



# LABOUR PARTY MARXISTS

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## READY TO FALL

Because of acute divisions over Europe the Tories are extremely vulnerable. However, says **David Sherrief**, the last thing we need to replace them is a 'normal' Labour government



Weak and wobbly

**T**heresa May's government is deeply divided and looks set to blunderingly take Brexit negotiations to a disastrous 'cliff edge'. Despite her Florence speech, little progress is being made in Brussels. No breakthrough over the divorce bill. No breakthrough over the Irish border. Then there is Boris Johnson and his 4,000-word *Sunday Telegraph* manifesto calling for a

low-tax, low-regulation Britain finding a "glorious" future outside both the single market and the customs union.<sup>1</sup> A cat in the "nest of singing birds".

True, the government comfortably got the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill through its second reading in the Commons. The final vote was 326-290. However, the war is far from over. Tory MPs - not least Nicky Morgan, Dominic Grieve and Anna Soubry - have tabled amendments aimed at shooting holes into May's Brexit plans: eg, they want to include the EU's charter of fundamental rights. There will also be challenges to the use of so-called Henry VIII powers and demands for a vote on final terms. This brings the distinct possibility of government defeats. Of course, that would not trigger a general election. For the moment at least, May is secure. Thanks to the £1 billion deal with the Democratic Unionist Party, she would win a vote of confidence. Nonetheless, the government is vulnerable and we should expect compromises, gruelling late-night sittings, MPs being brought in from sick beds and desperately fought by-elections.

Surely, though, the government's main problem is that a hard Brexit runs counter to the interests of the dominant sections of big capital in Britain. For example, the

recent Downing Street approach to large private companies and selected FT-100 firms, in the attempt to obtain endorsement for the government's post-Brexit plans for a "global Britain", was greeted with derision. Technology, aerospace, pharmaceutical, energy, manufacturing, banking and financial services firms have all warned that the drifting Brexit negotiations could lead them to transfer some operations from Britain. Toyota is already openly questioning the future of its Burnaston plant in Derbyshire.

Many capitalists fear that they will face tariffs and other damaging barriers after March 2019 ... if there is no deal. Nor do they have any liking for the government's leaked proposals to limit immigration post-Brexit. The markets confirm what the personifications of capital say. Since the June 2016 referendum the pound sterling has fallen by around 20%, compared with other major currencies. Moody's has meanwhile downgraded Britain's credit rating from a top AAA to Aa1, and now Aa2. Despite the requirement to pay what is in effect a 20% premium, *outward* investment has doubled in the last quarter. Figures such as these reveal the thinking of collective capital. The bet is that Britain is heading for difficult times. In other words, Brexit is bad for profit-making.

Of course, at Phillip Hammond's prompting, there has been an acceptance that Britain will, if it can, negotiate a two-year transition period. This has been cautiously welcomed by many of the CEOs and boardrooms of blue-chip companies. But the lack of detail causes uncertainty, frustration, even anguish.

A recent survey of 1,000 UK businesses reported that more than two-thirds of them needed to "know the details of any transition arrangement after Brexit by June 2018 - just nine months from now - in order to plan properly". If investment and recruitment decisions that have been put "on hold" are to be "unblocked", 40% of the businesses say the government must set out what the transition will involve, when it comes to vital areas, such as the movement of goods, capital and people, as well as legal arrangements.<sup>2</sup>

Far from May and her cabinet providing Britain with 'strong and stable' leadership, big capital worries that *party interests* are being put first. Hence, addressing widespread concerns amongst voters about 'unrestricted' immigration is being prioritised over guaranteeing access to the single market. Private meetings and frantic lobbying have had little effect on David Davies and his department for exiting the EU. The government says it has its mandate and

appears intent on brushing aside the interests of big capital. All in all, therefore, "big business is in a difficult position", reckons John Colley of the Warwick Business School.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, the capitalist class, though it is the ruling class, is particularly ill-adapted to exercising direct control over day-to-day government operations. The main business of members of the capitalist class is business. The exploitation of labour and dog-eats-dog competition is hellishly time-consuming. On average CEOs work "10-11 hours per day" plus weekends.<sup>4</sup>

