

LABOUR PARTY MARXISTS

labourpartymarxists.org.uk

Free - donations welcome



Only one of them really knew what they were doing

Eighteen theses on Labour

Disputation on the self-defeating common sense of governmentalism and the illusions of broad left alternatives

1. The December 2019 general election defeat and Sir Keir Starmer's subsequent leadership victory shows the bankruptcy of the reformist strategy for socialism. With Jeremy Corbyn they had their ideal leader, with John McDonnell they had their ideal shadow chancellor, with *It's time for real change* they had their ideal manifesto.

2. Labour's poor performance in 2019 is not only explained by 'getting Brexit done'. Jeremy Corbyn faced unremitting hostility from the mainstream media, which did everything it could to feed and promote the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' smear campaign. But to have expected anything else would have been naive. The mainstream media "carry out a system-supportive propaganda function" (Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky). In the absence of a full-spectrum mass media in the hands of the labour movement, Corbyn was forced to undergo trial by the bourgeois establishment's papers and journals, radio and TV stations, and news and blog sites. He was never going to win.

3. A Corbyn-led government was not a prospect that the ruling class was

prepared to countenance. Economically, they deemed its programme grossly irresponsible. It could, they feared, trigger a crisis of expectations. More than that, they considered Corbyn and his close allies totally unreliable when it came to international politics. So, if by some fluke a Corbyn-led government had taken office, their response would have been such tactics as an organised run on the pound, wrecking operations by the Parliamentary Labour Party right, MI5 subversion, an army mutiny, US 'pushback', a royal-blessed coup, etc.

4. While the chances of a Corbyn-led government were always exceedingly remote, that cannot be said of the possibility of making changes to the Labour Party's rules and structures. Yet, whereas Tony Blair carried out a (counter) revolution, all that Corbyn managed to achieve were a few tinkering reforms. That need not have been the case. With a more determined, more politically clear-sighted left, there really could have been a revolution in the party.

6. However, the left is politically weak. Too often it was determined to simply tail Corbyn, while Corbyn was determined to maintain unity with the openly pro-capitalist right in the PLP. That meant dropping open selection of parliamentary candidates, leaving Blair's clause four untouched and refusing to confront and call out the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' smear campaign.

7. Corbyn did not protest, even as friend after friend, ally after ally, was thrown to the wolves. Instead of taking the fight to the Zionist forces, such as Labour Friends of Israel and the Jewish Labour Movement (formerly Poale Zion), and championing the Palestinian cause through promoting the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign, on his watch there was a concerted drive to increase the number of expulsions and suspensions. The Corbyn-Formby regime itself became an agent of the witch-hunt. To even deny that Labour

has a real, a significant, a widespread problem with anti-Semitism became a disciplinary offence in its own right.

8. Not surprisingly, with the December 2019 general election defeat, many disorientated former Corbyn supporters variously concluded that: there needs to be a safe, acceptable, suitably centrist Labour Party that can 'rewind the trust' of the so-called Jewish community; that Labour can never be changed; that the fight for radical social change lies not in permanent political organisation, but in ephemeral street protests, economic strikes, tenant campaigns; etc.

9. Also not surprisingly, Starmer - former member of the International Revolutionary Marxist Tendency and editor of *Socialist Alternatives* - stood for leader promising to remain fully committed to *It's time for real change*. A cynical lie designed to pull wool over gullible eyes. Apart from getting himself into No10, he has no master plan nowadays. The latest round of the witch-hunt under Starmer owes nothing to defeating, finally seeing-off the left, that is for sure. With Corbyn gone, Rebecca Long-Bailey soundly beaten, David Evans as general secretary, a rightwing NEC majority, the PLP overwhelmingly dominated by the right and the three big union affiliates, GMB, Unite and Unison, unlikely to rock the boat, he has a controlling grip on the Labour Party.

10. No less to the point, the left in the CLPs is much reduced and organisations such as the Socialist Campaign Group, Momentum and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy are cowardly and display not the least appetite for a concerted fightback. Self-serving careerism counts for far more than the principle of solidarity: there is, for example, still a steadfast refusal to call out the 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' big lie.

11. No, the suspensions and expulsions under Starmer are a matter of display. He wants to prove to the capitalist media,

big business, the City, the establishment, the armed forces and the US state department that, as prime minister, he would be trustworthy, utterly loyal to the constitution, the UK state and its international alliances. That is why Starmer promises to "uproot" anti-Semitism, why Jeremy Corbyn remains suspended from the PLP, why Labour Against the Witchhunt, the Labour in Exile Network, Resist and Socialist Appeal have been banned and why Ken Loach was auto-expelled.

12. The failures, the cowardice, the treachery, the constantly repeated pattern of the official Labour left becoming the official Labour right has to be explained in materialist terms. It cannot be put down to individual oddity, personal weakness or some congenital tendency to betray. The Labour left is still the natural home for many trade union militants, socialist campaigners and those committed to radical social change. But Labour's position as the alternative party of government also makes the official Labour left a breeding ground for careerists, who, often starting off with good intentions, slowly or speedily evolve to the right. The lure of elected positions, generous expense accounts, lucrative sinecures, sly backhanders, mixing with the great and good and eventually entry into the lower ranks of the bourgeoisie all smooth the way.

