

# RED PAGES

● Labour Party Conference 2017 ●

produced by Labour Party Marxists



## Tom Watson speech: Delegates plan protests

There have been some interesting ramifications since the Labour Party's deputy leader, Tom Watson, briefly faced the prospect of his job disappearing from under him. The threat to Watson's livelihood came in the form of a motion from Momentum's number one, Jon Lansman, to abolish the post of deputy altogether (precisely the type of bold 'revolutionary' method that Corbyn should be deploying in the inner-party war).

Comrades who read us yesterday will be aware that we were profoundly sceptical about the real motivations of this rather strange move by Lansman. The specific issue of the disappearing deputy leader quickly vanished. However, we are left with some interesting developments in the aftermath of the original spat.

First, we have the response of Corbyn himself. In yesterday's bulletin, we characterised his general approach to the concrete question of the post of deputy and the threat to Watson as "supine" and Ghandi-like. Sadly, but predictably, this dismally timid method was carried over into the 'positive' solutions that he proposed for the structure of the leadership henceforth: ie, *two* deputy leaders ... with the stipulation that one must be a woman. 'Underwhelming' would be an overstatement.

In contrast, Tom Watson pin-pointed precisely the key issue that political life in our organisation revolves around – there is a "battle for the future of the Labour Party", he stated, in which members must "resist the destructive, corrosive impulse of factionalism". (For 'factionalism' read 'fighting for principled working class politics'.)

Thus far in this crisis in Labour, the members have been passive observers. So it is very encouraging that

word reaches us of provisional plans for some sort of protest against Watson when he rises to his feet on Tuesday to address conference. Even better, there are reports that this may include not simply individual delegates, but also CLP and union blocks. Much like the reaction to the original Lansman/deputy leader incident, these provisional plans have caused dissent and divisions on the left.

The essential lines of demarcation were delineated in an exchange between two comrades online. First a member expressed the worry that the walkers would "look like those Brexit MEPs turning their backs at the EU". No, came back the answer - "there's a civil war going on and one side is doing all the attacking!"

The world view of our readers will probably not shatter if we tell you that we support the fighting stance of the latter, rather than the timid approach of the former. However, we do understand that comrades are sensitive to the danger of providing the venal media with more ammunition with which to smear our party and thus are wary of scenes of division and conflict on conference floor.

Understandable, but wrong. In fact, we should think of the battle within Labour as being over a project of political hygiene rather than some self-indulgent "factionalism", as the deputy leader puts it. We urge comrades to support any protest that may be organised against the treacherous Tom Watson - a man who has been intricately involved in the witch-hunt against members of the party and attempts to undermine the leader. He is a disgrace and should be shamed not simply out of the Labour Party, but the wider workers' movement too. He should be given the heave-ho, pronto!

**TODAY'S ISSUE: MONDAY SEPTEMBER 23 2019**

- There is an alternative to Remain/Brexit
- LPM goes viral
- Union votes trump CLP votes: what to do?
- Full programme of Free Speech events

## Union votes vs CLP votes:

# Democratise the unions!

One thing has become pretty clear at this year's conference: the huge increase in membership and consequent radicalisation sparked by the election of Jeremy Corbyn in 2015 has not found much reflection within the trade unions.

This is hardly surprising, of course. Corbyn's election had little effect on the bureaucracies' control over their unions and this is exemplified by the way they vote at conference. On matters that have not been decided in advance, all union delegations are simply instructed on how they should cast the vote of their hundreds of thousands of members.

That was the case on Saturday in a series of card votes over proposed rule changes, and two in particular stand out. First, there was the vote on the NEC's proposal to "fast-track" expulsions of party members whose behaviour is judged to be irredeemably unacceptable - without the need for any hearing, for example. Understandably, most individual delegates were less than convinced by this proposal and CLP representatives voted narrowly to reject it (52%-48%). By contrast, the vote of affiliates (ie, overwhelmingly the unions) was 97% in favour! The CLPs and affiliates have equal weight, of course, both accounting for 50% of the total vote.

