



# LABOUR PARTY MARXISTS

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## Yes to a Momentum opposition NO TO A SPLIT

We all knew the Lansman coup was coming, says **Carla Roberts**. But now is the time for the left to take stock and organise

Once team Momentum announced its "online survey" of all members and supporters, the result was a forgone conclusion. In referendums the dictator gets to ask the question and, barring accidents, they get the result they want.

Not only were the questions loaded: they were also disgracefully backed up by Jeremy Corbyn, Clive Lewis and Diane Abbott. Topping it all it was the fact that team Momentum did the count ... a wonderful opportunity to gerrymander.

So, with a victorious 80.6% voting for Omov, at a stroke the national committee, steering committee and regional committees were abolished. There will perhaps be a *powerless* 'official' Momentum conference ... eventually (like the proposed November 5 national committee meeting, the February 18 conference has been cancelled - this time because of the by-elections in Stoke-on-Trent Central and Copeland). Moreover, everyone has to agree to Lansman's constitution ... or quit the organisation. They also have to be a member of the Labour Party by July 1 2017 or they will be "deemed to have resigned" (even though many have been already barred or expelled because of their activity in support of Jeremy Corbyn and Momentum).

Jon Lansman's *coup de grâce* was a long time in coming ... and, frankly, we are surprised it took him so long. Even though he has made his ally, Christine Shawcroft, a director of 'Momentum Data (Services) Ltd', he is still in charge of 'Jeremy for Labour Ltd'. In other words, legal control of Momentum lies not with its membership nor its elected committees. No, it lies with its tiny group of shareholders (very capitalistic). Hence it is Jon Lansman's hands on the databases and the funds. Effectively it is he too who appoints the full-timers who make up team Momentum.

However, not surprisingly, Momentum branches up and down the country have come out against Lansman's January 10 coup. To date around 30 of them. Most Momentum activists are utterly appalled by the crass way in which all democratic decision-making bodies have been abolished and a new anti-democratic constitution imposed by Jon Lansman and his allies. But, as would be expected, there is huge confusion on how to best move forward.

On January 13, the (abolished) Conference Arrangements Committee released a statement (with the three



Please listen, Jeremy

Lansman allies on the committee not voting), according to which: "The CAC takes its direction from Momentum's national committee, as per the original remit we were given. Until that body meets and informs us our role has changed, we will continue working towards Momentum's first conference." Brave talk ... and, given Momentum's original structure, perfectly legitimate.

A provisional date of March 11 for "the postponed conference" has been mooted. The statement rigidly sticks to the CAC's initial brief, according to which the committee will accept only "one motion" from each branch and "one motion or constitutional amendment" from each region. The committee also told us that the national committee (majority) would meet, as previously planned, on January 28 in London.

The meeting will probably be a non-binding get-together. However, there are those who wanted to use it as a springboard for a full-scale split, with the national committee appointing a new steering committee, agreeing the date of a sovereign conference and demanding the transfer of funds and databases from Jon Lansman and his allies. Morally, this course would have been perfectly justifiable. After all, with the new constitution it is next to impossible to remove Lansman and his allies from their position of total domination.

However, it has become clear in recent weeks that very few Momentum members, let alone branches, are up for such a course. While there are countless expressions of outrage, there is also a heart-felt desire not to further divide the movement. So, for the

moment at least, accept any anti-democratic outrage, any violation of basic principles.

There is naivety too. Some refuse to believe that Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and Diane Abbott know what Lansman has done. Similar illusions existed in the Soviet Union at the height of Stalin's purges.

There is also fear. A split in Momentum will give the bourgeois media a field day. Many worry that Ukip's Paul Nuttall is set to win in Stoke. Jeremy Corbyn's populist turn has not increased Labour's poll standing. If Theresa May calls a snap general election this spring, we therefore face a wipe-out of 1931 proportions. Those who joined Momentum to support Corbyn and get him into No10 are almost in a panic. Hence the frantic calls for unity, not to rock the boat and the need to get rid of troublesome leftists who could embarrass Jeremy Corbyn by reminding the public of his former republican stance, his anti-imperialist campaigning and forthright opposition to Zionist Israel.

Hence the chances are that a split would only take a tiny minority of Momentum's largely passive 20,000 members. However, the biggest problem for the opposition is its lack of solid politics and a clear perspective. The CAC was searching for some middle ground with Lansman. Its preferred constitution - drafted by Nick Wrack and Matt Wrack - had all the problems of Lansman's: referendums, direct election of officers and mimicking student unions, trade unions and the Labour Party itself. By contrast we in LPM wanted Momentum to recognise that it was a *faction* united by its common politics and which, like the Fabians, ought to seek affiliation to the

Labour Party.