So the capitalist class has to find itself a political party which "can take, and stick to, an overall and farsighted view of the interests and needs of the system as a whole"<sup>5</sup> Since the 1920s that party has been the Conservatives, but no longer, it seems. Today the Tories are clearly acting against the long-term needs and interests of the system: ie, the capitalist class as a whole. Maybe this reflects the increasingly cosmopolitan nature of modern capitalism - foreign investment in Britain stood at around £950 billion in 2015<sup>6</sup> - and therefore a hands-off approach to national political parties, their national rivalries and their national machinations.

True, a few big businesses, such as JCB, Westfield and Bloomberg Europe, have donated considerable sums to the Tories.<sup>7</sup>

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But most of the money going to Tory HQ nowadays comes from very wealthy - often very quirky - individuals (many of them after access to government, dinners with ministers, knighthoods, membership of the House of Lords, etc).

Over the years the number of companies making donations has shrunk.<sup>8</sup> Yet, with the bulk of Tory finances coming from the rich and the super-rich, with hundreds of Tory parliamentarians holding directorships, with Tory MPs coming from business and going back to business, with the visceral hostility to trade unions, it is clear that the standard Marxist description of the Conservative Party as the party of big business, albeit it with various qualifications, remains correct. Nevertheless, the tension that exists between the interests of big capital and the direction being taken by May's party and government is unmistakable.

The origins of this divergence lies squarely in electoral calculation. Having outmanoeuvred her rivals and successfully taken over from the hapless David Cameron - following his June 2016 referendum humiliation - Theresa May thought that she could inflict a massive general election defeat on the Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour Party ... if she seized hold of the political programme of the UK Independence Party. Of course, her gamble did not pay off. May's presidential campaign proved to be a disaster, while Jeremy Corbyn's *For the many, not the few* campaign was, by contrast, a brilliant success.

Now, irreversibly committed to a hard Brexit, the Tories resemble the Looney Tunes cartoon character, Wile E Coyote. Fixated on chasing the Road Runner, his nemesis, Wile E Coyote, suddenly finds himself in mid-air over a precipitous canyon. His legs still move and so does he. For a brief moment it appears nothing is wrong, that

the momentum can be maintained. But, inevitably, Wile E Coyote realises that he is suspended in mid-air ... then comes the long plunge to the ground.

Since the 48.11%-51.89% referendum result, Britain has not suffered the economic disaster George Osborne, Mark Carney, Peter Mandelson and co predicted. No yanking recession. No flight of capital. This has allowed little UK Europhobes right and left - from the *Daily Mail* to the *Morning Star* - to claim vindication. But a Brexit referendum result hardly amounts to Brexit. True, statisticians report that the British economy has been growing slower than the euro zone. It is, though, a case of anaemic growth compared with anaemic growth. Projected long-term, that heralds Britain's continued relative decline.

Nonetheless, a negotiated hard Brexit deal - let alone a hard Brexit *non-deal* - could quite conceivably result in absolute decline. Such a prospect deeply worries big capital. Unless control over the Conservative Party can be reasserted, the choices it faces are all unpalatable: tariffs on goods going to the EU, reduced supplies of cheap labour, running down investment in Britain, decamping abroad, sponsorship of a national government, etc.

Meanwhile, Keir Starmer has succeeded in getting the shadow cabinet to come out in favour of negotiating a "new single market relationship" with the EU. For the sake of appearances, he pays lip service to the 2016 referendum result. There is no wish to alienate the *minority* of Labour voters who backed 'leave'. Nonetheless, the message on Europe is clear: it is Labour which is articulating the "interests and needs" of big capital.