Then there was the card vote on ditching the 1995 Blairite version of clause four in favour of the original (Fabian) version. We have made clear our criticisms of the 1918 wording, but it is self-evident that its reinstatement would have marked a substantial advance. CLP delegates voted 56% in favour. But over 99% of the affiliated unions and socialist societies voted against!

On Sunday a series of national policy forum documents were put before conference. As delegates cannot amend these documents, the only option they have is to propose a 'referencing back' of particular sections of these for the NPF to reconsider (clearly, the whole undemocratic NPF should be abolished). In relation to the NPF document on education there were several such proposals, one of which specified that it should be reconsidered on the grounds that it did not contain a clear commitment to abolish grammar schools.

Incredibly, none of these reference-back proposals are put before conference in writing - delegates have to *listen* really carefully about what is being proposed. Perhaps even more incredibly, it was a full three hours later when the chair, Andi Fox, put them to a vote - without even a reminder as to their contents. Unsurprisingly, there was a lot of confusion in the hall. And when the unions overwhelm-

ingly rejected every single reference back, this caused a huge ruckus and eventually Andi Fox agreed that the votes would be revisited.

Sitting at the back of the hall, it did indeed look incredibly undemocratic: in vote after vote, a clear majority of people voted *in favour* of a particular reference back - but then the chair ruled that the vote was, in fact, *lost*. Why? Because in the areas where the union delegates sit, most had voted *against*. The chair explained that as she knew "certain stakeholders" hold more votes than the CLP delegates, she had taken that into consideration to make her decision.

Numerous delegates got up to express their dismay at these rulings - should the chair not actually be counting all the hands? "What is the point of me being here?", one delegate asked? "Everything us CLP delegates are trying to get through is opposed by the unions over there!" Encouragingly, there was also discontent within the union delegations and members were seen arguing amongst themselves over the wisdom of voting against the abolition of grammar schools, for example.

So what is the solution? Certainly Labour should remain a federal party - indeed in our view it should encourage the affiliation of *all* working class organisations, including left groups, and grant them the right to participate in its decision-making process. But, when it comes to trade unions in particular, we are talking about mass organisations with less than vibrant forms of democracy and accountability. All too often the bureaucracy is given a free ride.

That bureaucracy knows which side its bread is buttered. Its role as the intermediary between the employers and their workers requires that it must appear 'reasonable and acceptable' to both sides. In reality, left to itself, it acts as a stalwart of the current capitalist order. And it follows from that that the union bureaucracy tends to side with the 'moderate' wing of the Labour Party - in other words, the right.

The solution therefore must lie in the ability of the union membership to control and hold to account their leaders. We need the great mass of that membership to get actively involved - in the Labour Party as well as in the unions - to demand that their interests really are represented and that the bureaucracy upholds democratic principles. And such mass participation would make it less likely that the bureaucracy continually votes with the right at Labour conference.



# Our Europe, their Europe

Marxists are by definition internationalists. Therefore we are opposed to nationalism in all its variants, whether it be the classic Little-England type or the 'left' version of socialism in one country (national socialism) - something normally associated with Stalinism.

How does this impact on the Brexit debate? For a very large part of liberal opinion, and the left which tails it - such as Another Europe is Possible -, the actually existing European Union has become an emblem of everything that is progressive - the cherished ideal of anti-racism harmony in marked contrast to the increasingly rancorous nationalism of the UK Independence Party, the European Research Group (headed by the weird retro-Victorian Jacob Rees-Mogg), the desperate Boris Johnson, etc. A social democratic refuge from the onslaught of neo-liberalism and the market.