Given the absence of a well-organised and politically principled left, the idea of challenging the Lansman coup head-on was never realistic. But that does not mean we should give up the fight for the hearts and minds of Momentum's 20,000 or the 200,000 on its database. True, quite a number of people - for example, Nick Wrack - have talked about resigning or have already left Momentum. This level of frustration and impatience is understandable, but also short-sighted.

There has been a huge democratic deficit within Momentum right from the start. Ever since Corbyn won the leadership race he and his allies have had to improvise. Jon Lansman swapped his role as Corbyn's campaign organiser for what became the Momentum brief. To begin with there was vague talk of grassroots control, involving wider protest movements and local campaigning. However, instead of channelling the huge enthusiasm generated by Corbyn's success into a battle to transform the Labour Party, another, more conservative, course was chosen. The Labour Party right had to be conciliated ... therefore Momentum has to be tightly controlled from above. Otherwise it would be demanding the automatic reselection of MPs (which was until very recently, the position of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, of which Corbyn and Lansman are members).

Of course, any organisation that cannot trust its membership is unlikely to be able to mobilise them ... even as spear-carriers. The danger is that Momentum will soon become little more than an empty husk. But for now Labour Party Marxists will continue to work

in Momentum while any life in it remains. We will do so with a view to spreading our vision of what Labour needs to be.

Demands for boycotting Momentum - crucially the elections to the new National Coordinating Group - are mistaken. There is no reason to impose isolation upon ourselves. Indeed we should use every opportunity, every avenue to spread the ideas of Marxism. That is why Stan Keable, secretary of LPM, is standing for the NCG, in the South East constituency.

True, Momentum's new constitution is a travesty of democracy. The 12 rank-and-file members will find themselves swamped by chosen representatives of Left Futures, *Labour Briefing* ('original'), MPs, councillors, affiliated trade unions, etc, etc, who are allocated specially reserved places on the NCG.

But the same can be said of the post-1905 constitution of tsarist Russia. An autocratic monarch; rigged, indirect elections; seats reserved for the aristocracy and priesthood; and a stifling regime of censorship. Nevertheless, it was right for the Bolsheviks to stand in *duma* elections.

Of course, the left should organise and debate the road ahead. That can involve electing delegates from Momentum branches. But there should also be a conscious effort to involve the groups and fractions committed to working in the Labour Party: the Labour Representation Committee, Red Labour, *The Clarion*, *Red Flag*, Labour Party Socialist Network, *Socialist Appeal* and, of course, Labour Party Marxists.

So, no to a split, yes to Momentum opposition ●

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# Why referendums are anti-democratic

Mike Macnair says referendums empower those above, not those below

Tim Stanley in *The Daily Telegraph* writes, apropos of Brexit and of the election of Donald Trump, that “The left are being sore losers and democracy is the poorer for it”. His objection is that, by failing to accept the result of these votes, “the left” is failing to “move on” to challenge the actual policy choices of Trump, and/or of the Brexiters; so that “democracy” is “poorer”, both because there is insufficient ‘scrutiny’ of the winners’ policies and - more emphasised in his argument - because the tendency of the criticisms is, he says, to undermine the practice of having elections and votes at all.<sup>1</sup>

Stanley’s argument is a defence of the devices by which capital turns universal suffrage into an ‘instrument of deception’. These devices have been so ostentatiously on display in 2016 that they can hardly be missed; and hence might, just possibly, be threatened with public revulsion, which would make ‘democracy’ poorer - meaning, make journos and their employers poorer. But, of course, much of the mainstream ‘left’ is perfectly willing to help out Stanley and his ilk in this matter. To characterise Trump, or the Brexiters, as fascists or protofascists - as something unusual - is to divert attention from the routine in which journos’ lies fool enough people enough of the time to swing referendums and elections. And, moreover, part of the left positively supports the sort of plebiscitary politics which facilitates journo-fraud as an instrument of corruption.

This is the nature of Jon Lansman and his allies’ campaign for a referendum-based constitution for Momentum: a campaign which revealed its true nature by being carried out through ‘red scare’ witch-hunting in the advertising-funded media: a small-scale imitation of the techniques of the Blairites against Corbyn, and of the Trumpites and Brexiters in mainstream politics.

## The left

“The left” in the context of Stanley’s argument means, of course, the US Democrats, and the British Labour right and Lib Dem ‘remainers’, not anyone further left. Stanley might have noticed, if he bothered to, that the Corbyn camp’s position was ambiguous (complained of, indeed, by remainder journos and MPs) and that the main forces further left - the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain, the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party in England and Wales - were all advocates of ‘left exit’, so that from their point of view the Brexit vote was a victory. Here “the left” is a selective view of the left, meaning ‘the rightwing part of the left, which we rightwing journos are willing to regard as respectable’.

