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We need a new clause four

James Marshall says that instead of fostering illusions in Fabian socialism, the task of Marxists must lie in winning the Labour Party to ... Marxist socialism

Clause four - rewritten under Tony Blair in 1995 - carries a totemic status for partisans both of the right and left. But should the left seek to raise the 1918 Lazarus from its grave? Or should we leave behind a flawed past and audaciously reach out for another, better future? That is the question.

John McDonnell told the 2018 Liverpool conference that "the clause four principles are as relevant today as they were back then."¹ There are also groups such as Socialist Appeal, British section of the International Marxist Tendency, who are fully committed to what is, in fact, an anti-working class tradition.² Its Labour4Clause4 campaign has garnered support from the likes of Ken Loach, the leftwing film director, and MPs Karen Lee, Dennis Skinner, Ian Mearns, Chris Williamson, Dan Carden and Ronnie Campbell. Alongside them there are like-minded trade union leaders such as Steve Gillan of the POA, Ian Hodson and Ronnie Draper of the bakers' union, and Mick Cash and Steve Hedley of RMT.

Thankfully, Jeremy Corbyn is more open-ended: "I think we should talk about what the objectives of the party are, whether that's restoring the clause four as it was originally written or it's a different one I'm interested in the idea that we have a more inclusive, clearer set of objectives."³

Either way, a discussion is underway and that can only be for the good.

History

Our February 1918 conference agreed a new constitution. Clause four (objects) committed the Labour Party to these aims (subsequently amended in 1959):

1. To organise and maintain in parliament and in the country a political Labour Party.
2. To cooperate with the general council of the Trades Union Congress, or other kindred organisations, in joint political or other action in harmony with the party constitution and standing orders.
3. To give effect as far as possible to the principles from time to time approved by the party conference.
4. To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and



Jeremy Corbyn: "I think we should talk"

exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.

5. Generally to promote the political, social and economic emancipation of the people, and more particularly of those who depend directly upon their own exertions by hand or by brain for the means of life.

6. To cooperate with the labour and socialist organisations in the commonwealth overseas with a view to promoting the purposes of the party, and to take common action for the promotion of a higher standard of social and economic life for the working population of the respective countries.

7. To cooperate with the labour and socialist organisations in other countries and to support the United Nations and its various agencies and other international organisations for the promotion of peace, the adjustment and settlement of international disputes by conciliation or judicial arbitration, the establishment and defence of human rights, and the improvement of the social and economic standards and conditions of work of the people of the world.

These formulations - crucially the fourth - are too often celebrated as being a defining socialist moment. Yet, when first mooted in November 1917 - amidst the slaughter of inter-imperialist war -

Sidney Webb, its principle author, Fabian guru and quintessential philistine - had no thought, no wish, no intention of promoting genuine socialism. Parliament, the courts, enlightened civil servants and the liberal intelligentsia provided his road to a reformed British empire. Webb wanted a government of magnanimous experts whose decisions would be no more than ratified in elections: even referendums were ruled out as impeding the will of the educated elite.

Top leaders of the Fabian Society - eg, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Annie Besant, Sydney Olivier, HG Wells and George Bernard Shaw - considered themselves social engineers of the highest order, modern princes, prophets of the future. The role of these ever so clever people was to slowly, patiently, courteously persuade the great and the good of the benefits of 'socialism' ... hence their organisation's chosen name (taken from Quintus Fabius, the Roman general who avoided pitched battles with Hannibal's superior Carthaginian army and instead pursued a strategy of attrition).

Unsurprisingly, Marxists have long considered Fabianism to be the crassest expression of opportunism. Fredrick Engels showed particular contempt for this "well-meaning gang of eddicated middle class folk."⁴ True, he credited them with enough wit to realise the "inevitability of the social revolution." But the Fabians

could not possibly entrust this "gigantic task to the raw proletariat alone". Engels concluded that "[f]ear of revolution is their guiding principle."⁵

The real class war was denounced by the Fabian ladies and gentlemen. The underlying social contradiction in society, according to them, was not between labour and capital, but the idle rich and the industrious masses ... of all classes, managers and entrepreneurs provide an invaluable service to society. As long as they honestly paid their taxes, then fat profits and fat salaries are fully justified. In other words, original Fabianism amounted to nothing more than a form of bourgeois socialism.