13. Both the official Labour left and the official Labour right share a 'common sense' that politics are about winning elections. Therefore, policies are limited to what can be 'sold' to the electorate. But it is the mainstream capitalist media that, ultimately, decides what is to be regarded as sensible and what is to be dismissed as sectarian craziness. Anything that gets in the way of winning elections must therefore be avoided like the plague. Hence it is not only the Labour right which attempts to restrict, muddy and segment debate, and impose bureaucratic limits and measures to

sideline awkward minorities. The official Labour left behaves in exactly the same anti-democratic manner.

14. The Labour Party, as presently constituted, is certainly not a "true mass organisation of the working class". Doubtless, although it is down by a hundred thousand, Labour still has a mass membership and relies on trade union money and working class voters. But, in the last analysis, what decides the class character of a political party is its leadership and its programme.

15. The election of Corbyn did not produce fundamental change here. Neither *For the many, not the few* (2017) nor *It's time for real change* (2019) questioned the monarchical constitution, the standing army, judge-made law or the US-dominated international order, let alone the system of wage-slavery. So, even under Corbyn, Labour was neither a democratic nor a socialist party. It was, and remains, a bourgeois workers' party, which has its place in capitalism's many defensive moats, ramparts and walls.

16. Despite the failure of Corbyn and the election of Starmer, we remain committed to the complete transformation of the Labour Party, forging it into a permanent united front of the working class and equipping it with solid Marxist principles and a tried-and-tested Marxist leadership.

17. However, this positive perspective for Labour can only be realised through the struggle to unite the left inside and outside the Labour Party - but not into a broad front based on soggy, middle-ground compromises, like the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, Left Unity, Respect or the Socialist Alliance. Sadly, all these have been wasted opportunities. No, we need to unite in building a mass Marxist party - a party that applies to affiliate to Labour, but can operate within the party despite bans and proscriptions.

18. Without a mass Marxist party, the left is doomed to suffer one Sisyphean defeat after another ●

SEP
NO 27 23
2021

LABOUR AS A UNITED FRONT

Once all working class and socialist organisations were welcome - obviously no longer. **James Marshall** looks at the past, present and future



Purging, banning, proscribing the left reduces, diminishes and might well destroy the Labour Party as a Labour Party

We are in the midst of a terrible witch-hunt - a witch-hunt fully backed by the Labour right, the capitalist media, the courts, the Israeli embassy and the forces of the deep state. Three examples:

■ Jeremy Corbyn was suspended from membership of the Parliamentary Labour Party in October 2020, thereby preventing him from standing as a Labour candidate in the next general election. Why? He dared tell the truth: “accusations” of anti-Semitism have been “dramatically overstated for political reasons by our opponents inside and outside the party, as well as by much of the media”.¹ Constituency Labour Party chairs and secretaries who allowed debates on, or resolutions protesting against, his treatment faced suspension or expulsion.

■ Hundreds, if not thousands, have been purged, many charged with anti-Semitism, and predictably a hugely disproportionate percentage of them are Jewish: eg, Jackie Walker, Tony Greenstein and Moshé Machover. Their real crime is opposing the Zionist colonial-settler state of Israel ... and Labour’s pro-capitalist right wing.

■ The July 20 national executive committee banned Labour Against the Witchhunt, Resist, the Labour In Exile Network and Socialist Appeal. Anyone deemed a member or supporter of one of those proscribed organisations faces auto-expulsion. Amongst the first to fall foul of the new rule was celebrated film director Ken Loach. He refused to renounce support for LAW.

It is all too clear what Sir Keir Starmer and general secretary David Evans are up to. Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership victory in September 2015 owed much to historical accident; little or nothing to the strategic acumen, ideological hegemony and organisational strength of the official left. With his ill-judged resignation following the December 2019 general election and the resounding defeat suffered by the hapless Rebecca Long-Bailey in the April 2020 leadership contest, the Labour right has been firmly back in the saddle. The witch-hunt is no longer about undermining Corbyn, driving him into complicity, forcing him to sacrifice one friend and one ally after another and ensuring that he never enters No10 Downing Street as prime minister.

No, the witch-hunt is about Sir Keir demonstrating his unquestioning loyalty to the UK state and its international allies - crucially the US and its most important strategic asset in the Middle East. Bans, expulsions, character assassination and riding roughshod over basic democratic norms have a potent symbolic value. They show that Starmer is worthy of the establishment’s trust. That way, he hopes to ingratiate himself with the capitalist media, boost Labour’s poll ratings and calm the fears of the army top brass, MI5, the City and the US state department. If - and it is a big if - Brexit comes to be commonly regarded as a Boris Johnson-driven car crash, then Sir Keir has the distinct possibility of getting that summons to Buckingham Palace and being asked to form a government by her majesty the queen.

Class against class

Labour Party Marxists has actively joined with those many others fighting the suspension and expulsion of socialists, trade union activists and anti-Zionists. All of them, without exception, should be immediately reinstated. There is surely nothing uncontroversial about Marxists making such a demand. After all, what is going on inside the Labour Party is a clear and unmistakable manifestation of the class struggle.

What then should we make of those self-declared ‘leftwingers’ who have turned a blind eye, excused, complied with or even promoted the witch-hunt? Painful though it may be for many, the fact of the matter is that it was under the pro-Corbyn regime of Jennie Formby that Labour HQ ‘fast-tracked’ expulsions. ‘Denialism’ - ie, what Corbyn was charged with - first became a crime with general secretary Formby (denialism, in this context, being a refusal to go along with the big lie that Labour has a widespread, politically significant problem with anti-Semitism).