Indeed, just before the Brighton conference opened, Corbyn declared that Labour "is the natural party of

***The Tories are still running ... but they appear to be heading for a big fall. However, will a Corbyn-led government be a normal Labour government - a government committed to the 'national interest'?***



business".<sup>9</sup> He has, in fact, said similar things before. Eg, 18 months ago Corbyn told the British Chambers of Commerce that "we are natural allies". Such statements ought to be taken seriously. Basically what Corbyn is promising is that the "next Labour government" will be a normal Labour government. A government fully in the spirit of Ramsay MacDonald, Clement Attlee, Harold Wilson, etc. That ought to be good news for the Labour right - it shows that Corbyn can be tamed.

Whether or not big business believes Corbyn is another matter. After all, there is his long established record of opposing imperialist wars, supporting strikes and advocating wide-ranging nationalisation. And, of course, as the capitalist class well knows, behind Corbyn there lies a mass membership which is expressing itself, is eager for ideas and is already tentatively pursuing its own agenda: a mass membership which, if disappointed, if thwarted, if it asserts itself, could well abandon Corbyn and embrace the "dangers of Marxism" (Chris Leslie).

We do not consider big business "natural allies". No, on the contrary, we strive to express and represent the "interests and needs" of the *global* working class. Hence, when it comes to Europe, instead of getting embroiled in the argument about what is and what is not in the 'national interest' - eg, staying in the single market versus leaving the single market - what Labour ought to adopt is a clear, ambitious and farsighted working class perspective.

Marxists have no illusions in the European Union. It is a bosses' club, it is by treaty committed to neoliberalism and it is by law anti-working class (note, the European Court of Justice and its Viking,

Laval and Ruffert judgements). But nor should we have any illusions in a so-called Lexit, as advocated by Labour MPs Dennis Skinner and Kelvin Hopkins.

On the contrary the EU should be seen as a site of struggle. Our task is to unite the working class in the EU in order to end the rule of capital and establish socialism on a continental scale. That would be the biggest contribution we can make to the global struggle for human liberation ●

## Notes

1. *The Sunday Telegraph* September 15 2017.
2. *Financial Times* September 12 2017.
3. <https://uk.finance.yahoo.com/news/business-government-lobbying-brexit-isnt-working-heres-143415309.html>.
4. *Time* October 16 2015.
5. H Draper *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* Vol 1, New York NY 1977, p324.
6. House of Commons Library *Debate pack* Number CDP 2017/0159, September 8 2017.
7. *The Guardian* April 1 2015.
8. B Jones (ed) *Political issues in Britain today* Manchester 1999, p313.
9. *Morning Star* September 23-24 2017.

## LONDON COMMUNIST FORUM

Sundays, 5pm: Weekly political meeting and study group organised jointly by Labour Party Marxists and CPGB. Details in *Weekly Worker*.

### VENUE:

The Calthorpe Arms,  
252 Grays Inn Road,  
London WC1X 8JR

# Transform the Labour Party

Jeremy Corbyn says he wants to find ways to give more power to ordinary members and a conference that makes the final decision on policy. The democracy commission has now been agreed and will report next year. All this is very welcome. **James Marshall** presents a 13-point platform that will provide the basis for our submission

1. Mandatory reselection is crucial, though it terrifies the right. We read that this, “even more than nuclear disarmament and membership of the European Community, became the main catalyst for the launch of the breakaway Social Democratic Party” in March 1981.<sup>1</sup> In that same treacherous spirit as the founders of the SDP, Progress - Lord David Sainsbury's party within a party - furiously denounces mandatory reselection as “a weapon of fear and intimidation”.<sup>2</sup> Yes, it is viewed as an affront by every rightwing wrecker, every hireling, every parliamentary careerist.