The Fabian Society was not only elitist. Their leaders were thorough-going eugenicists too. Friedrich Nietzsche provided a warped inspiration. Wells urged the death penalty for those suffering from "genetically transferable diseases". Defective men, women and children were to be dealt with by the means of a "lethal chamber".⁶

As for the "swarms of black, and brown, and dirty white and yellow people", who did not match his criteria of intelligence and efficiency, "they will have to go". It is their "portion to die out and disappear".⁷ With that noble end in mind Shaw demanded that "[e]xtermination must be put on a scientific basis if it is ever to be carried out humanely and apologetically as well as thoroughly".⁸ Meanwhile, the working

class was to be lifted out of their ignorance. The more stubborn sections herded into "human sorting houses" to be trained for work. Those who refused would be packed off to semi-penal detention colonies.

The Fabians were committed pro-imperialists. According to their *Fabianism and empire* (1900) tract, Britain needed to get its fair share of the spoils from the division of the world:

The partition of the greater part of the globe among such [great] powers is, as a matter of fact that must be faced, approvingly or deploringly, now only a question of time; and whether England [sic] is to be the centre and nucleus of one of those great powers of the future, or to be cast off by its colonies, ousted from its provinces, and reduced to its old island status, will depend on the ability with which the empire is governed as a whole, and the freedom of its governments and its officials from complicity in private financial interests and from the passions of the newspaper correspondents who describe our enemies as 'beasts'.⁹

Fabian socialism valued politeness and good manners on all occasions, even in the midst of a voracious imperialist war. Over the years 1899-1902, as good patriots, the Fabians backed Britain's war against the Boer republics: the "native races" must be "protected despotically by the empire or abandoned to slavery and extermination."¹⁰

The British empire was portrayed as a benevolent bringer of democracy to the white dominions and a saviour of the 'lower breeds'. The best interests of 'black, brown and yellow' peoples lay in being ruled over by young men fresh out of Britain's public schools. Under this guiding hand they would eventually be led to "adulthood."¹¹

Interestingly, as an aside, the Fabians thought that the South African war demonstrated the "superiority of a militia" system over the professional army.¹² An idea that much of today's left refuses even to contemplate.

Naturally, come the 1914-18 great war, the Fabians did their best to serve the imperial cause. Europe had to be saved from the Junkers and Prussian militarism.

However, as the war dragged on and the corpses piled up, any initial popular enthusiasm turned into discontent. The February 1917 revolution in Russia galvanised the hopes of many. Workers, including those in the munitions industry, took strike action. Demands for a negotiated peace grew and amongst sections of the ruling class there were serious worries that Britain stood on the edge of revolution. Reports came of mutinies in army base camps and the killing of military policemen. June 1917 saw a big labour movement conference in Leeds. Famously delegates called for a national network of Workers' and Soldiers' Soviets on the model of Russia. Then came the October Revolution which shook the whole capitalist world to its very foundations. Bourgeois politicians rushed to make concessions. Hence, Sidney Webb and the drafting of clause four.

By cynical calculation he had three goals in mind.

Firstly, his clause four socialism could be used to divert the considerable rank-

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and-file sympathy that existed for the Russian Revolution into safe, peaceful and exclusively constitutional channels. Not that that stopped prime minister David Lloyd George from declaring, in his closing speech of the 1918 general election campaign, that the "Labour Party is being run by the extreme pacifist Bolshevik group".¹³

Secondly, by adopting clause four socialism, the Labour Party could both distinguish itself from the exhausted, divided and rapidly declining Liberal Party and please the trade union bureaucracy. Since the 1890s the TUC had been drawing up various wish lists of what ought to be nationalised: eg, rails, mines, electricity, liquor and land. Clause four socialism also usefully went along with the grain of Britain's wartime experience. There was steadily expanding state intervention in the economy. Nationalisation was, as a result, widely identified with efficiency, modernisation and beating the Austro-German foe. It therefore appealed to technocratically minded elements amongst the middle classes.

Thirdly, clause four socialism had to be implicitly anti-Marxist. Webb well knew the history of the Social Democratic Party in Germany. And, of course, Karl Marx savaged various passages in its *Gotha programme* (1875), not least those which declared that every worker should receive a "fair distribution of their proceeds of labour" and that "the proceeds of labour belong undiminished with equal right to all members of society".¹⁴

Contradictory and vacuous, seethed Marx. What is fair? What about replacement means of production? What about the expansion of production? What about those unable to work? More than that, Marx explained these and other such woolly formulations as unneeded concessions to the followers of Ferdinand Lassalle. His *Workers' programme* (1862) called for "an equal right to the undiminished proceeds of labour". Obviously Webb wanted to give clause four a distinct Lassallean coloration not out of admiration for Lassalle, but because he wanted to distance the Labour Party from Marxism.