Yet, as the witch-hunt ripped through the ranks of the Labour left, John McDonnell, Diane Abbott and the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs maintained a studied silence. None of them defended Ken Livingstone, Chris Williamson, Pete Willsman or Marc Wadsworth. The principle, ‘An injury to one is an injury to all’, became an alien concept. *The Guardian’s* house-trained

Owen Jones was little different. Nor did Momentum lift a finger. Indeed Jackie Walker was surgically removed as its vice-chair.

Then there is Dan Randall and the social-imperialist Alliance for Workers’ Liberty outfit. They might as well be paid agents of the foreign office. Perhaps, though, the most revolting of all is Robert Griffiths, leader of the *Morning Star’s* Communist Party of Britain. He actually wrote to the Labour Party’s witch-hunter-in-chief, Iain McNicol, asking him to name the names of any members of his who had entered the Labour Party “or engaged in any similar subterfuge”, so that ‘action can be taken against them’.² Not to leave a shadow of doubt, Griffiths signed off: “With comradely regards”.

Exactly how Griffiths’ sorry excuse for a communist organisation arrived at its ban on Labour Party members joining the CPB and the ban on CPB members joining the Labour Party need not concern us here. Its roots, though, surely lie in the ‘official’ Communist Party of Great Britain and its turn to the cross-class politics of the popular front, sanctioned by the 7th Congress of the Communist International in 1935 under Stalin’s direct command.

Despite CPB claims to be the unbroken continuation of the CPGB going back to its foundation in 1920, nothing could be further from the truth. A fundamental break occurred. The same goes for the Labour Party.

Beginnings

From its beginning Labour was a federal party, which sought to unite all working class and socialist organisations. It was a united front of a special kind - special because, as with the soviets in Russia, unity was not tactical, fleeting or episodic. True, especially at first, political aims were decidedly limited.

JH Holmes, delegate of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, moved this historic resolution at the 1899 TUC:

That this Congress, having regard to its decisions in former years, and with a view to securing better representation of the interests of labour in the House of Commons, hereby instructs the Parliamentary

Committee to invite the cooperation of all cooperative, socialistic, trade unions and other working class organisations to jointly cooperate on lines mutually agreed upon, in convening a special congress of representatives from such above-named organisations as may be willing to take part to devise ways and means of securing the return of an increased number of labour members in the next parliament.³

His resolution was opposed by the miners’ union on the basis of impracticability, but found support from the dockers, the railway servants and shop assistants. After a long debate the resolution was narrowly carried by 546,000 votes to 434,000.

The TUC’s parliamentary committee oversaw the founding conference of the Labour Representation Committee in February 1900. The 129 delegates, representing around 500,000 members, finally agreed to establish a distinct Labour Party in parliament, with its own whips, policies, finances, etc.

An executive committee was also elected. It would prepare lists of candidates, administer funds and convene an annual conference. Besides affiliated trade unions, the newly formed NEC would also include socialist societies. In fact, they, the socialist societies, were allocated five out of the 12 NEC seats (one for the right-reformist Fabians, two for the centrist Independent Labour Party and two for the openly revolutionary Social Democratic Federation). Given the diminutive size of these socialist societies compared with the trade unions, it is obvious that they were treated with considerable generosity. Presumably their “advanced” views were highly regarded.⁴

For Keir Hardie the formation of the Labour Party marked something of a tactical retreat. He had long sought some kind of socialist party. However, to secure an alliance with the trade unions he and other ILPers were prepared to programmatically limit the Labour Party to nothing more than furthering working class interests by getting “men sympathetic with the aims and demands of the labour movement” into the House of Commons.⁵

SDF delegates proposed that the newly established Labour Party commit

itself to the “class war and having as its ultimate object the socialisation of the means of production and exchange” - a formulation rejected by a large majority. In the main the trade unions were still Liberal politically. Unfortunately, as a result of this vote, the next annual conference of the SDF voted by 54 to 14 to withdraw from the Labour Party. Many SDF leaders came to bitterly “regret” this sectarian decision.⁶

As might be expected, this was part of a wider pattern. For example, faced with the great industrial unrest of 1910-14, Henry Hyndman, the SDF’s autocratic leader, rhetorically asked: “Can anything be imagined more foolish, more harmful, more - in the widest sense of the word - unsocial than a strike?”⁷

Of course, it is quite possible to actively support trade unions in their struggles over wages, conditions, etc, and to patiently and steadfastly advocate republican democracy and international socialism. Indeed without doing just that there can be no hope for a mass socialist party here in Britain.

Nonetheless, the SDF is too often casually dismissed by historians. Eg, Henry Pelling describes it as “a rather weedy growth in the political garden”.⁸ True, its Marxism was typically crude and, with Hyndman, mixed with more than a tinge of anti-Semitism. For him the Boer war was instigated by “Jew financial cliques and their hangers-on”.⁹ Yet the SDF was “the first modern socialist organisation of national importance” in Britain.¹⁰

Karl Marx disliked it, Fredrick Engels despaired of it, William Morris, John Burns, Tom Mann and Edward Aveling split from it. But the SDF survived. The various breakaways - eg, the Socialist League, the Socialist Party of Great Britain and the Socialist Labour Party - either disappeared, remained utterly impotent or could manage little more than regional influence. Meanwhile, the SDF continued as the “major representative” of what passed for Marxism in this country till 1911, when it merged with a range of local socialist societies to become the British Socialist Party.¹¹