Does that mean Marxists are enthusiastic about today's EU or would consider voting 'remain' in any possible future referendum? The answer to both these questions is no. In reality, the bloc is committed heart and soul to market values, for all of the flummery about "human dignity", "tolerance", "fundamental rights", and so on. The whole project marches according to the rhythm, requirements and restrictions imposed by capital. Indeed, the EU constitution is a paean of praise for the market and the virtues of competition.

Then remember how the European Commission - in cahoots with the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund - imposed a regime of savage austerity upon Greece for daring to defy its diktats, driving millions into penury, homelessness and even suicide.

However, it does not follow that Marxists call for the UK to pull out of the EU because it is a "bosses' club", or

because it is not "socialist" - silly and also a criminal desertion of internationalism. One might just as well suggest pulling the working class out of the "bosses' club" of Britain. Or is the pound sterling more socialistic than the euro?

Capitalism and the capitalist state, as it historically presents itself in the here and now, is where the socialist project starts - in this case, the EU. The idea that the working class and the fight for socialism would be collectively strengthened if one or two of our national battalions aligned themselves with this or that faction of the bourgeoisie with a view to forcing a Britain, a France, a Spain or an Italy to withdraw from the EU displays a complete lack of seriousness. Disastrously, we would be weakening our forces.

Instead, Marxists argue for a positive programme. A Europe without unelected bureaucrats, technocrats, monarchies, and standing armies. Communists strive for working class unity within, but *against*, the existing EU - ultimately we want to overthrow it, just like the British state. Winning the battle for democracy in the EU and securing working class rule over this relatively small but strategically vital continent is the best service we can do for our comrades in the Americas, Africa, Asia and Australasia - as opposed to building "Fortress Europe".

In other words, we are for a republican United States of Europe. Armed with a continental-wide programme, the United Socialist States of Europe can be realised - the "bosses' club" is replaced by a workers' club. In turn, such an internationalist perspective directly points to the necessity of organising across the EU at the highest level - crucially a revolutionary Marxist party covering the entire European Union.

## No to a second - or any - referendum

Referendums, by their very nature, are undemocratic. At first, this might sound paradoxical or counter-intuitive - you get to vote in an act of 'direct democracy', after all. But, whilst referendums have the great virtue of appearing to be the epitome of democracy, the reality is quite the opposite. They bypass representative institutions and serve, in general, to fool enough of the people enough of the time. Often complex issues are simplified, drained of nuance and reduced to a crude choice that cuts across class loyalties. Hence today, thanks to Brexit, one half of the working class is found in the 'leave' camp - the other half is with 'remain'. That is hardly a situation to be celebrated.

There are very few situations where there is a simple binary choice in politics, and that can be illustrated by what followed the referendum. Yes, a relatively small majority voted 'leave', but on what terms - hard Brexit, soft Brexit, Brexit-in-name-only? If there had been a 'remain' victory, as most people had expected right to the wire, we would have been confronted by the same conundrum - ie, how to interpret the result.

Furthermore, what about the long-term validity of that result? For example, many of those who argue against a second referendum today claim that 'the people have spoken' and so their verdict must be regarded as final. But in fact the 2016 poll was itself the 'second referendum' on the subject. In 1975 Harold Wilson

called one to decide whether Britain should remain in what was then called the 'European Community' (or 'Common Market'), even though it had only joined two years earlier. There was a substantial 67% majority to stay in the EC. Clearly people can change their minds.

The problem is that referendums are totally inadequate compared to representative democracy. The latter is based on the election of well-tested working class representatives, who must be made accountable to those who elected them. Under such a system we should trust those representatives to take the necessary decisions - and ensure that they face the consequences if they embark on a path that is not in our interests. Referendums, on the contrary, tend to divide the working class, weaken its party spirit and produce the strangest of bedfellows. For example, in 2016 committed socialists were urging the same vote as the far right, while others were aligned with the liberal establishment. Now we find Nigel Farage on the same side as George Galloway.