Red ribbon

Almost needless to say, clause four was mainly for show. A red ribbon tied around what was Labourism's standing programme of social liberalism. In parliament Labour supported Liberal governments and their palliative measures of social reform. Because of its alliance with the Liberals, the party even found itself divided over the abolition of the House of Lords and the fight for female suffrage. While a minority - eg, George Lansbury and Keir Hardie - defended the suffragettes and their militant tactics, the majority craved respectability. As Ramsay MacDonald wrote, "The violent methods... are wrong, and in their nature reactionary and anti-social, quite irrespective of vote or no vote."¹⁵

Yet, even if it had been put into effect, clause four socialism remains antithetical to working class self-liberation. Capitalism without capitalists does not count amongst our goals. Railways, mines, land, electricity, etc, would pass into the hands of the British empire state.

Capitalist owners might well be bought out - eased into a comfortable retirement. But, as they vacate the field of production, a new class of state-appointed managers and supervisors enters the fray. In terms of the division of labour, they substitute for the capitalists. The mass of the population, meanwhile, remain exploited wage-slaves. They would be subject to the same hierarchal chain of command, the same lack of control, the same mind-numbing routine.

Marxism, by contrast, is based on an altogether different perspective. If it is to win its freedom, the working class must overthrow the existing state. But - and this is crucial - in so doing the proletariat "abolishes itself as a proletariat, abolishes all class distinctions and antagonisms, abolishes also the state as state".¹⁶

Capitalist relations of production and the whole bureaucratic state apparatus are swept away. Every sphere of social life sees control exercised from below. All positions

of command are elected or chosen by lot and are regularly rotated. Hierarchy is flattened. Alienation is overcome. What is produced and how it is produced radically alters too. Need, not exchange, is the ruling principle. And alone such an association of producers creates the benign conditions which allow for the full development of each and every individual.

Doubtless, the old 1918 clause four resulted from profound political developments. The horrors of World War I and the inspiration provided by the October Revolution have already been mentioned. But there is also the formation of the Socialist International, the world-wide celebration of May Day, the considerable influence of the socialist press, the increased size of trade union membership, the formation of the shop stewards movement and the election of a growing body of Labour MPs. Then there was the growing role of state intervention and regulation of the economy. Capitalism was widely considered abhorrent, outmoded and doomed. Socialism more and more became the common sense of the organised working class.¹⁷

By contrast, Fabian socialism meant arguing against unconstitutional methods, slowly expanding the provision of social welfare and persuading *all classes* of the benefits that would come to the nation, if the commanding heights of the economy were put in state hands. In other words, the Fabians *consciously* sought to ameliorate the mounting contradictions between labour and capital... and thus put off socialism. Rightly, Lenin denounced Fabianism as the "most consummate expression of opportunism."¹⁸ And, needless to say, the years 1918-20 witnessed colonial uprisings abroad and a massive strike wave at home.

Revealingly, before 1918, attempts to commit the Labour Party to socialism met with mixed success. The 1900 founding conference rejected the "class war" ultimatum tabled by the Social Democratic Federation.¹⁹ Despite that, conference voted to support the "socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange". The next year a socialistic motion moved by Bruce Glasier was defeated. In 1903 another socialistic motion fell, this time without debate. Two years later conference passed a motion with the exact same wording. In 1907 the previous endorsement of socialism was overturned at the prompting of... Bruce Glasier. The same conference agreed to set the goal of "socialising the means of production, distribution and exchange".²⁰

The explanation for the seesawing doubtless lies with electoral calculation. While most in the party leadership considered themselves socialists of a kind, they were mortally afraid of losing out in the polls. What appeared acceptable to likely voters - in other words, the popular press - set their limits. So, instead of fearlessly presenting a bold socialist vision and building support on that basis, Sidney Webb, Arthur Henderson, Ramsay MacDonald and co chased the vagaries of popularity. With the growth of militancy and radicalism, socialist declarations were considered a sure way of adding to Labour's ranks in parliament.²¹ Forming a government being both a means and an end.

Accept

Nevertheless, the Blairising of clause four in 1995 was hugely symbolic - the ground having been laid by the Eurocommunists and their *Marxism Today* journal. Socialism was declared dead and buried, the working class a shrinking minority. Only if Labour accepted capitalism and reached out to the middle classes would it have a future. Neil Kinnock, John Smith and finally Tony Blair dragged the party ever further to the right. Out went the commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament, out went the commitment to comprehensive education, out went the commitment to full employment, out went the commitment to repeal the Tories' anti-trade union laws, out went the commitment to "the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange".