The first conference of the newly formed BSP voted, by an overwhelming majority, to “seek direct and independent affiliation” to the Second International.¹²

In other words, not through the Labour Party-dominated British section of the Second International. Despite that, however, the BSP began to overcome its Labour-phobia. Leading figures, such as Henry Hyndman, J Hunter Watts and Dan Irving, eventually came round to affiliation. That was vindication for Zelda Kahan and the internationalist left. Withdrawal from the Labour Party, she argued, had been a profound mistake. Outside the Labour Party the BSP was seen as hostile, fault-finding and antagonistic. Inside, the BSP would get a wider hearing and win over the “best” rank-and-file forces.¹³ Affiliation to the Labour Party was agreed, albeit by a relatively narrow majority. Efforts then began to put that into effect. The formal application for affiliation was submitted in June 1914. And in 1916 - things having been considerably delayed due to the outbreak of World War I - the BSP gained entry into the Labour Party. Almost simultaneously, in Easter 1916, the BSP in effect expelled the pro-war right wing. Hyndman went off to form his National Socialist Party.

Communist affiliation

The October revolution found militant and unstinting support in the BSP. A number of its émigré comrades from Russia returned home and took up important positions in the Soviet government. Bolshevik publications were soon being translated into English: eg, Lenin's *State and revolution*. Money too flowed in.

The Leeds conference of the BSP in 1918 enthusiastically declared its solidarity with the Bolsheviks and a wish to emulate their methods and achievements. And under the influence of Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin, etc, the BSP adopted a much more active, much more agitational role in the Labour Party and the trade unions. In the words of Fred Shaw, instead of standing aloof from the “existing organisations” of the working class, “win them for Marxism”¹⁴

Needless to say, the BSP constituted the main body that went towards the historic formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain over July 31-August 1 1920. Given BSP affiliation four years earlier, and the fact that in 1918 the Labour Party introduced individual membership, there can be no doubt that the bulk of CPGBers were card-carrying Labour Party members. Dual membership was therefore the norm, as with the Fabians and ILP.

However, instead of simply informing Arthur Henderson, Labour's secretary, that the BSP had changed its name, the CPGB, following Lenin's advice, applied for affiliation. Lenin thought the CPGB was in a win-win situation. If affiliation was accepted, this would open up the Labour Party rank and file to communist influence. If affiliation was rejected, this would expose Labour leaders for what they really were: “the worst kind of reactionaries”.¹⁵

With 20:20 foresight it would probably have been better for the CPGB to have presented itself merely as the continuation of the BSP. True, that would have tested to the limits the CPGB's own unity. Its First Congress had a surprisingly large minority opposed to Labour Party affiliation: eg, the Communist Unity Group.

Nevertheless, securing a divorce is undoubtedly far harder than turning down a would-be suitor. The Labour leadership would have had to expel a renamed existing affiliate rather than reject a brand new prospective affiliate. Note, the BSP was allowed to affiliate in 1916, despite its long established commitment to Marxism, and, as far as I know, there were no moves to expel the BSP because of its newly adopted opposition to the ongoing inter-imperialist war - a position shared, of course, by Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald and the centrist ILP.

After World War I and the 1917 Russian Revolution, however, Labour's

grandees were determined to distance themselves from Bolshevism. The revolution had put terror into the soul of the bourgeoisie. Their system was mortal. In defence of their system of exploitation they reinvented capitalism as ‘democracy’ ,while the communists, in defence of the isolated Soviet republic, championed ‘dictatorship’. A strategic blunder. A gift. Arthur Henderson therefore replied to the CPGB's first application for affiliation by counterposing democracy and dictatorship. The principles of the communists do not accord with those of the Labour Party, he flatly declared. To which the CPGB responded by pointing out that:

... it understood the Labour Party to be so catholic in composition and constitution that it could admit to its ranks all sections of the working class movement that accept the broad principle of independent working class political action, at the same time granting them freedom to propagate their own particular views as to the policy the Labour Party should pursue and the tactics it should adopt.¹⁶

A good many local Labour Parties, particularly in London, forthrightly rejected Henderson's characterisation of the CPGB as, in effect, mad, bad and dangerous to know. Nonetheless, Labour's apparatus experienced no difficulty in marshalling crushing majorities. Eg, in June 1921 there was an overwhelming 4,115,000 to 224,000 conference vote against CPGB affiliation.

A *minority* Labour government was now a real prospect. Towards that end Labour had to be made acceptable to the Liberal Party, the capitalist press, the army high command, the City and George V. Britain and its vast empire of exploitation, pillage and extermination would be safe in Labour hands. That was the essential message that the Labour and trade union bureaucracy wanted to convey by rejecting the CPGB.

Lenin had, in 1908, optimistically called Labour the “first step towards socialism and towards a class policy”¹⁷ As it was, Labour took one step forward in 1900 and one step back with its support for British imperialism in World War I ... and still another step back with its refusal to accept communist affiliation. The united front of the working class was thereby disunited. The Labour Party dishonestly continued to call itself by that name, but in reality Labour was sabotaged as a party going towards socialism and a class policy. It continues, of course, but akin to soviets without Bolsheviks: soviets subordinated to the capitalist state; soviets as a career ladder for colourless, clueless, professional politicians.

Bans and defiance

Not that the CPGB could be easily seen off. Affiliation might have been rejected, but there remained dual membership. In 1922, two CPGB members won parliamentary seats as Labour candidates: JT Walton Newbold (Motherwell and Wishaw) and Shapurji Saklatvala (Battersea North).