It is worth looking at the background. Interestingly, and with good foundation, we read on the Progress website that mandatory reselection carries “echoes of the Paris Commune, and of the Russian soviets, where delegates were subject to recall if they displeased their local citizenry. It rests on the idea that leaders will always be tempted to sell you out, once they get power.”<sup>3</sup> Well, surely, that is what history actually shows.

For decades, sitting Labour MPs - certainly those with safe seats - enjoyed a job for life (or as long as no better offer came along). They might deign to visit their constituency once or twice a year, deliver a speech to the AGM and write an occasional letter to the local newspaper. Meanwhile they lived a pampered, middle class life, frequented various London gentlemen's clubs and spent their weekends in the home counties with Lord this and Lady that. Despite such evident moral corruption, they were automatically the candidate for the next election. Unless found guilty of an act of gross indecency or had the party whip withdrawn, they could do as they pleased.

With the insurgent rise of Bennism, that totally unacceptable situation was called into question. The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, founded in 1973, committed itself to a range of rule changes - the mandatory reselection of MPs was finally agreed by the 1980 conference. What this saw, however, was not a Labour Party equivalent of the Paris Commune or the Russian soviets. There was no right to instantly recall. Nevertheless, once in each parliament, our MPs had to secure the endorsement of their local general management committee. Note, GMCs were made up of delegates elected by local party and trade union branches; they were sizable bodies too, typically consisting of 80, 90, 100 or even more delegates.

At the prompting of the bourgeois media, Neil Kinnock, desperately seeking acceptability, sought to extract trade unions from the voting process altogether. He failed, but accepted a compromise. A local electoral college for the selection and reselection of candidates was introduced. Ordinary members were given a direct vote for the first time, leaving GMCs with the right to nominate and shortlist only. This electoral college system gave unions and affiliated organisations up to 40% of the vote, with ordinary members having some 60% (the actual balance was different in each seat, depending on party and union membership).

Trigger ballots were a product of the 1990s. Formally honouring conference's “desire to maintain reselection”, they made it significantly “easier for MPs to defend their positions”.<sup>4</sup> They allowed for a sitting MP to be subject to a full-scale ballot of the membership. But only if they lost a trigger ballot.

We say, all elected Labour representatives must, by rule, be subject to a one-member, one-vote mandatory reselection. MPs have



An historic opportunity

to be brought under democratic control - from above, by the national executive committee; from below by Constituency Labour Parties.

2. We urgently need a sovereign conference once again. The cumbersome, undemocratic and oppressive structures, especially those put in place under the Blair supremacy, must be abolished. The joint policy committee, the national policy forums, etc, have to go.

3. We are against the idea of electing the general secretary through an all-member ballot. The NEC should elect all national officers. Therefore the post of Labour leader should be replaced by the post of NEC chair. We favour annual elections with the right to recall at any time. As a matter of basic principle Marxists oppose all forms of Bonapartism.

4. In Scotland and Wales, Labour's executive committees should likewise elect their own officers, including their representatives on the all-UK NEC. We are against a single individual in Scotland and Wales having the right to appoint themselves, or a trusted clone.

5. Scrap the hated compliance unit “and get back to the situation where people are automatically accepted for membership, unless there is a significant issue that comes up” (John McDonnell).<sup>5</sup> The compliance unit operates in the murky shadows, routinely leaks to the capitalist media and makes rulings in a completely biased manner. We want to welcome into our ranks the bulk of those who have been barred from membership by the compliance unit. Many of them are good socialists with a proven record.

6. Those expelled from membership ought to have the right to reapply - not after five years, but in just one year. All disciplinary procedures should be completed within three months. Endless delay violates natural justice.

7. The huge swing towards Labour in the June 2017 general election happened in no small part due to the enthusiasm of young voters. Yet Young Labour is a creaking, uninviting, thoroughly bureaucratic construction. We need a one-member, one-vote organisation. That must include Young Labour's national committee. At present, two-thirds of votes are accounted for by appointees from affiliated organisations: eg, the Fabians and Cooperative Party, and affiliated trade unions. Instead of policy and national committee elections every two years, there must be an annual conference that can both decide on policy and elect a

leadership. Young Labour has to have the right to decide on its own constitution and standing orders.