By sacrificing the old clause four in the full glare of publicity, Blair and his New Labour clique sought to appease the establishment, the City, the Murdoch

empire, the global plutocracy. Capitalism would be *absolutely* safe in their hands. A New Labour government could be relied upon not even to pay lip service to a British version of state capitalism. Leftwingers such as Tony Benn, Dennis Skinner, Diane Abbott and Ken Livingstone protested, trade union leaders grumbled, but the April 1995 special conference voted by 65% in favour of Blair's clause four.

Needless to say, his version is stuffed full of managerial guff and classless nonsense. Just what one would expect from the architect of New Labour. After all, one of Blair's big ideas was to replace 'socialism' with 'social-ism'. Another was communitarianism. But, of course, the media glowed with admiration. Crucially, Rupert Murdoch agreed to unleash his attack dogs. Within a few months John Major was almost universally derided as a total incompetent, heading a sleaze-mired government.

Riding high in the opinion polls, Blair inaugurated a series of internal 'reforms'. Conference was gutted. No longer could it debate issues, vote on policy or embarrass the leadership in front of the media. Instead the whole thing became a rubber-stamping exercise. Then there were the tightly controlled policy forums, focus groups and the staffing of the party machine with eager young careerists (most on temporary contracts). Blair thereby asserted himself over the national executive committee... considerably reducing its effectiveness in the process.

Calls for a return of the old clause four are perfectly understandable. But why go back to a Fabian past? Instead we surely need to persuade members and affiliates to take up the cause of "replacing the rule of capital with the rule of the working class". Our socialism would (a) introduce a democratically planned economy, (b) end the ecologically ruinous cycle of production for the sake of production and (c) move towards a stateless, classless, moneyless society that embodies the principle, "From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs" (see model motion below).

Towards that end our next conference - Brighton, September 21-25 2019 - should radically overhaul the constitution and adopt a new clause four.

Reclaiming

Real Marxists, not fake Marxists, have never talked of reclaiming Labour. It has never been ours in the sense of being a "political weapon for the workers' movement". No, despite the electoral base and trade union affiliations, the Labour Party has been dominated by career politicians and trade union bureaucrats: a distinct social stratum, which in the last analysis serves not the interests of the working class, but the continuation of capitalist exploitation.

Speaking in the context of the need for the newly formed Communist Party of Great Britain to affiliate to the Labour Party, Lenin said this:

... whether or not a party is really a political party of the workers does not depend solely upon a membership of workers, but also upon the men that lead it, and the content of its actions and its political tactics. Only this latter determines whether we really have before us a political party of the proletariat.

Regarded from this - the only correct - point of view, the Labour Party is a thoroughly bourgeois party, because, although made up of workers, it is led by reactionaries, and the worst kind of reactionaries at that, who act quite in the spirit of the bourgeoisie. It is an organisation of the bourgeoisie, which exists to systematically dupe the workers with the aid of the British Noskes and Scheidemanns [the German social chauvinist murderers of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht - JM].²²

Despite all the subsequent changes, this assessment remains true. Labour is still a "bourgeois workers' party". Of course, once Corbyn was formally announced leader of the Labour Party on September 12 2015, things became more complex.

Labour became a chimera. Instead of a twofold contradiction, we have a threefold contradiction. The left dominates both the top and bottom of the party.

Corbyn is not the equivalent of George Lansbury or Michael Foot - an elementary mistake. They were promoted by the labour and trade union bureaucracy after a severe crisis: namely Ramsay MacDonald's treachery and James Callaghan's winter of discontent. Corbyn's leadership is, in the first instance, the result of an historic accident. The 'morons' from the Parliamentary Labour Party lent him their nomination. After that, however, Corbyn owes everything to the mass membership.

That gives us the possibility of attacking the rightwing domination of the middle - not least the councillors and Parliamentary Labour Party - from below and above. No wonder the more astute minds of the bourgeois commentariat can be found expressing profound concern over the prospects of Labour being dominated by leftwing socialists, militant trade unions and Marxists.

Not that Jeremy Corbyn is a Marxist. Politically, he is a run-of-the-mill left reformist, albeit a left reformist with an enduring commitment to workers involved in economic struggles, campaigners for democratic rights and liberation movements in the so-called third world. Inevitably, not least given his Straight Leftist advisors, he is more than prone to compromise with the PLP right and trade union bureaucracy. Indeed his strategy amounts to seeking out allies on the soft right, while attempting to neutralise the hard right. He fears going to war against the right. He therefore seeks to hold back rank-and-file self-activity against the right. The 'big idea' is to concentrate on bread-and-butter issues: ie, ending austerity.