Subsequently, Labour's NEC was forced to temporarily drop its attempt to bar CPGB members from being elected as annual conference delegates. The June 26-29 1923 Labour conference had 36 CPGB members as delegates, “as against six at Edinburgh” the previous year.¹⁸ Incidentally, the 1923 conference once again rejected CPGB affiliation, this time by a narrower 2,880,000 to 366,000 margin.

Nonetheless, the general election in December 1923 saw CPGBers Ellen Wilkinson (Ashton-under-Lyne), Shapurji Saklatvala (Battersea North), M Philips Price (Gloucester), William Paul (Manchester Rusholme) and Joe Vaughan (Bethnal Green SW) stand as *official* Labour candidates, while Alec Geddes (Greenock) and Aitken Ferguson (Glasgow Kelvingrove) were *unofficial*

Labour candidates, there being no official Labour candidate in either constituency. Walton Newbold (Motherwell) and Willie Gallacher (Dundee) alone stood as CPGB candidates. Despite a considerable increase in the overall communist vote, none were elected.¹⁹

A ban on CPGB members standing as Labour Party candidates swiftly followed. Yet, though Labour Party organisations were instructed not to support CPGB candidates, this was met with defiance - not the fawning compliance nowadays personified by the miserable Robert Griffiths. In the run-up to the October 1924 general election, Battersea North Labour Party overwhelmingly endorsed Shapurji Saklatvala, Joe Vaughan was unanimously endorsed by Bethnal Green SW CLP and William Paul similarly by the Rusholme CLP executive committee. And Saklatvala was once again elected as an MP.

The 1924 Labour Party conference decision against CPGB members continuing with dual membership was reaffirmed in 1925. And, going further, trade unions were “asked not to nominate communists as delegates to Labour organisations”. In response, in December 1925, the National Left Wing Movement was formed. Its stated aim was not only to oppose bans on communists: it also sought to hold together disaffiliated CLPs. Basically a model which today's LIEN seeks to emulate.

The NLWM insisted it had no wish or thought of superseding the Labour Party, but, instead, it sought to advance the generally held aspirations of Labour's leftwing militants. In this it was considerably boosted by the newly established *Sunday Worker*. Despite being initiated, funded and edited by the CPGB, the *Sunday Worker* served as the authoritative voice of the NLWM. At its height it achieved a circulation of 100,000. The NLWM's 1925 founding conference had nearly 100 Labour Party organisations sending delegates.

Following the defeat of the 1926 General Strike, the Labour apparatus and trade union bureaucracy wanted the movement to draw the conclusion that the only way to make progress would be through cooperating with the capitalist class in the national interest - Mondism. As a direct concomitant of this miserable class-collaborationism there was a renewed drive to exclude communists. Yet, despite these assaults on the Labour Party's founding principles, at the end of 1926 the CPGB could report that 1,544 of its 7,900 members were still individual members of the Labour Party.

The struggle proved particularly sharp in London. In the capital city around half of the CPGB's membership were active in their CLPs. And despite claiming that it was the communists who were “splitting the movement”, the labour leadership palpably strove to do just that. Battersea CLP was disaffiliated because it dared to back Saklatvala and refused to bar CPGB members. Similar measures were taken against Bethnal Green CLP, where the communist ex-mayor, Joe Vaughan, was held in particularly high regard.

Yet the Labour leadership's campaign of disaffiliation and expulsion remorselessly ground on. The NLWM therefore found itself considerably weakened in terms of official Labour Party structures. Hence at its second annual conference in 1927 there were delegates from only 54 local Labour Parties and other Labour groups (representing a total of 150,000 individual party members). Militant union leaders, such as the miners' AJ Cook, supported the conference.

However, external factors came into play - negatively. With the counterrevolution within the revolution in the Soviet Union, the CPGB was, in many ways willingly, reduced to being a slave of Stalin's foreign policy. The CPGB's attitude towards the Labour Party correspondingly wildly zigged and zagged. During the so-called ‘third period’ leaders such as Harry Pollitt

and Rajani Palme Dutt denounced the Labour Party as nothing but “a third capitalist party” (shades of Peter Taaffe and Hannah Sell and their Socialist Party in England and Wales).²⁰

As an integral part of this madness, in 1929 the *Sunday Worker* was closed down and the NLWM was wound up. In effect the CPGB returned to its SDF roots. Ralph Miliband comments that the CPGB's so-called new line “brought it to the nadir of its influence”²¹

Third period left sectarianism could only but spur on the Labour right's witch-hunt. In 1930 there came the first proscribed list. Members of a whole variety of organisations became ineligible for individual membership of the Labour Party, and CLPs were instructed not to affiliate to proscribed organisations. Needless to say, most of them were associated in some way or another with the CPGB.

Latest round

What began as a witch-hunt against the CPGB in the 1920s nowadays not only includes LAW, LIEN and Socialist Appeal. There is the catch-all ban on “racist, abusive or foul language, abuse against women, homophobia or anti-Semitism at meetings, on social media or in any other context”. The Victoria Street thought-police can, at a whim, expel anyone. Members live in fear. They silence themselves. They keep their heads down. They fret, worry and sometimes experience profound mental distress over nothing more than past Zoom appearances, social media posts, likes and dislikes. Naturally, often they simply despair, and leave in disgust. They scatter to the four winds and turn to social dust.

