed to the 'next Labour government'. The danger is that many Labour members will conclude: (a) that Labour can never be changed (and therefore drop out of active politics); or (b) that the fight for social change lies not in permanent organisations and patient education, but in ephemeral street protests and economic strikes; or (c) that there needs to be a safe, acceptable, suitably centrist leader who can reach out to the Labour right, unite the party and 'rewind the trust' of the so-called Jewish community. Paradoxically, that almost certainly means purging the left, almost certainly using the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' big lie.

17. Those wedded to the 'next Labour government' perspective are doubtless well intentioned. But it is not a road to socialism. It is the road to the right and the next Tory government.

18. Our task is to fully empower the Labour Party's mass membership, open eyes as to the hopeless nature of the reformist left and bring about circumstances whereby the Labour Party is thoroughly purged of the pro-capitalist right and the leadership is won by real, not supposed, Marxists.

19. That is why we strive in the here and

now to equip the Labour left with the perspective of thoroughly democratising the Labour Party and politically refounding it. The Labour left needs to commit itself to replacing the existing clause four - but not with the old, 1918, Fabian clause four, as championed by the so-called Marxists of Socialist Appeal. On the contrary, what is needed is a genuinely Marxist clause four, as formulated by Labour Party Marxists.

20. Not that we should boycott the Labour leadership and deputy leadership elections, because none of the candidates are Marxists or even remotely principled. Eg, none of them has opposed the witch-hunt. We should give a critical vote to the main left candidates for leader and deputy leader and vote 'lesser evil' for the other candidates. We vote with no illusions. The chances are that even the 'continuity' candidates, if they get their way, would take up the mantle of Neil Kinnock.

21. That is why we support the organisation of a left opposition. However, perspectives of uniting with others on the Labour left on a lowest-common-denominator basis - eg, merely restoring - the practice of automatic reselection of MPs, or merely opposing austerity, Trident renewal, etc - are the politics of the broad front, which lead nowhere positive.

22. We have no principled objection to Marxists in the Labour Party working in such formations. But we put the fight for our own programme and organisational principles above diplomatic tweaking, give-and-take compromises and rotten deals. We accept the possibility of being in a minority. That is preferable to putting our programme and organisational principles onto the back burner ●

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