The result can only but be a series of rotten decisions. We have already seen the tacit backing of Jon Lansman's Bonapartist coup in Momentum, the retreat over Trident renewal, the advocacy of a 'jobs and the economy' version of Brexit and the disgraceful silence that reigns over the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' witch-hunt.

In other words, it would be fatal for the leftwing majority at a grassroots level to content itself with playing a support role for Corbyn. No, the left needs to fight for its own aims and its own principles ●

Notes

- Daily Mirror September 24 2018.
- As are Socialist Appeal's old comrades in the Socialist Party in England and Wales. After the 1991 split in the Militant Tendency, the minority around Ted Grant, Alan Woods and Rob Sewell became Socialist Appeal. The majority - around Peter Taaffe, Tony Mulhearn, Hannah Sell and Dave Nellist - evolved through Militant Labour and became SPEW in 1997. Needless to say, comrade Nellist - former Labour MP for Coventry South East and nowadays national chair of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, insists that the 1918 clause four must be "reinstated" (Coventry Telegraph August 19 2015).
- Independent on Sunday August 9 2015.
- K Marx and F Engels CW Vol 48, London 2001, p449.
- K Marx and F Engels CW Vol 50, New York 2004, p83.
- D Stone Breeding superman Liverpool 2002, p115.
- HG Wells Anticipations of the reaction of mechanical and scientific progress upon human life and scientific thought London 1902, p317. See - <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/19229/19229-h/19229-h.htm>.
- GB Shaw quoted in J Carey The intellectuals and the masses London 1992, p63.
- https://archive.org/stream/fabianismempireooshawuoft_djvu.txt.
- https://archive.org/stream/fabianismempireooshawuoft_djvu.txt.
- G Foote The Labour Party's political thought London 1985, p29-30.
- AM McBriar Fabian socialism and English politics: 1884-1918, Cambridge 1962, p130.
- Quoted in R Miliband Parliamentary socialism London 1973, p64n.
- K Marx and F Engels CW Vol 24, London 1989, p83.
- Socialist Review August 1912 - quoted in R Miliband Parliamentary socialism London 1973, p25n.
- K Marx and F Engels CW Vol 25, London 1987, p267.
- 'Common sense' being the continuously changing but widely held outlook of various classes and strata. Gramsci called it "folklore of philosophy", because it exists "halfway between folklore properly speaking and the philosophy, science and economics of the specialists" (A Gramsci Selections from the prison notebooks London 1973, p326n).
- VI Lenin CW Vol 21 Moscow 1977, p261.
- Though it had two guaranteed seats on the LRC's leading body, the Social Democratic Federation disaffiliated in August 1901.
- See RT McKenzie British political parties London 1963, pp465-71.
- Labour gained 15 seats in the December 1918 general election, making it the fourth largest party in parliament after Bonar Law's Tories, Lloyd George's Coalition Liberals and Sinn Féin. It had a total of 57 MPs.
- VI Lenin CW Vol 31, Moscow 1977, pp257-58.

Model motion

This branch/CLP notes that the old 1918 clause four was drafted by the Fabian leader, Sidney Webb, in order to divert the considerable rank-and-file sympathy that existed for the Russian Revolution into safe, peaceful and exclusively constitutional channels. Clause four was managerial, statist and predicated on the continuation of wage-slavery. It had nothing to do with putting an end to capitalism and bringing about the socialist transformation of society.

This branch/CLP notes that, by sacrificing the old clause four in the full glare of publicity, Tony Blair and his New Labour clique sought to appease the establishment, the City, the Murdoch empire, the global plutocracy. Capitalism would be *absolutely* safe in their hands. A New Labour government could be relied upon not even to pay lip service to a British version of state capitalism.

The Labour Party has been transformed by the influx of tens of thousands of new members and the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader. This branch/CLP therefore believes that the time is ripe to commit the party to the following, genuinely socialist, version of clause four.

- Labour is the federal party of the working class. We strive to bring all trade unions, cooperatives, socialist societies and leftwing groups and parties under our banner. We believe that unity brings strength.
- Labour is committed to replacing the rule of capital with the rule of the

working class. Socialism introduces a democratically planned economy, ends the ecologically ruinous cycle of production for the sake of production and moves 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.