However, there is a growing fightback. Twelve NEC members have declared the ban on the four proscribed groups “unfair”.²² The SCG even summed up the courage to organise a statement, signed by 20 Labour MPs and five Labour peers, urging that Ken Loach be reinstated as a member.²³ In a similar fashion a range of groups have united as Defend the Left to oppose the bans and proscriptions - whatever the many political faults and inadequacies, a positive development. Even better, there are those now committed to the “refoundation of Labour as a united front of a special kind open to all socialist and working class organisations” (LAW).²⁴

Here a really valuable lesson has been learnt. Yes, comrades, to fight against the witch-hunt we need a clear vision of what we are fighting for. The struggle continues ●

Notes

1.The Independent October 29 2020.
2.Morning Star August 12 2016
3.BC Roberts *The Trade Union Congress 1868-1921* London 1958, p166.
4.Ibid p167.
5.Quoted in R Miliband *Parliamentary socialism* London 1960, p17.
6.M Crick *The history of the Social Democratic Federation* Keel 1994, p97.
7.Ibid p230
8.H Pelling *Origins of the Labour Party* Oxford 1976, p172.
9.M Crick *The history of the Social Democratic Federation* Keel 1994, p159.
10.Ibid p8.
11.Ibid p8.
12.Ibid p8.
13.Ibid p248.
14.Quoted in M Crick *The history of the Social Democratic Federation* Keel 1994, p281.
15.VI Lenin CW Vol 31, Moscow 1977, p258.
16.Quoted in J Klugmann *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain* Vol 1, London 1968, p168.
17.VI Lenin CW Vol 15, Moscow 1977, pp234-35.
18.JT Murphy, 'The Labour Party conference' *Communist Review* August 1923, Vol 4, No4: www.marxists.org/archive/murphy-jt/1923/08/labour_conf.htm
19.J Klugmann *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain* Vol 1, London 1968, pp361-62.
20.N Branson *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927-1941* London 1985, p5.
21.R Miliband *Parliamentary socialism* London 1960, p153.
22.labourlist.org/2021/09/labour-implementing-ban-on-groups-in-unfair-way-say-12-nec-members.
23.labourlist.org/2021/08/socialist-campaign-group-of-mps-urges-labour-to-reinstate-ken-loach.
24.www.labouragainsthewitchhunt.org.

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 are therefore to be opposed.
9. Political principles and organisational forms go hand-in-hand. The Labour Party must become the umbrella organisation for all trade unions, socialist groups and pro-working class partisans. Hence all the undemocratic bans and proscriptions must be done away with.
10. The fight to democratise the Labour Party cannot be separated from the fight to democratise the trade unions. Trade union votes at Labour Party conferences should be cast not by general secretaries but proportionately according to the political balance in each delegation.
11. All trade unions should be encouraged to affiliate, all members of the trade unions encouraged to pay the political levy and join the Labour Party as individual members.
12. The party must be reorganised from top to bottom. Bring the Parliamentary Labour Party under democratic control. The position of Labour leader should be abolished along with the national policy forum. The NEC should be unambiguously responsible for drafting Labour Party manifestos.
13. The NEC should be elected and accountable to the annual conference, which must be the supreme body in the party. Instead of a tame rally there must be democratic debate and binding votes.
14. Our elected representatives must be recallable by the constituency or other body that selected them. That includes MPs, MSPs, AMs, councillors, etc. Without exception elected representatives should take only the average wage of a skilled worker, the balance being donated to furthering the interests of the labour movement ●

We need system change

Capitalism cannot be trusted with the future of the planet, says **David Sherrief**. But be warned: governments could go for 'climate socialism'

The key findings of the IPCC sixth report are alarming, widely known and well worth repeating: human-induced warming is "unequivocally" the cause of rapid changes to the climate and, unless dramatic and sustained action is taken, the 1.5°C limit will be exceeded in the early 2030s.¹ The aim to limit global warming to "well below" 2°C, "preferably" to 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels was, of course, agreed by the Paris 2015 Cop21 meeting and is signed off by 195 countries.²