8. We need a rule that commits the NEC to securing the affiliation of *all* trade unions to the Labour Party. The FBU has already reaffiliated. Excellent. Matt Wrack at last came to his senses and took the lead in reversing the disaffiliation policy. But what about the RMT? Let us win RMT militants to finally drop their support for the thoroughly misconceived Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition project. Instead reaffiliate to the Labour Party. And what about the NUT? This year's Cardiff conference saw the executive narrowly win an amendment, by 50.63% to 49.37%, which in effect ruled out considering affiliation ... at this moment. This can be changed ... if we campaign to win hearts and minds.

Then there is the PCS. Thankfully, Mark Serwotka, its leftwing general secretary, has at last come round to the idea of affiliation. Yes, that would run up against the Trades Disputes and Trade Union Act (1927), introduced by a vengeful Tory government in the aftermath of the General Strike. Civil service unions were barred from affiliating to the Labour Party and the TUC. The Civil and Public Services Association - predecessor of the PCS - reaffiliated to the TUC in 1946. Now, however, surely, it is time for the PCS to reaffiliate to the Labour Party. Force another change in the law.

9. There has to be a shift in the party, away from the HQ, regional officers, the leader's office, the Parliamentary Labour Party, etc. CLPs must be empowered. Towards that end there has to be proper financing. CLPs should be allocated 50% of the individual membership dues. That will help with producing publicity material, hiring rooms, paying for full-time officers, providing transport, setting up websites, etc. That way, our CLPs can be made into vibrant centres of socialist organisation, education and action.

10. Our goal must be a Labour Party that, in the words of Keir Hardie, can “organise the working class into a great, independent political power to fight for the coming of socialism”.<sup>6</sup> We therefore need rule changes to *once again* allow left, communist and revolutionary groups and parties to affiliate. As long as they do not stand against us in elections, this can only but strengthen Labour as a federal party. Nowadays affiliated organisations include the Fabians, Christians on the Left, the Cooperative Party and, problematically, the Jewish Labour Movement and Labour

Business. Encourage the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party in England and Wales, Communist Party of Great Britain, Left Unity, Socialist Appeal, the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, etc, to join our ranks.

11. Being an MP ought to be an honour, not a career ladder - not a way for university graduates to secure a lucrative living. A particularly potent weapon here would be a rule requiring all our elected representatives and officials to take only the average wage of a skilled worker - a principle that was indeed upheld by the Paris Commune and the Bolshevik revolution. Our MPs are on a basic £67,060 annual salary. On top of that they get around £12,000 in expenses and allowances, putting them on £79,060 (yet at present Labour MPs are only obliged to pay the £82 parliamentarian's subscription rate). Moreover, as leader of the official opposition, Jeremy Corbyn not only gets his MP's salary: he is entitled to an additional £73,617.<sup>7</sup>

Let them keep the average skilled worker's wage - say £40,000 (plus legitimate expenses). Then, however, they should hand the balance over to the party. Even without a rule change Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and Diane Abbott ought to take the lead here.

12. Relying on the favours of the capitalist press, radio and TV is a fool's game. Yes, it worked splendidly for Tony Blair and Alistair Campbell. But, as Neil Kinnock, Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband found to their cost, to live by the mainstream media is to die by the mainstream media.

The NEC should, by rule, establish and maintain our own press, radio and TV. To state the obvious, tweeting and texting have severe limits. They are brilliant mediums for transmitting simple, short and sharp messages to the already converted, but, when it comes to complex ideas, debating history and charting out political strategies, they are worse than useless. We should provide time and space for controversy and the whole range of different opinions within the party. Without that our media will be dull, lifeless, pointless. We should also take full advantage of parliamentary immunity to circumvent the oppressive libel laws. Then we can say the unsayable. That would prove to be electric in terms of shaping and mobilising public opinion.