- Towards that end Labour commits 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 seeks to win the active backing of the majority of people and forming a government on this basis.
- We shall work with others, in particular in the European Union, in pursuit of the aim of replacing capitalism with working class rule and socialism.

This branch/CLP calls for this version of clause four to be included as part of Labour's constitution at the earliest opportunity.

(For trade unions: This branch/conference calls upon the union to campaign within the Labour Party at all levels for this version of clause four to be included as part of Labour's constitution at the earliest opportunity.)

Another witch-hunt victim

NEC refuses to endorse Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt in South Thanet. **Carla Roberts** asks some pertinent questions

In April 2018, Corbyn supporter Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt was selected as Labour's parliamentary candidate for the "key marginal" seat of Thanet South. She beat the more 'moderate' local councillor, Karen Constantine, by 17 votes - despite the fact that the latter was backed by an unholy alliance of Unite, Unison, GMB and, somewhat strangely, Momentum.

We hear that Constantine had never been seen at a Momentum meeting and only started to back Jeremy Corbyn for Labour leader once he was sure to win. On Twitter, she proudly declares that her "motto" was: "An ounce of action is worth a ton of theory". Gordon-Nesbitt, on the other hand, is known as an outspoken Corbyn supporter and life-long socialist campaigner. So no real surprise then that local members chose the more leftwing candidate (as would probably be the case almost everywhere, if members were allowed to democratically select their prospective candidate via a system of mandatory reselection).

But, clearly, not everybody was happy about the result. Two weeks after the local decision, the revolting Guido Fawkes published a take-down piece on Gordon-Nesbitt, who works as a researcher to, among others, Labour peer Lord Howarth of Newport.² Fawkes published a small number of tweets released by the Centre for Cultural Change in 2016, to which Gordon-Nesbitt contributed.

As is unfortunately now the norm in the Labour Party, the tweets were - probably simultaneously - passed on to the compliance unit, an investigation was opened and Labour's national executive committee decided to put on hold the required endorsement of her candidacy - a highly unusual decision. Guido Fawkes seemed to have had more than a good inkling of the result of the investigation even before it started: "Assume Gordon-Nesbitt will be deselected if Corbyn is really taking anti-Semitism seriously...," he wrote in April.

And he was right. Still, it took the Labour Party bureaucracy a staggering eight months to look into those few tweets - three of which were authored by Gordon-Nesbitt:

- "Accusations levelled at Jackie Walker are politically motivated."
- "Anti-Semitism has been weaponised by those who seek to silence anti-Zionist voices. See *The Lynching*, endorsed by Ken Loach, for elucidation."
- "Accusations of AS levelled in an attempt to discredit the left."

Even the most biased bourgeois justice system would have laughed this 'evidence' out of court. Not so today's Labour Party, unfortunately, which is cleaved apart by the ongoing civil war that began with the election of Corbyn. In July 2018, the NEC - even though it was now ostensibly dominated by the 'left' - voted to refer the case to its kangaroo court, the national constitutional committee (NCC). This is a crucial body in the party. It deals with all disciplinary matters that the NEC feels it cannot resolve and - given that the NCC is dominated by the right - the referral of a leftwinger usually



results in expulsion from the party. Incredibly, even after its recent expansion from 11 to 25, only a minority are chosen by rank-and-file Labour members.

Gordon-Nesbitt describes how "months went by, but nothing happened". She continued to be the officially selected candidate and campaigned with local party members. Six months after the referral to the NCC she was invited to an interview - not with the NCC, but with a panel of three NEC members.

Gordon-Nesbitt writes that she came to the hearing on December 18 "armed with a dozen endorsements from local party members, a respected rabbi, an Oxford University anti-Semitism expert and a sizeable group of parliamentary candidates from around the country, all of whom said in various different ways that neither I nor the tweets were anti-Semitic".

Her local Labour Party continues to support her: the CLP executive, its branches and the CLP women's forum have all rejected the NEC's decision.