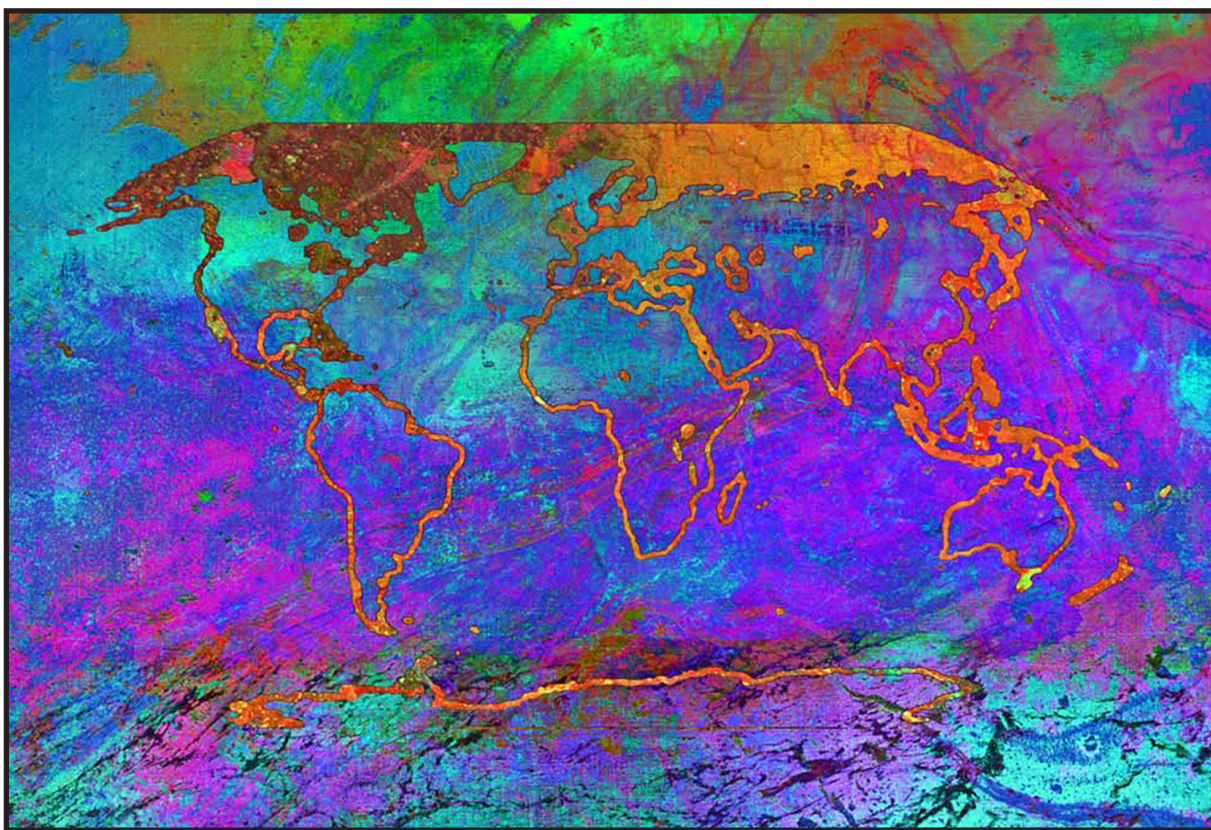
Now, says the IPCC, it is "code red". Human activity is changing the climate in ways "unprecedented" in thousands - or hundreds of thousands - of years. Some of the changes are likely to be "irreversible" over centuries or millennia - including the melting of polar ice, sea level rises and the acidification of the oceans.

Total warming is "dominated by past and future carbon emissions", the report states, but cuts must also be made to the shorter-lived methane emissions - responsible for roughly 30% of post-industrial global warming and 80 times more potent when it comes to climate change. In terms of human activity, methane is released primarily through biomass/biofuel burning, gas/oil production, rotting waste in landfill sites and, of course, meat and dairy farming. Cutting methane emissions by 30% over the next decade is, reportedly, a US-EU-UK "priority" for November's Cop26 in Glasgow.³

Tipping point

But, whatever happens with methane, not only do we seem well on course to hit the 1.5°C limit a lot sooner than first predicted, but there is the danger of reaching 2°C and going beyond. The IPCC warns that we are at or very near the tipping point. When quantity turns into quality, a "multiplier effect" kicks in and, through feedbacks and couplings, we get an entirely different climate system.⁴ Leave aside ocean currents, such as the Gulf Stream, slowing down or switching off entirely,⁵ mid-latitude land masses are hit with searing, almost impossibly high, temperatures; meanwhile, polar regions get far less cold during the winter months.⁶

Keeping to the Paris 1.5°C limit to prevent runaway climate change will require, says the IPCC, "immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions" in greenhouse gas emissions - of which there is no sign to date. For example, governments of all stripes leave urban sprawl, road building and the whole car economy going unquestioned. The much vaunted transition to electric vehicles is more a giant selling opportunity than any kind of a genuine solution. Not only does electricity still have to be generated - much still relying on coal, oil and gas power stations - there are also the steel, plastics, glass, computer chips, batteries, tyres, etc, that go towards making an electric vehicle. So, even if there is a 100% transition to renewable power sources, there will remain the large-scale release of greenhouse gases. The same applies to other major sources of human-induced greenhouse gas emissions: air flights, shipping, agriculture and industry. It is business as usual ... and, needless



Hotter and hotter

to say, business is driven by the capitalist M-P-M' imperative.

If emissions are not significantly reduced in the next decade, then reaching 3°C is all too conceivable - an apocalyptic scenario: though it would take thousands of years, the polar ice caps melt, sea levels head for a 10-metre rise, there is a further thaw of permafrost and another surge in global temperatures. There is, unavoidably, as a consequence, the mass extinction of flora and fauna. Countless cities are inundated: Alexandria, Dhaka, Jakarta, Bangkok, Kolkata, Miami, Houston, New Orleans, Rotterdam, Rio de Janeiro, Osaka and Shanghai. Along with much of Europe and western Asia, Britain eventually fragments into a series of islands. Oxford finds itself one of many new coastal towns. The North American wheat belt turns to desert. We effectively return to the conditions of the early Eocene 56-49 million years ago. As a bonus, true, the far north of America and Asia becomes habitable along with Antarctica. But what this presages is not exciting new opportunities for humanity, but rather a new dark age. Indeed there is the possibility that large parts of the planet becomes uninhabitable due to flammable air-methane concentrations.⁷ According to Tim Palmer, professor of climate physics at Oxford University, if we do not radically halt our emissions soon, our planet could well become "some kind of hell on Earth".⁸

As the IPCC report emphasises, even if the capitalist ruling class somehow manages to get its act together by drastically reducing emissions, the climate will not return to the patterns we have been used to in the recent past. A 1.5°C warmer world will see an increase in "unprecedented" weather events. Disastrous floods, droughts, heatwaves and fires become far more frequent and far more intense.