The plain dishonesty or self-serving self-deception in this selective identification of the target should alert us to the probable dishonesty or self-serving self-deception of the rest of the argument of the article. Perhaps more immediately to the present point, Labour Party Marxists, and hence this bulletin, did not wait until the ‘unpleasant’ (from a liberal point of view) results of the Brexit referendum and Trump’s election to complain of the fraudulent character of the referendum process, of the direct election of presidents, party leaders and so on.

We argued for an active boycott of the Brexit referendum on this basis. Our co-thinkers were already arguing against these Bonapartist operations in relation to

the ‘Vote for the crook, not for the fascist’ presidential election in France in 2002. They argued, similarly, for a boycott of the Scottish independence referendum in 2014, on the basis that it offered a false choice. Such tactics in relation to all these challenges are open to debate; but our school of thought can hardly be accused of raising objections to the process as a sour-grapes response to results we didn’t (or don’t) like. Nor is this LPM position a novelty.

It is merely a matter of recovering the historic position of the labour movement against plebiscites/referenda, and against the elevation of single-person executive presidencies, as forms of the Bonapartism of Napoleon III (directly elected president of France 1848-52 and emperor 1852-1870). Napoleon III’s 1851 coup was endorsed by ... a rapid referendum, followed by a second referendum in 1852 to make him emperor. It is against these methods that Marx and his co-authors argued in the *Programme of the Parti Ouvrier* that the creation of a workers’ party “must be pursued by all the means the proletariat has at its disposal, including universal suffrage, which will thus be transformed from the instrument of deception that it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation”.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, that socialists sought to abolish the US presidency (like similar offices) was already a commonplace in 1893.<sup>3</sup> Readers might also usefully look at Ben Lewis’s overview of Karl Kautsky’s 1893 *Parliamentarism, direct legislation by the people and social democracy*, and earlier this year Ben’s translation of extracts from Kautsky’s book.<sup>4</sup> This argued at length against the idea of legislation by referendum.<sup>5</sup>

## Forgotten

The fact that this routine pre-1914 labour-movement understanding has been lost by the majority of the left results from two sets of ideas.

The first is that called by György Lukács the ‘actuality of the revolution’: the idea, posed by the early Communist International in 1919-22, that revolution was on the immediate agenda, and that this meant essentially the struggle for power, growing directly out of strike struggles, as opposed to any thought wasted on concrete constitutional arrangements. This was a reasonable interpretation of conditions at the end of World War I and immediately after, but was already becoming problematic by 1923.

The second is the concept of the ‘transitional method’ developed by post-1945 Trotskyists on the basis of the idea of a ‘transitional programme’, first posed at the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in 1922, then elaborated in the *Transitional programme* of the founding congress of the Trotskyists’ Fourth International in 1938.

While the ‘transitional programme’ had some substance to it, the ‘transitional method’ turns out to be merely an attempt to con the working class into taking power by avoiding talking about constitutional issues: a variant on the line of the Russian economists of the early 1900s. In this context, talk of the Lukácsian ‘actuality of the revolution’ and the recital by modern leftists of old leftist objections to pre-1914 socialist policy turn into pseudo-leftist alibis for a concrete policy which fails to challenge the existing constitutional order.

When people who think like this argue, like Socialist Resistance or the Alliance for

Workers’ Liberty, for resistance to Trump or Trumpism, or to Brexit, they do indeed engage in sour-grapes reasoning - and, in addition, appear merely as the enraged wing of the liberals.

## Old corruption

It is, however, more interesting that Stanley argues that criticisms of the electoral process will necessarily undermine the practice of holding elections, because the defects complained of are merely normal. “Have you ever known an election in which a politician didn’t fib? It’s up to voters to play detective ...”

Back to the beginning. Stanley’s argument shows signs of either dishonesty or self-serving self-deception in the targets he selects as ‘the left’. We may reasonably infer that the rest of the argument is the same. But what is it defending? The underlying nature of his argument is not dissimilar to arguments made against electoral reform in the 19th century: for example, an opponent of banning candidates’ agents bribing voters complained in 1870 that, “Given that ‘free trade’ was otherwise ‘a principle of universal application’, why ‘affect a fastidious indignation at a political offence that poverty makes venial?’”<sup>6</sup>

We can, of course, push this sort of thing further back. A close analogy with Stanley’s argument that voters should act as detectives is Mr Justice Grose’s conclusion in *Pasley v Freeman* (1789) that there should be no civil legal liability for causing loss by fraud in the absence of a contract between the parties, since “I believe there has been no time when men have not been constantly damned by the fraudulent misrepresentations of others: and if such an action would have lain, there certainly has been, and will be, a plentiful source of litigation”; and that in the instant case “it is that sort of misrepresentation, the truth of which does not lie merely in the knowledge of the defendant, but may be inquired into, and the plaintiff is bound so to do; and he cannot recover a damage which he has suffered by his laches [carelessness].”<sup>7</sup> (The argument was rejected by the majority of the judges.) Or Chief Justice Holt’s 1704 objection to criminal liability for fraud: “Shall we indict a man for making a fool of another?”<sup>8</sup> (In this case the indictment was quashed. The conduct charged would now be covered by the Fraud Act 2006.)