We understand that, worryingly, leftwinger Claudia Webbe was one of the three NEC members on the panel. In fact, she was the only one who was there in person - the other two were listening in via speakerphone. In July, Webbe replaced Christine Shawcroft as chair of the NEC's disputes panel, having been nominated to the post by both Momentum's Jon Lansman and Pete Willsman, secretary of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (Webbe also serves as chair of the CLPD). It is unusual for Lansman and Willsman to agree on anything these days - the former comrades who worked together for decades in the CLPD have fallen out spectacularly over the last 12 months or so, after Lansman falsely accused Willsman of anti-Semitism and dropped him from Momentum's list of recommended candidates for the NEC (Willsman was elected anyway).³

Of course, we do not actually know how Webbe voted. These hugely important decisions are kept secret, away from the membership. She certainly has not made her views on the matter public. But we know that she is an ally of Lansman, who, we have been told, was campaigning *against* attempts to allow the next full NEC meeting (January 29) to revisit the panel's decision on Gordon-Nesbitt. In fact the January 29 NEC did not discuss the case, so the decision stands and Gordon-Nesbitt has said she will now take legal action.

It is clearly the case that anti-Semitism has been weaponised by those who seek to silence anti-Zionist voices in the Labour Party

Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt and the real target



Momentum locally and nationally has certainly not raised a finger to defend her or the democratic will of the local members.

NEC panels have the right to make decisions on behalf of the executive and those decisions do not have to be ratified by the full NEC. But, as Darren Williams explains, they can be "revisited" and overturned by the NEC. Williams seems to be the only NEC member who has come out publicly on this case, though we understand that he is not the only leftwinger on the NEC who is "unhappy" about the panel's decision.⁴ If there were official minutes of NEC meetings we would know for sure. There ought to be, but, of course, there aren't. We have to rely on the few reports produced by individual members (who only report on decisions they find interesting or important).

This case does shed a rather worrying light on the state of the so-called 'left' on the NEC (and the wider party). Lansman has thrown himself with gusto into the campaign to equate criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism - a campaign whose chief target is, of course, Jeremy Corbyn himself. While Lansman has always been a soft Zionist, he has certainly found his hard-core Zionist feet in recent months. He successfully campaigned for the NEC to adopt the ludicrously inaccurate and pro-Zionist 'Definition of anti-Semitism' published by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, with all its disputed 11 examples.

Lansman and his close allies make up about half of the nine NEC members elected by party members on the slate pushed by the Centre Left Grassroots Alliance. Darren Williams, Pete Willsman and Rachel Garnham seem to be the only NEC members with at least half an occasional backbone. Even though Unite is headed by close Corbyn ally Len McCluskey, the numerous Unite members on the NEC tend to vote - in general - with the rest of the unions on Labour's leadership body.

This is particularly worrying, as Jeremy Corbyn remains a prisoner of Labour's MPs, who are far to his right and, of course, to the right of the majority of members. Refusing to endorse a candidate who would have been a very valuable ally of Corbyn makes you wonder on which side Jon Lansman and some of his allies on the NEC really stand ●

Notes

1. https://twitter.com/uk_karen.
2. <https://order-order.com/2018/04/18/labour-candidates-think-tank-defended-ken-jackie-walker>.
3. <http://labourparty marxists.org.uk/ncc-left-slate-farce-ends-in-another-jon-lansman-surrender>.
4. www.facebook.com/darren.williams.146

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 ●

Labour Against the Witchhunt

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Danger of national government

Theresa May's backstop contortions show that Brexit hangs in the balance. **Paul Demarty** says there is no high-tech solution



The pre-Socratic philosophers, Parmenides and Zeno, are remembered chiefly for their arguments by paradox that motion is an illusion, and that it is logically impossible for one faster-moving body to catch up with another.

No more recent thinkers have prepared us so well for the limitless toing and froing in the House of Commons at the present time, as it tries to pick its way through the factional interests of various layers of the political class, the state interests of the UK and the widespread suspicion - on the part of 'leave' and 'remain' voters alike - that none of them have a clue what they are doing. There is the clear *impression* of movement, but we rarely seem to have moved terribly *far* - or qualitatively closer to the goal.

The January 29 'crunch votes' were the result of Theresa May's defeat two weeks earlier, when the withdrawal deal painstakingly negotiated by her minions with the European powers finally met its reckoning. The question begged was: what next? The answer, apparently, is *déjà vu* all over again. May brought her parliamentary colleagues a motion, purely indicative, about the government's next steps. It has served as a blank canvas for all her opponents (and supporters) to pursue their interests.

In the end, three amendments were pertinent. Firstly, Graham Brady - chair of the 1922 Committee, which represents backbench Tories - proposed to add text about abandoning the existing backstop agreement concerning the Irish border in favour of unspecified alternative arrangements. In such a form it was unacceptable, but many conciliators in the different Tory factions decided to use it as the basis for hashing out a compromise. The one that eventually emerged, and gained the support of No10 and victory on the Commons floor, was Kit Malthouse's version, that offered remainers a longer transition period, and in return declared breezily that technological solutions would be found to avoid a hard Irish border in the event of some disaster.