In 1911 Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald called referendums "a clumsy and ineffective weapon, which the reaction can always use more effectively than democracy, because it, being the power to say 'no', is far more useful to the few than the many". Yes, a couple of decades later he completely sold out by agreeing to lead a national government with the Tories, but in 1911 he was totally right.

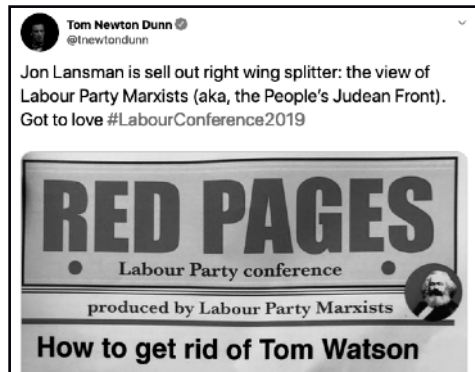
# Labour Party Marxists goes viral

Over the last few days both *Red Pages* and the *Labour Party Marxists* newspaper have received plenty of attention from so-called professional journalists hanging around conference with time on their hands. Tom Newton Dunn, political editor of *The Sun*, tweeted on Sunday's *Red Pages* lead, 'How to get rid of Tom Watson', which suggested that the role of the leader of Momentum in the affair was less than honourable: "Jon Lansman is sell out right wing splitter: the view of Labour Party Marxists (aka, the People's Judean Front). Got to love #LabourConference2019." What we've also got to love is journalists so stuck for things to say that they have to rely on jokes from a 40-year-old film, Monty Python's *Life of Brian*.

Other journalists found the latest issue of *Labour Party Marxists*, with its headline 'A racist endeavour' - relating, of course, to the state of Israel - objectionable. Funnily enough, none of them mention that the article was written by the internationally respected, Israeli-born professor, Moshé Machover, who was briefly expelled two years ago after writing a similar article for *LPM* (and then quickly reinstated after an international campaign). This was photographed and tweeted by the *Observer*'s Michael Savage and picked up by Dave Rich (author of the execrable *The left's Jewish problem: Jeremy Corbyn, Israel and antisemitism*), who wrote: "Of all the issues facing this country that #LabourConference2019 will be discussing, this is the one the publishers of this trash think is the most important to put on their front page." But it's on the front page because it's true and the likes of Rich can't face that - along with the fact the vast majority of conference delegates support the Palestinian struggle.

*The Sunday Telegraph* feigns outrage about our "leaflet", but can only come up with the rather accurate description that comrade Machover's article "describes Israel as a 'colonial settler project' involved in the 'systematic discrimination' against the Palestinians". Erm, and what exactly is the problem here?

Along with puerile allegations about Labour Party Marxists being a 'racist' organisation, some Labour supporters have been attempting to downplay the publicity given to us in the last few days. One writes: "Not to minimise antisemitism, but 'Labour Party Marxists' are literally a handful of people who have probably all been expelled now." A case of wishful thinking if there ever was one.



## Today's programme

@ Rialto Theatre,  
11 Dyke Road, Brighton BN1 3FE

### 1.15pm: Culture, Arts, and Freedom

- **Jackie Walker:** Socialist activist and writer
- **Professor David Miller:** Professor of Political Sociology at Bristol University's School for Policy Studies
- **Ken Loach (invited, but not yet confirmed)**

### 3pm: A showing of WitchHunt

John Pullman's film looks at the attacks on Labour and the tragedy of Palestine.

### 4.30pm: Modern Monetary Theory (MMT)

with **Professor Bill Mitchell** and **Chris Williamson**

### 6.30pm: Labour Representation Committee:

#### The Left Labour Needs

- **Matt Wrack:** general secretary, Fire Brigades Union
- **Adriana Alvarez:** Fight for 15 organising committee
- **Chris Williamson:** Socialist MP for Derby North
- **Jackie Walker:** LRC national executive committee
- **Ian Hodson:** Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union

### 9.30pm: An evening of readings and reflections

- **Jackie Walker:** Socialist activist

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