13. We should adopt a new clause four. Not a return to the old 1918 version, but a commitment to working class rule and the aim of a stateless, classless, moneyless society, which embodies the principle, “From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs”. That is what socialism is all about. Not a measly £10-per-hour “living wage”, shifting the tax balance and a state investment bank. No, re-establishing socialism in the mainstream of politics means committing the Labour Party to achieving a “democratic republic”<sup>8</sup>

## Notes

- <http://thirdavenue.org.uk/a-beginners-guide-to-the-labour-party-rulebook-part-2-reselection-of-mps>.
- [www.progressonline.org.uk/2015/09/28/the-price-of-a-seat-in-parliament](http://www.progressonline.org.uk/2015/09/28/the-price-of-a-seat-in-parliament).
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- <http://thirdavenue.org.uk/a-beginners-guide-to-the-labour-party-rulebook-part-2-reselection-of-mps>.
- <http://labourlist.org/2016/02/mcdonnell-and-woodcock-clash-over-plan-to-scrap-member-checks>.
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- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leader\\_of\\_the\\_Opposition\\_\(United\\_Kingdom\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leader_of_the_Opposition_(United_Kingdom)).
- Labour Party Marxists* July 7 2016.

## 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, 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



If this isn't the time to get involved, when is?

# Still on the sidelines

Organisations such as SPEW, SWP, CPB and Left Unity are not only draining members, says **Robert Matron**: they are profoundly disorientated politically

Having dismissed the Labour Party as nothing more than a British version of the US Democrat Party, having backed the left-nationalist Scottish Socialist Party, having fought for trade unions to disaffiliate from Labour, having promoted the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition as a Labour Party mark two, Peter Taaffe, general secretary of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, has been busily backtracking. Now he says, quite rightly, that Labour should open up to affiliation by the likes of SPEW.

Yet comrade Taaffe cannot frankly admit that for nearly two decades he has been wrong about the Labour Party. That for nearly two decades he has misled his organisation. Hence, instead of urging his members and supporters to join Labour, join in order to defend Jeremy Corbyn from the right, join to fight alongside other leftwingers to transform it into a permanent united front, comrade Taaffe resorts to all manner of ultimatums, posturing and subterfuges.

Labour councils should stop blaming the Tories for austerity; they should agree illegal budgets. Labour should allow the RMT union to support whatever election candidates it happens to like. Labour should accept the collective demand for readmittance from Militant members expelled in the 1980s. Labour should issue an affiliation invitation to SPEW.

Till such demands are met comrade Taaffe will claim the necessity of standing "against rightwing, cuts-inflicting Labour candidates".<sup>1</sup> Till such demands are met SPEW will continue with the farcical Tusc project. Till such demands are met

SPEW will continue to oppose the growing numbers arguing for the RMT to reaffiliate and PSC to affiliate. Till such demands are met SPEW will stand aloof from the historic battle that is raging ever more fiercely inside the Labour Party.

Comrade Taaffe seems to imagine himself akin to Mohammed, the prophet of Islam - that he can order the Labour mountain to come to him. But, of course, so the story goes: "If the mountain will not come to Mohammad, then Mohammad must go to the mountain." In other words, Mohammad, as recounted by the philosopher Francis Bacon, was a lot cleverer, a lot more realistic, than comrade Taaffe.

However, comrade Taaffe is a towering genius compared with Robert Griffiths, the general secretary of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain. When not promising to shop "entryists" to our witch-finder general, Iain McNicol, what he displays is a completely imbecilic attitude towards Labour's civil war. He says there are more important issues ... like routine strikes and protest demonstrations.