Nonetheless, even when this sort of argument was commonplace, and buying votes was normal, the ‘voters play detective’ logic was not followed through fully. Sir John Trevor was sacked as Speaker of the House of Commons in 1695, when he was caught taking a large bribe from the City of London for facilitating legislation they wanted. Bribing voters was acceptable; fraud, of a sort which would be illegal in modern times, was on the edge of legality. But for the speaker of the House of Commons to take bribes was unacceptable - and so was, even earlier, for the Lord Chancellor to take bribes.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, there are limits. Even suppose that you are a strong advocate of free markets and the idea that *caveat emptor* (let the buyer beware). Still, without some degree of bribe-free and manipulation-free decision-making, there can be neither legally binding contracts nor property rights among market actors. The real meaning of ‘anarcho-capitalism’ is warlordism, in the style of Afghanistan or Somalia. Over time, the limits have shifted.

In the 19th century, in particular, there was a major shift against ‘Old corruption’; one which in the later 19th century, both in England and the US, produced institutional steps against vote-buying.<sup>10</sup>

It is clear enough that these steps were linked to other institutional changes of the period, which involved most famously the extension of the franchise. Less famously a process of professionalisation of the state apparatus, which actually involved its proletarianisation: that is, that public office ceased to be a marketable asset (‘offices of profit under the Crown’, the sale and purchase of commissions in the army, and so on) and became instead mere employments, with the state official as an employee limited to a wage (salary). It is common on the left to regard the changes made at this time either as mere technical ‘modernisation’ (following Weber, perhaps by way of Lukács); or as ‘bourgeois democracy’ on the supposition that the capitalist class is inherently ‘democratic’.

The error is the supposition that ‘Old corruption’ was feudal - an error encouraged by 19th century radicals’ own interpretation of it. It is clear, however, that capitalist groups down to the early 20th century preferred restrictive franchises and co-optative systems of self-perpetuating oligarchy; a form of governance which continues to this day in the City of London, for example. The partial suppression of certain open forms of corruption, together with the extended franchise and the partial proletarianisation of the state apparatus, reflected partial concessions to the proletariat as a class, in response to the political threats faced by capital around 1848 and again in the 1860s.

Once we see this, we can also see that, while the boundary of unacceptable ‘corruption’ moved outward in the later 19th century, what continues is a regime of corruption and electoral fraud under limits - not one of the actual elimination of corruption. Actually to eliminate corruption and fraud would be to destroy the underlying Burkean conception of the state as a ‘joint stock’, a quasi-corporation owned by its ‘shareholders’, the property-owners, in proportion to their wealth.<sup>11</sup> If anything, the acceptance of extended suffrage (ultimately and currently, universal adult suffrage) requires more means of control both of the electoral system, and external to it.

## Fraud

There are a variety of such means. But one central aspect is the role of advertising-funded media as engines of electoral fraud. It is a marked feature of writers in the advertising-funded media to deny the influence of its own fraudulent misrepresentations when - as now - the legitimacy of this influence is called into question. But when the papers, and so on, are selling advertising space, a very different story will be told. And the same is true when efforts are being made to persuade the leaders of political parties that they cannot realistically ‘go up against’ the media, or are doomed to defeat if they do so.

To sell advertising space, or to back up advocates of ‘better media relations’, the story told is one of the great power of advertising and media. In reality, the story is neither one of feeble illusions that anyone can see through - the voters effectively playing detective - nor one of omnipotent media controlling completely the terms of ‘discourse’. Consider, for example, the

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Brexit referendum result - 17,410,742 or 51.9% for ‘leave’, 16,141,241 or 48.1% for ‘remain’. Or the US presidential election: 62,979,636 or 46% for Trump-Pence, 65,844,610 or 48% for Clinton-Caine, with 6% given to third-party candidates and the votes distributed in such a way that the popular plurality for the Democrat ticket nonetheless produced a clear electoral college majority for Trump.

In neither of these cases - and in no recent British general election - is it necessary to fool all the people all the time, or even to fool a majority. It is only necessary to fool a small minority of people, the ‘swing voters’, for a small period of time - the immediate run-up to an election or referendum.

## Sign up now!

How does it work? A large part of the doorstep conman’s or other fraudster’s trick is to reduce the information available to the mark. The primary fraudulent misrepresentations are expected to crowd out other information, less attractively presented, which might conflict with them; but also pressure is put on to ‘close the deal’ before the mark has had an opportunity to rethink. It is precisely for this reason that consumer protection regulation against these forms of fraud, primarily the Consumer Credit Acts, impose cooling-off periods during which the consumer can back off from the deal which has been pressure-sold to them.

Electoral fraud works in the same way. The primary fraudulent misrepresentations are broadcast by paid advertising and the state and advertising-funded media, crowding out other messages (indeed, the phenomena of junk mail, billboard advertising and flyposting for clubs and gigs themselves work to drown out all forms of political communication not backed by advertising agencies or the mass media). The role of the advertising-funded mass media is, in fact, central to corruption and sleaze, because the only way (within the rules of the game) that politicians can hope to counter the biases of the mass media and behind them the advertisers, is to buy commercial advertising, which demands donations from the rich to fund the advertising, which in turn demands the policy pay-off to the donors.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, elections happen once every five years, and the campaign is short: and the message from both the media and the main parties is that the job of elections is to choose a government. So don’t waste your vote - or your thinking time - on fringe parties. Close the deal! Political action in local government elections and the internal life of parties, which can provide some degree of political life outside the ‘government election season’, is as far as possible closed down: by first-past-the-post, which results in big-party control of councils and ‘rotten boroughs’, by the enormous expansion of judicial review (why fight for council policies when the lawyers will tell you what to do anyhow?) - and, in the Labour Party, by bureaucratic intervention by the central apparatus, backed if necessary by the trade union bureaucracy. Only in general elections are the voters to be allowed to make ‘real choices’. Close the deal! Close the deal now! No cooling-off period is to be permitted: this



## But real life is far more complex

is the exact point of the intense campaign of the Brexiteer wing of the media to insist that the referendum result is final and force through irrevocable steps for Brexit. This campaign against cooling-off is precisely evidence that what they are engaged in is a fraudulent operation.

The anarchists produced a true slogan about capitalist elections: 'Whoever you vote for, the government will get in.' It would be even truer to say: 'Whoever of the main parties you vote for, you will have been conned.' The more referendum-like the election process is - the more the question set is defined by full-time political operators, the more the access to information and to arguments is controlled by full-time staff or MPs and by the advertising-funded media, and the more there is no opportunity to repent and change your mind - the more you will be conned.

## Momentum

As I said earlier, Stanley is concerned to defend 'democracy', meaning corruption through media control of limited elections, against the threat that the obvious manipulation of recent plebiscitary votes just might lead enough people to call into question the 'process': that is, the instruments of manipulation. It is deeply ironic that at the same moment the group round Jon Lansman in the leadership of Momentum used just these old media-manipulative methods to defend the old plebiscitary methods which make media manipulation more effective (and thereby enforce corruption through donations to parties); and to defend these old methods as somehow 'new'.

Lansman and Co lost a number of votes in Momentum's National Committee meeting on December 3. It was perfectly legitimate for them to argue for the reversal of these decisions. It was equally legitimate for them to argue that the Momentum NC is unrepresentative. It could hardly be anything but, given Momentum's weak structures; but then the small Steering Committee which the NC left in place on December 3 is even more unrepresentative, and Jon Lansman as the individual private owner of the companies which own Momentum's funds and data is more unrepresentative still.

When, however, the form of the campaign to reverse the decisions is not through Momentum internal structures or self-publishing, but through the Blairite and employers' technique of briefing the advertising-funded media, it is reasonable to suppose that Lansman and his camp have committed themselves to the constitutional order in which capital rules *inter alia*

through journo-fraud.

An example of the journo-fraud operations in progress have been seen recently in the concerted media campaign against potential strikers in the rail and the post. This very old-fashioned Bonapartist plebiscitary form of politics, routinely used as a means of political corruption by capital, is nonetheless presented by Lansman and Co as new politics.

The culmination of this was the email issued by 'team Momentum to Momentum members and supporters in the name of Jeremy Corbyn - and presumably actually agreed by him (this was followed by similar messages from Diane Abbott and Clive Lewis). Corbyn's emails told us that:

We must not let internal debate distract from our work that has to be done to help Labour win elections. Momentum needs to be an organisation fit for purpose - not copying the failed models of the past, but bringing fresh ideas to campaigning and organising in communities, helping members be active in the Labour Party and helping secure a Labour government to rebuild and transform Britain. That's why the Momentum team has drawn up a survey to give every member a direct say in its future ...

The email pointed members to ... a "survey", or opinion poll, carefully drafted to maximise the vote for Lansman and Co's preferred approach: that 'key decisions' should be taken by referenda; and that the job of Momentum should be to turn out the vote - ie, that it should not 'waste time' discussing policy questions. The activists, it is suggested, should not bother their fluffly little heads with these issues.

They are to be treated as belonging to the party leadership, or the leader's office, or Team Momentum: as, for example, when team Momentum decided, without consultation beyond the Steering Committee, to dump Jackie Walker out of the sleigh to feed the journo-wolves of the media witch-hunt round alleged Labour anti-Semitism: briefed by what can best be called the Start the War Coalition of Labour MPs gung-ho for bombing Syria.

How can this very traditional bureaucratic, media and professional politician management possibly be claimed to be new politics? The simple version is that Jeremy Corbyn was elected by online 'one member, one vote', and if it is good enough for him it should be good enough for taking all sorts of policy decisions.

But this, of course, has nothing new about it at all, being merely a revived form of the argument of Louis Bonaparte for his legitimacy to overthrow the French republican constitution in 1851 and his use of referendums to decide 'key' questions. It is also true that a combination of accidents meant that Ed Miliband's Omov scheme for election of the Labour leader allowed hundreds of thousands of people fed up with 'Blairmeronite' bipartisan politics to revolt at a low cost.

This low cost, however, has meant that the Labour left has been affected by an illusion of strength through social media - shown to be an illusion by the practical results of the political war actually being waged by the Labour right, which has allowed it to tighten its grip on party conference and party institutions.

A similar, but desperately more serious, example of the illusions of 'new media' activism, this time under conditions of real repression and war, can be seen in the Syrian uprising and civil war: a point made recently by Riham Alkousaa on Al-Jazeera.<sup>13</sup>

Leaving aside illusions of strength, does the new tech change the delusive character of 'plebiscitary democracy'? Not in the least. It is just in the nature of things that human beings have disagreements. Assuming there is a straightforwardly 'right thing to do', it is rarely obvious what the right thing to do is. Very frequently, there is not only a choice to be made between option 1 or 2, but from options 1 to 7 and within these, 1 (a) (i), 1 (a) (ii), 1 (b), ... and so on. To reach a decision, then, it is necessary to reduce the range of options. This is, of course, why the Labour Party, when it functioned at all democratically, had (1) the right of constituencies to introduce amendments to proposed motions, (2) compositing procedures, and (3) even then, discussion at party conference before the vote was taken. Without such methods, let us imagine a Momentum of 200,000 members, of which every member has (a) the right to put proposals by electronic circulation to the whole membership, and (b) the right of individual veto over all such proposals (which is what is actually meant by proceeding by consensus, rather than proceeding by vote). Then on the one hand I get up in the morning, open my emails and find 10,000 emails with individual proposals for Momentum decisions waiting to be read. However, on the other hand, actually, I needn't read them, because I can be pretty certain that someone among the 200,000 members will veto any of them, so that none of them will be adopted. The

reality is that someone has to reduce the range of possible choices.

Behind any consensus process, there must be some decision-making mechanism which works otherwise. Thus in the World Social Forums, the decisive voice was of the bureaucratic apparatus of the Brazilian Workers' Party; in the European Social Forums, that of Rifondazione Comunista; in the London variant, Ken Livingstone's London mayor's office.

In the absence of elected bodies able to narrow the options down, and of debate among rival trends, factions and so on, it must be so. That this is how Lansman and Co see 'new politics' is plain enough. They are already operating under a regime in which team Momentum exercises bureaucratic control and Jon Lansman has the authority to act on his own - though in consultation with the equivalent full-timers in Jeremy Corbyn's office, and so on.

The idea that referendumism is new or 'horizontal' is a scam or, at most, a self-deception, just like Tim Stanley's scamming or self-deceptive claims that criticisms of fraud in the Trump victory or the Brexit vote make "democracy" the "poorer". They are, in truth, just the same argument in favour of media control: reflected in the use made by team Momentum of traditional media spin techniques ●

## Notes

1. *The Daily Telegraph* December 12 2016.
2. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm).
3. Engels' March 14 1893 letter to F Wiesen of Texas, copied to Sorge: [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1893/letters/93\\_03\\_18.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1893/letters/93_03_18.htm).
4. *Ibid*
5. B Lewis, 'Referenda and direct democracy' *Weekly Worker* September 18 2014; K Kautsky, 'Direct legislation by the people and the class struggle' *Weekly Worker* March 31 2016.
6. G Orr, 'Suppressing vote-buying: the 'war' on electoral bribery from 1868' *J Leg Hist* 27 pp289-314 (2006) at p294, quoting an anonymous pamphlet of 1870.
7. 3 Term Reports 51, 100 ER 450, at pp53/451, 55/452. 7. *Regina v Jones* 2 Lord Raymond 1013, 92 ER 174.
8. K Ellis, 'Trevor, Sir John': <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/trevor-sir-john-1637-1717>.
9. Lord Chancellor: Francis Bacon, impeached for corruption 1621.
10. G Orr above, note 4; cf also Stokes et al *Brokers, voters and clientelism: the puzzle of distributive politics* Cambridge 2013, chapter 8.
11. Burke, 'Reflections on the revolution in France': <https://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/563/>, para 3.
12. 'Sleaze is back' *Weekly Worker* July 20 2006.
13. 'How Facebook hurt the Syrian Revolution', December 4 2016: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/12/facebook-hurt-syrianrevolution-16120312591577.html>.

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, MEPs, 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 ●

# Establishment looking to dump Trump

First the salacious dossier, then the huge, but liberal-led, women's marches. The left must maintain its political independence, says **Jim Grant**

World-wide over 2.5 million marched after Donald's Trump's inauguration. There were protests in at least 600 towns and cities. Truly, a mass outpouring of disappointment, anger and desperation. Not only did the US fail to elect its first female president, but Trump is an odious xenophobe, misogynist and a sworn enemy of virtually every progressive cause.

It is vital that we are not led by the nose in what could well be a carefully choreographed campaign to impeach Trump at the earliest possible opportunity. Who spoke at the rallies and what they said tells us everything we need to know about the politics of the organisers. In Washington speakers included Madonna, Katy Perry, America Ferrera, Ashley Judd, Michael Moore and Scarlett Johansson. Their message: stand up to racism and sexism. In London it was Sandi Toksvig and Yvette Cooper (she was there as unofficial Labour - somewhat stupidly the Labour front bench stuck to its NHS action day). Their message: stand up to racism and sexism.

On Twitter, Hillary Clinton, the unsuccessful Democrat presidential contender, thanked all who attended for "standing, speaking and marching for our values". As for the media, it gave generous pre- and post-publicity.

But Trump cannot be impeached simply because he is an odious xenophobe, misogynist and a sworn enemy of virtually every progressive cause. That is where the infamous Trump dossier comes in. The author is widely assumed to be a certain Christopher Steele. His 35 pages of allegations against the president and his people range from the dubious to the treasonous, to the downright bizarre; all rendered in the bland, grey prose of the MI6 house style.

Steele, a former operative at the Circus gone private, and his firm, Orbis, are merely one of a whole nexus of private intelligence firms operating in London, whose previous claim to notability consists in compiling evidence of corruption at the top of football's governing body, Fifa, on the UK government's dime, which issued ultimately - after the information made it to Washington - in the dramatic arrests of mid-2015 and the resignation of Sepp Blatter.

Steele's name came up after it was admitted that the source of all these allegations is a Briton, which in the end is hardly surprising. Britain has the right combination - slavish obedience to US policy, coupled with a most hospitable environment for Russian oligarchs to stash their fortunes. No doubt there are many Russian gentlemen with ambiguous relations to the Kremlin available for a 'private chat' in the right sort of Mayfair club. A whole industry, it appears, has grown up around this fortuitous position, with ex-spooks very quickly replacing their income (and more) in the private sector.

There are, now we think of it, a few parallels between Blatter's case and Trump's: both men are sexist buffoons, for a start; and what Blatter achieved within the small circles of football's governing elite (founding a firm and unpleasant regime on the support of more marginal constituencies) Trump aims to replicate on the grander stage of American society. They are both, above all, men who are liable to make enemies, and Blatter's ultimately caught up with him.

While the interest of the secret state and its semi-detached private apparatchiks like Steele in the black heart of international football is merely a testament to how bizarre the distempers of the imperialist world order can get, the interest in Trump's Russian adventures is more easily explicable. US state department doctrine



Donald Trump: appears to mean what he was saying

in the recent period has been dominated by the objective of encircling Russia, in order to ensure ready American access from western Europe all the way to the far side of the Mediterranean and the Arabian peninsula. Such activity has increasingly clashed with Russia's perceived interests in its near abroad - a policy that has provoked crises over Nato expansion and the recent wave of fatuous doublethink over who may be said to have liberated cities from Islamic State in the Middle East.

## Compromised

Trump's *stated* foreign policy represents, on this point at least, a dramatic shift. He has made no secret of his admiration for Russian president Vladimir Putin, and is gleeful in ramming home the point that the Russians have a freer hand to bomb the hell out of jihadist militants than the United States, such is the diplomatic cat's cradle the latter has built for itself in the region.

The Steele dossier alleges in substance that the new president's approach can be explained simply thus: Trump is compromised by Russian intelligence. His close advisors are accused of collaborating in the hacking of Democratic national committee emails. It is alleged that the Russian authorities, while 'cultivating' Trump as a presidential hopeful for five years, were simultaneously gathering

compromising material (*kompromat*) as a guarantee of good behaviour, including the eye-catching claim that he paid prostitutes to piss in a bed once used by Barack and Michelle Obama, while he watched.

Trump's response was, of course, to call all this so much "fake news" and a "political witch-hunt", which raises inevitably the question of exactly how much there is in these claims. An interesting piece on the website of the *London Review of Books* by Arthur Snell, a former foreign office apparatchik, makes the point that there are rarely smoking guns in strategic intelligence, which is not so much post-truth as para-truth. What the poor, beleaguered spook has to work with is essentially hearsay:

At the heart of this game of betrayal is trust: the source of the intelligence must be trusted by his or her handler. The reader of the intelligence report has to trust the provider of the intelligence, while remaining critical. Intelligence is about degrees of credibility, and reading it is not the same as reading reportage, or a piece of political analysis. In order to make an assessment of its reliability, a reader needs to examine how it's been sourced, insofar as that's possible.<sup>1</sup>

All news outlets, especially in libel-crazy Britain, are keen to point out

the unsubstantiated nature of all these allegations; and it certainly seems at least that the most straightforwardly damning one (that Trump ally Michael Cohen met with Russian intelligence on a particular date in Prague to discuss dirty digital tricks) is factually incorrect. As for the business with the bed, it is unlikely that any interested parties in the west are going to get any DNA swabs from the sheets. Who knows?

The more interesting question is perhaps not whether such things are true in the narrow sense, but whether they are advanced in good faith. The story being told about Steele is that, having been commissioned by the Democrats to look into Trump for them, he was so spooked by what he discovered that he went to the FBI, who merely sat on all this stuff, not wanting to be seen to intervene in the election. In this version, Steele (or whoever) investigated and reported the allegations out of concern for the west's internal security, and the leak is essentially a disaster, shifting the terms of debate from the probabilistic models of the securocracy to the less nuanced arenas of the civilian legal system and media scrutiny.

There is the alternative explanation, which is that the whole thing is straightforwardly a fabrication - a Zinoviev letter for the right, playing on Manchurian candidate-style fantasies of the White House somehow being seized by an

enemy agent.

The Steele dossier then has two potential uses - the one, being employed as a pretext for impeachment early in Trump's reign, in a 'very British coup' (spooks, sex, the whole works!); the other, being used to make it *politically difficult* for Trump to pursue his thaw with the Kremlin without appearing to confirm the idea that he is Putin's catspaw.

## Left response

On January 20 the transition of power was complete and Donald John Trump was sworn in as the 45th president of the United States of America. A new era of global politics has begun.

How should the labour movement - in this country and the States - respond?

It is no surprise that there have been huge protests; indeed, protests have barely let up since the election. The horror among liberals, progressives and socialists is palpable, and understandable, at the rise of this narcissistic, bigoted cretin to the Oval Office; and we are disturbed by the apparent reality that he succeeded in part not in spite of, but *because* of, his posturing machismo and gleeful chauvinism. Trump has exposed a rottenness at the heart of political culture in the Anglosphere; the question is merely what exactly it is that is rotting.

Yet it is a peculiar age indeed when America's business, political, secret and cultural establishment and the Socialist Workers Party are eye to eye on anything, never mind their attitude towards a newly elected president: "We don't want Trump - but neither do the bosses," says SWP leader Alex Callinicos. But all he can offer is "redouble building" the Stand up to Racism front.<sup>2</sup> Indeed the SWP's main slogan, 'Dump Trump', is identical with the interests of what is commonly called neoliberal capitalism. There is no independent class politics. No independent class strategy.

The sad fact of the matter is that the SWP is far from alone. The identification of the left with the establishment, the meat and potatoes of the American (and European) right, is being successfully exploited in elections by Donald Trump, Nigel Farage, Gert Wilders, Frauke Petry and Marine Le Pen.

Unity with the 'liberal elite' is paralysing any meaningful counter-strike against rightist national chauvinism; and the radical left has failed to benefit because it fails to acknowledge that mere ritual denunciations of racism, sexism, etc have not only lost the dissident edge they once possessed, but are now *official establishment ideology* throughout the so-called western world ●

## Notes

1. [www.lrb.co.uk/2017/01/17/arthur-snell/how-to-read-the-trump-dossier](http://www.lrb.co.uk/2017/01/17/arthur-snell/how-to-read-the-trump-dossier).
2. <http://internationalsocialists.org/wordpress/2016/11/we-dont-want-trump%E2%80%94neither-do-the-bosses-alex-callinicos/>.

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