Secondly, there was Yvette Cooper's and Nick Boles's attempt to table a debate on a bill, drawn up by Cooper, that - if passed - would rule out a no-deal Brexit and prepare the ground to delay the completion of article 50 by nine months. The third, moved by the liberal Tory, Caroline Spelman, explicitly condemned the no-deal scenario, but did not - like Cooper/Boles - commit parliament to *discussing legislation* ruling it out.

The parliamentary layout began to fall back to the partisan dividing lines, albeit with visible tensions between the parties' respective factions. The Labour leadership came out in support of Cooper's amendment, in line with its public rejection of a no-deal Brexit, but was careful to make known that it would table amendments to Cooper's *bill*, specifically to shorten the proposed delay.

The Malthouse amendment, meanwhile, did at least have the distinct benefit of actually representing a real compromise among the various Conservative factions. That must be its only benefit, however. As it gathered support, political pundits multiplied their stories of anonymous "senior Tories" agreeing to it, in despair at getting through the day otherwise, yet fully aware that it would never pass muster in Europe. Hours before the votes actually took place in parliament, the EU 27 had already prepared a statement to be issued in the event of the Brady amendment (and, impliedly, the Malthouse compromise) passing; a firm no to any renegotiations.

Leave it to IT?

One of the aforementioned "senior Tories" claimed that the compromise brought his party from farce back into tragedy - no longer squabbling like children, but uniting on principle and preparing to go down, thus united, in some foreign field.

Yet a recurring impression, as this absurd kabuki dance moves from one step to the next, is how ridiculous the Brexiteers actually are in their aspirations. An IT professional like your humble correspondent can hardly resist a pop at the purely notional

'technological solutions' to the hard-border problem. There is, if nothing else, the small matter that huge government IT projects - how to put this? - do not enjoy an unblemished record of success. Disasters abound, from the NHS to the ministry of defence. There are successes too; but it is a pretty big chance to take.

On top of that, a computerised system is just peachy when it comes to good-faith border-crossers, but how exactly is it supposed to catch smugglers? That is a pretty hairy AI problem, Mr Malthouse; avoiding it demands either fairly hard borders or a customs union ... Can anyone have imagined that this is the magic ingredient that will convince Messrs Tusk, Barnier and co that the backstop agreement can be radically revised? Yet magic 'technology' has been a mainstay of Brexiteer question-begging since the get-go. We wonder sometimes if Jacob Rees-Mogg has even used a computer: nothing else could account for his naivety on this front.

And indeed we have to assume that none of this was primarily for a European audience. Getting the Brady amendment through parliament may look like the final few drops of urine on the grave of May's deal, but it has advantages: it absolves her from the charge of ignoring parliament, which removed one of the preconditions Jeremy Corbyn imposed on her, and authorises her to troop off to Brussels, get told 'no', come back and ask her MPs, 'Now what?'

The result - victory for Brady and Spelman, defeat for Cooper - settles nothing in this regard. Indeed, it commits parliament, admittedly loosely, to two sharply contradictory positions: avoiding a no-deal Brexit at any cost, and rejecting the deal the opposing negotiators are actually prepared to make. Something has to give. In spite of no doubt unpleasant encounters to come on the continent, we must consider this a narrow victory for May's government. Corbyn agreed to hold talks and had a "serious and engaged" meeting with her on January 31. May also forced her own head-bangers to vote with her, and she

has the advantage ... until the next vote.

Fundamentally, however, the position has not altered. The government's inability to get a realistic withdrawal deal, from the point of view of the European powers, will lead to continued pressure and more Nissan-type statements from major industrial concerns. Remainer manoeuvres are seen, by Brexit voters, as sabotage - accurately, as far as these things go. Perhaps the most worrying sign for the British bourgeoisie is how straightforwardly partisan the votes were. The raw materials of a national government of the 'sensible' is there in the Commons, but quite spectacularly failed to come together - even speculatively - on January 29. For the bourgeoisie a national government has, of course, two great advantages. The Brexit nonsense would be disposed of at a stroke. Ditto the danger of a Corbyn-led Labour government.

Perhaps the January 29 vote improved May's leverage in Europe - marginally. She cannot negotiate her way out of the backstop with 'technology', of course; but she can claim with somewhat greater plausibility that she has forced more of her tormentors to show their hand, and is thus in a better position to get a 'compromise' - even one wholly on her side - through an exhausted parliament.

Time will tell ●

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