Echoing him, *Morning Star* editor Ben Chacko is just as witless. He sees "a task far bigger than the Labour Party". Fighting for a mass revolutionary party? No. Forging the links necessary for establishing a new workers' international? No. What comrade Chacko, laughably, wants is "organising at a local level in groups such as the People's Assembly, Keep Our NHS Public, Black Activists Rising Against Cuts and many more".<sup>2</sup>

Where we in LPM strive to elevate local struggles to the national and the international level, comrade Chacko's

sights are set on "saving an A&E or a youth club". That he does so in the name of Marxist politics and creating a mass movement on the scale of the Chartists shows an inability to grasp even the A in the ABC of communism.

Left Unity condemned itself to irrelevance in February 2016 when it rejected any active involvement in the Labour Party. In fact, many prominent members believed the election of Jeremy Corbyn was a total disaster. Their illusory project of building a left-reformist "alternative to the main political parties" had just hit the rocks of reality. Since then one resignation has followed another. Many who once greeted Corbyn's election as a total disaster are now members or want to be members of the Labour Party.

Under national secretary Felicity Dowling, what remains of Left Unity is reduced to voting Labour - except maybe in Scotland - and issuing banal calls to support this campaign, that protest: Another Europe, Stand Up to Racism, the People's Assembly demo, etc. No wonder its entire London membership now meets in the snug little room provided by Housman's bookshop.

Then there is Charlie Kimber - indicating the Socialist Workers Party's crisis of leadership, he is now *joint* national secretary and *Socialist Worker* editor. Anyway, showing a modicum of common sense, the SWP "suspended" its involvement with Tusc (reducing it in the process to just two affiliates - SPEW and the RMT).

As might be expected, comrade Kimber called for a Labour vote on June 8 - except in Scotland - but, the more SWP members leave for the Labour Party, the more he too

stresses localism, the latest demonstrations, economic strikes and fake fronts.

In his 'Letter to a Jeremy Corbyn supporter', comrade Kimber warns that "there's a great danger that you could be drawn into endless internal battles". The "crucial arena" of struggle is not "the long slog" of "endless meetings to (perhaps) get rid of a rightwinger".<sup>3</sup> No, its is economic strikes and street demonstrations.

Evidently, comrade Kimber does not have a clue about transforming the Labour Party or even how it could be opened up to affiliation once again. How the Parliamentary Labour Party could be made into the servants, not the masters, of the labour movement. How Labour could be armed with Marxist principles, with a new clause four. How Labour could be made into Britain's version of soviets: ie, a permanent united front of all working class organisations.

Comrade Kimber's myopic claim that what *really matters* is not changing the Labour Party through the long, hard slog, but the "fightback in the workplaces and the streets", is a Bakuninist, not a Marxist, formulation. For the 19th century anarchist leader, Mikhail Bakunin, *direct action* - ie, strikes and protests - were the key to revolution. By contrast, Marxists have always placed their emphasis on programme, consciousness and the patient work of building a mass party and digging deep social roots.

In Marxist terms, because the Labour Party is historically established, because it is a class party, because it involves all big unions, because it has a mass electoral base, because it has drawn in hundreds of thousands of new members, what is now

happening in Labour is a far higher form of the class struggle than mere economic strikes, protest demonstrations - let alone the ephemeral fake fronts established by this or that small left group.

In point of fact, the ongoing civil war in the Labour Party is a *concentrated* form of the class struggle, because above all it is a *political* struggle. Labour's leftwing mass membership is confident, is learning and is determined to take on and defeat the smug middle class careerists, the pro-capitalist warmongers, the defenders of Zionist oppression in Palestine and, behind that, the Anglo-American imperialist alliance.

To belittle what is happening in the Labour Party, to abstain from the struggle to transform the Labour Party, is inexcusable for any socialist ●

## Notes

1. 'What we think' *The Socialist* September 20 2017.
2. *Morning Star* September 10-11 2016.
3. *Socialist Worker* September 20 2016.

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