Capitalocene

With its imperialist hierarchy, ruthless exploitation of nature

and never satiated lust for profit, capitalism is the major driver of climate change - despite its different political economy, the Soviet Union and its 'socialist' bloc made no difference here. As for China - today the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases - it is, of course, fully integrated into the global capitalist economy. Some talk of the Anthropocene, as if it is an undifferentiated humanity that is responsible for climate change. But it is surely better, more accurate to talk of the Capitalocene.

For many on the left, not unreasonably, capitalism is defined, categorically, as incapable of dealing with the danger of runaway global warming. However, not even the most fabulously wealthy billionaire, or their 'slave' politicians and state actors, are so blind that they cannot see that something must urgently be done. Nonetheless, true, it is hard to imagine governments such as Boris Johnson's Tories ever carrying out a programme that would actually achieve net zero emissions - after all, that would require a dramatic restructuring of power generation, industry, agriculture, transport, housing provision, etc.

Therefore, so the reasoning goes, the corrupt, grasping, self-interested Tories will confine themselves to nothing more than empty gestures, cheap platform rhetoric and legislating for an electorally safe, distant future. Meantime they carry on as usual: more nuclear power, more roads, more air travel, more poor quality housing ... crucially, more of everything: ie, more economic growth. Apropos the loathsome Tories: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" If not, then "neither can they do good who are accustomed to doing evil."⁹

Yet, as seen with the ongoing Covid pandemic - and two world wars before that - the ruling class is prepared to allow governments to temporarily suspend the law of value. The normal workings of capitalism

are overridden, curtailed or tightly directed in order to achieve agreed state aims.

The more intelligent sections of the left have written about how the Tories, and other governments too, introduced 'Covid socialism', roughly equivalent to the 'war socialism' put into effect by the German high command in 1916 - ie, the use of concentrated state power to deal with a dire emergency. The Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine is a good example. Developed double quick, produced on a non-profit basis, it was then rolled out by the NHS according to need.

In terms of the general interest - more particularly the general capitalist interest - governments will take what are usually regarded as extreme measures. Tory chancellor Rishi Sunak talked about tearing up his economic textbooks, doing what is necessary, thinking the unthinkable and all the rest of it. Though fraught with horrendous difficulties - not least because capitalism, from the level of the firm to that of the state, is characterised by internally generated rivalries - we should not discount the possibility that this will happen with the climate emergency. After all, the capitalist class lives on the same fragile planet as the rest of us (even if Elon Musk would like to rocket off to a frigid, lifeless, almost airless Mars).

No illusions

So climate socialism, enforced by a firefighter capitalist state - maybe with green advisors, enlightened technocrats and the armed forces playing a leading role - could conceivably impose draconian restrictions on emissions, reorganise industry, transport and agriculture and thereby limit the rise in global warming to "well below" 2°C, or even to 1.5°C.

Of course, that, or something like it, would have to happen in all the major countries. Adding to that little difficulty, the global hegemon, the United States, is in

visible decline. There is, therefore, no effective power that can enforce the general capitalist interest. However, even on a purely national level, we should have no illusions about any eco or climate socialism introduced, overseen and enforced by the capitalist state (or, for that matter, the Xi Jinping regime in China). As with war socialism, there will be monumental blunders, severe restrictions on democratic rights, attempts to drive down popular living standards - all accompanied by endemic corruption and corresponding opportunities for well connected insiders to enrich themselves beyond the dreams of Croesus.

Nor will such a climate socialism peacefully, smoothly, evolve into proletarian socialism. True, we would reach a partial negation of capitalist production, the outer limits of capitalist society. But, because there is a swollen, parasitic, aggressively repressive bureaucratic state, what we have is the extreme opposite of proletarian socialism. Nonetheless, there is a relationship between climate socialism - in reality capitalism attempting to save itself on the backs of the working class - and proletarian socialism.

After all, we could substitute for the 'firefighter capitalist state' above the working class organised as the state power. Such a state, based on extreme democracy, closely coordinating with other such states across the globe, would radically reorganise power generation, industry, agriculture, transport, the housing stock, etc; it would be a state that reduces greenhouse gas emissions to net zero and then below; a state that subordinates production to need. Then, it is clear, such a state would be able to achieve far more than capitalist climate socialism to benefit the whole of humanity: it would represent the negation of capitalism and the first step towards a classless, moneyless, stateless and ecologically sustainable communism ●

Notes

1. www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_SPM.pdf.
2. unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement.
3. *Financial Times* September 15 2021.
4. CW Arnscheidt and DH Rothman, 'Asymmetry of extreme Cenozoic climate-carbon cycle events' *Science Advances* August 11 2021.
5. theguardian.com/environment/2021/aug/05/climate-crisis-scientists-spot-warning-signs-of-gulf-stream-collapse.
6. climate.nasa.gov/news/2865/a-degree-of-concern-why-global-temperatures-matter.
7. globalwarming.berrens.nl/globalwarming.htm.
8. ox.ac.uk/news/2021-08-09-oxford-climate-scientists-no-doubt-about-climate-change.
9. Jeremiah xiii:23 - slightly rephrased.

Your financial support is needed - please pay into the LPM bank account:
Sort Code 30-96-26, Account No 22097060

Or send cheques, payable to 'LPM', to:
LPM, BCM Box 8932,
London WC1N 3XX.

Or pay by Paypal to:
secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk