

The Socialist Correspondent

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Discussion, debate and authors' opinions: To encourage the broadest possible discussion and debate around the aims of exposing capitalism and promoting socialism, we hope our readers appreciate that not all the opinions expressed by individual authors are necessarily those of The Socialist Correspondent.

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The Socialist Correspondent

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War

It was once argued by supporters of the West that with the end of the Cold War and the defeat of the Soviet Union, the world would be a safer place. It doesn't look that way now.

There are numerous wars in the Middle East, led or supported by the United States with Britain participating.

Yemen, Syria, Iraq are some of the countries devastated by war, covered in articles in this issue by Simon Korner and John Moore.

John Moore describes the Saudi Arabian war in Yemen as a "humanitarian disaster" with famine and an enormous cholera epidemic.

The Saudis military hardware causing much of the devastation is British.

Iraq is being fragmented following the US-led war in that country and



Libya is accepted as a "failed state" after the disastrous Bush-Blair war.

The West continues its support for anybody who is fighting President Assad (pictured) in Syria although so far they have failed to remove him as

Simon Korner explains in his article "Syria success forces US to retreat".

Israel and Saudi Arabia continue to press for the US to take military action against Iran.

Korea

The Korean peninsula is another powder keg and in the article, "Demonisation as US prepares for war", Alex Davidson outlines the United States aggressive joint military exercises with South Korea, its many military bases in the region, and its installation of the Thaad missile first-strike system.

Trump's belligerence against North Korea has ratcheted up the prospects of war in that part of the world.

While North Korea is criticised and sanctioned for testing ballistic missiles as self-defence against the hostile military presence in an arc around it, there is a need to point out that North Korea has never attacked anyone, unlike the United States, which

Commentary

has continuously inflicted war for decades on peaceable countries in every continent.



Former Nato Supreme Allied Commander Europe, Admiral James Stavridis, stated that "There is nothing irrational about Kim Jong-un's (pictured) behaviour as he has seen what happened to Saddam and Gaddafi."

The North Koreans have good reason to feel threatened, after all their country and people suffered abominably from the US military during the Korean War, as the US prolonged that war in an attempt to take more ground.

Sanctions against Russia

The US has increased its sanctions against Russia and in so doing has upset its allies in western Europe, notably Germany, as is outlined in the article, "US sanctions: trade war or much worse?"

Inter-capitalist rivalries have come to the fore in the aftermath of the Cold War. The US is now supplying liquefied natural gas to countries in eastern Europe in an effort to supplant Russian gas and undermine Germany's control of the EU.



The US sanctions against Russia will affect European companies involved in the Nord Stream pipeline project bringing Russian gas to Europe.

This has upset the Germans, Austrians and others with the Foreign Ministers of these countries arguing that it "impacts European-American relations in a new and very negative way."

British General Election

The recent British General Election is analysed in some depth by a variety of articles covering different parts of the country.

Theresa May thought she could call a snap General Election, while Labour



was on the back foot, and return to Downing Street with a landslide.

However, she miscalculated and is now a lame duck Prime Minister with Jeremy Corbyn (pictured) in

his strongest position since he became Leader of the Labour Party.

Grenfell Tower

The tragedy of the Grenfell Tower fire was the culmination of years of de-regulation, privatisation, cuts and the criminal neglect of housing for the majority of people in Britain.



Pat Turnbull writes about how the Grenfell Tower residents' concerns about safety were ignored for years.

She illustrates how de-regulation, privatisation and the pursuit of profit led to this and previous tragedies.

The Socialist Correspondent's new website

We are delighted to announce the launch of our new website. It contains all the back issues in PDF format, and individual articles from each edition. You can pay your subscription, search the site and share articles on social media.

The archive of political analysis over the last 10 years is impressive:
www.thesocialistcorrespondent.org.uk

Demonisation as US prepares for war

United States President, Donald Trump's belligerent rhetoric and his threat of nuclear war on North Korea cannot be dismissed as just another crazy tweet.

By **ALEX DAVIDSON**

Some 64 years ago during the Korean War the United States, using the fig leaf of the United Nations, considered the use of nuclear weapons against North Korea and General McArthur wanted to turn it into full-scale war against China.

During the lengthy Panmunjom "peace" talks the American side kept changing their negotiating positions because they wanted to gain more ground before coming to a settlement.

For two years they lied about their intentions and kept the western mainstream media in the dark. It was only through the reportage of journalists, Alan Winnington of the *Daily Worker* and *Ce Soir's* Wilfred Burchett, that the truth eventually became known.⁽¹⁾

In his study of war correspondents, *The First Casualty*, Philip Knightley, wrote that "in Korea, the truth was that Burchett and Winnington were a better source of news than the UN information officers, and if the allied reporters did not see them they risked being beaten on stories".⁽²⁾

One result of this was that the British Cabinet discussed what they regarded as treasonous behaviour by Winnington and he may well have faced the gallows. Eventually the British authorities decided to withdraw his passport and he couldn't return to Britain.

North Korea emerged from the war into a living nightmare after three years of "rain and ruin" by the US Air Force. Pyongyang had been razed to the ground with the US Air Force stating in official documents that the North's cities suffered greater damage than German and Japanese cities firebombed during World War II.

The historical and duplicitous behaviour of the Americans along with their current aggressive war manoeuvres and huge arc of armaments around North

Korea is what makes the North Koreans understandably anxious.

The US-South Korea joint military manoeuvres, called Ulich-Freedom Guardian, involve some 80,000 troops; include the *Michigan*, a submarine with Tomahawk cruise missiles docked in South Korea's port of Busan; and work



- US soldiers capture Saddam Hussein who was executed in 2006.
- Muammar Gaddafi was murdered by US-supported rebels in 2011.
- Kim Jong-un. Is he the USA's next demonised target?

began on Thaad.⁽³⁾

Thaad is a first-strike weapon that can reach China. As well as Chinese and Russian opposition there is considerable opposition in South Korea to the deployment of Thaad as it is seen as an offensive weapon, despite its name, and ratchets up the possibility of war.

The North Koreans also see what happened to Saddam Hussein and Colonel Gadaafi. As former Nato Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (2009-2013), Admiral James Stavridis, commented, "There is nothing irrational about Kim Jong-un's behaviour as he has seen what happened to Saddam and Gadaafi."

Saddam and Gadaafi were also demonised before the US wars were launched to effect regime-change. The North Koreans have similarly been de-

monised over many years, by selective news coverage and vilification, to prepare the people of the west for war on Korea.

When China and Russia did not veto the UN Security Council resolution on sanctions against North Korea presumably it was because they thought it would help to keep the peace. Instead of which, before the ink was dry on the paper, and increased sanctions had time to take effect, Trump ramped up the rhetoric with his "fire and fury". However, it may well be more than rhetoric.

When German Chancellor Angela Merkel called for a tempering of language she expressed what many people know: you can talk yourself into war.

White House Chief Strategist, Steve Bannon, was relieved of his post by Trump in a further example of the Trump's administration's blood-letting. Bannon wasn't dismissed for his views on Charlottesville because on

that he supported Trump's statements nor for his general "alt-right" views.

However, he did say that there was "no military solution" for North Korea's nuclear threats and dubbed the tensions with Pyongyang as a "sideshow" compared to the importance of what he called the "economic war with China".

Bannon's view was rebuffed by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and next day Bannon was out.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Winnington A., *Breakfast with Mao: Memoirs of a Foreign Correspondent*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1986; and Winnington A., *I Saw the Truth in Korea*, 1950; Burchett W., *At the Barricades: the Memoirs of a Rebel Journalist*.

2. Knightly P., *The First Casualty: the War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from Crimea to Kosovo*, p 388, Prion, London, 2000.

3. Thaad stands for Terminal High Altitude Defence System but is widely regarded as an offensive system.

US sanctions: trade war or much worse?

Donald Trump signed into law new sanctions against Russia, Iran and North Korea on 2 August 2017.

By **ALEX DAVIDSON**

He did so grudgingly over the Russian sanctions, indicating the deep divisions between the White House and Congress.

In his signing statement to the bill he wrote, "I have expressed my concerns to Congress about the many ways it improperly encroaches on Executive power, disadvantages American companies, and hurts the interests of our European allies...the bill remains seriously flawed - particularly because it encroaches on the executive branch's authority to negotiate.

"Congress could not even negotiate a healthcare bill after seven years of talking. By limiting the Executive's flexibility, this bill makes it harder for the United States to strike good deals for the American people, and will drive China, Russia, and North Korea much closer together."⁽¹⁾

The Russian Prime Minister, Dmitry Medvedev, called the sanctions tantamount to a "full-scale trade war". He added, "The hope that our relations with the new American administration would improve is finished."

Sergei Lavrov, Russia's Foreign Minister said in a statement that while Russia has been doing "everything possible" to improve the relationship with the US, "recent events showed that US policy was in the hands of Russophobic forces, pushing Washington to the path of confrontation."

The United States unilateral increase in sanctions against Russia has put it into serious conflict with Germany as well as Russia

and further divided the EU.

The bill steps up sanctions against Russia over its involvement in the wars in Ukraine and Syria as well as allegations it interfered in the 2016 US Presidential election.

However, the EU has warned that this may cause upheaval in Europe's energy market as the new sanctions target any company that contributes to the development, maintenance or modernisation of Russia's export gas pipeline, known as Nord Stream.

The day after the Senate voted overwhelmingly⁽²⁾ to impose new sanctions against Russia, Germany and Austria - two of Russia's biggest energy clients in Europe - strongly criticised the latest U.S. sanctions, saying they could affect European businesses involved in piping Russian natural gas via the Nord Stream pipeline.

The Nord Stream pipeline carries natural gas from Vyborg in Russia to Griefswald in Germany under the Baltic Sea. The first pipeline was officially inaugurated on 8 November 2011 by German Chancellor Merkel, Russian President Medvedev, French Prime Minister Francois Fillon and Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte.

The pipeline, 759 miles in length is the longest sub-sea pipeline in the world and has a capacity to carry 55 billion cubic metres of natural gas.

Nord Stream AG shareholders are the Russian company Gazprom (51%), the German companies E.ON (15.5%) and Wintershall (15.5%), the Dutch company Gasunie (9%) and the French company Engie (9%).

The Chair of Nord Stream's Board is Gerhard Schroder, former German Chancellor (1998-2005).

Nord Stream 2 will double the capacity to 110 billion cubic metres and is scheduled to come into operation in late 2019.

Nord Stream AG signed a financing agreement for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project with the German company UNIPER, the Austrian company OMV, Royal Dutch Shell, the German company Wintershall and the French company Engie.

Germany and Austria condemn US sanctions

In a joint statement (15 June 2017) Austria's Chancellor, Christian Kern and Germany's Foreign Minister, Sigmar Gabriel said: "It is in the common interest of the EU and the US to take resolute and unified action with a view to resolving the conflict in Ukraine.

"We cannot, however, accept the threat of illegal extraterritorial sanctions being imposed on European companies that are



Nov. 2011: Nord Stream opening ceremony (left to right, hands on table) France's Francois Fillon; Germany's Angela Merkel; Holland's Mark Rutte and Russia's Dmitry Medvedev.

participating in efforts to expand Europe's energy supply network!

"The draft bill of the US is surprisingly candid about what is actually at stake, namely selling American liquefied natural gas and ending the supply of Russian natural gas to the European market.

"The bill aims to protect US jobs in the natural gas and petroleum industries. Political sanctions should not in any way be tied to economic

interests. Threatening to impose penalties on companies in Germany, Austria and other European countries with regard to their business in the United States if they participate in, or fund, natural gas projects involving Russia, such as Nord Stream 2, impacts European-American relations in a new and very negative way.

"This is about the competitiveness of our energy-intensive industries, and about thousands of jobs. Europe's energy supply network is Europe's affair, not that of the United States of America!

"We decide who supplies us with energy, and how they do it, and we do so based on transparency and on free market principles.

"It would not only be highly regrettable, but would also diminish the effectiveness of our stance on the conflict in Ukraine, if we were to no longer take joint action, and if completely separate interests were to prevail, such as the US's economic pursuits in the field of gas exports.

"Foreign policy interests must in no way be linked to economic interests! There is still enough time, and opportunity, to prevent this!"⁽³⁾

In the joint statement there are no fewer than four exclamation points underlining the sharpness of the German/Austrian opposition. Three of them are worth repeating:

1. "We cannot accept the threat of illegal extraterritorial sanctions being imposed on European companies that are participating in efforts to expand Europe's energy supply network!"

2. "Europe's energy supply network is Europe's affair, not that of the United States of America!"

3. "Foreign policy interests must in no way be linked to economic interests! There is still enough time, and opportunity, to prevent this!"

German Chancellor Angela Merkel backed up the joint statement and Jean-



Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, said "We will respond with counter-measures if need be, hoping that this is not actually necessary. We are willing to take up arms if need be."

Cecilia Malmstrom, EU Trade Commissioner, warned of a challenge in the World Trade Organisation (WTO), saying, "if global trade rules are not upheld the EU will retaliate." A similar challenge led to the roll-back of tariffs imposed by US President George W Bush in 2002.

The aim of the US sanctions is to block Russian gas supplies to Europe in order to sell shale gas from the United States.

Ukraine

The Nord Stream pipeline bypasses countries like Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic States. 9 EU countries signed a letter criticising the project.⁽⁴⁾

Ukraine, in particular, fears the loss of transit revenue if Russian gas supplies don't pass through their territory anymore once the new pipeline is built.

Lithuania's state-owned gas trader Lietuvos DUJU Tiekimas (LDT) signed a deal in May 2017 to buy liquefied natural gas (LNG) directly from the United States for the first time and expects to receive a delivery in the second half of August.

The deal is with a unit of Cheniere Energy and is part of Lithuania's efforts to diversify its gas suppliers and reduce its reliance on Russia's Gazprom.

LDT, part of state-owned energy group Lietuvos Energija, signed a deal last year with Koch Supply & Trading for LNG supplies throughout 2017.

The LNG terminal at the Klaipeda port broke Russia's Gazprom gas supply monopoly in the Baltic States when it came online in 2014 and now provides Lithuania with roughly half of its gas. Gazprom supplies the rest.

State-run Polish gas firm PGNiG received its first U.S. spot delivery of LNG

from Cheniere Energy in June 2017.

Croatia is planning to complete the building of an LNG terminal in 2019.

Three Seas Summit

12 countries⁽⁵⁾ bordering the Baltic, Black and Adriatic seas formed a consortium, dubbed the "Three Seas Initiative", in 2016 to develop regional infrastructure, trade and energy projects.

On 6 July 2017 a summit of the presidents of the countries involved gathered in Warsaw, hosted jointly by Poland and Croatia.

The Three Seas Initiative is seen as a Polish bid to carve out influence outside the European Union with which the nationalist government has repeatedly clashed.

US President Trump visited Poland for one day - en route to the G20 summit in Hamburg, Germany - to take part in the "Three Seas Summit" of leaders from central Europe, Baltic states and the Balkans. The summit was moved from its original location in south western Poland to Warsaw to accommodate Trump's attendance.

At the "Three Seas Summit" Trump promoted U.S. natural gas exports to the leaders from central and eastern Europe, a region currently heavily reliant on Russian supplies.

The following is an extract from President Trump's address to the summit: "We're here at this historic gathering to launch a new future for open, fair, and affordable energy markets that bring greater security and prosperity to all of our citizens. We are sitting on massive energy and we are now exporters of energy. So, if one of you need energy, just give us a call.

"On behalf of the American people, let me say that we stand with the Three Seas nations. Beautiful nations, by the way. Beautiful country. We support your drive for greater prosperity and security. We applaud your initiative to expand infrastructure. We welcome this historic opportunity to deepen our economic partnership with your region.

"I congratulate your nations for already beginning the critical projects that open us up to greater access, and you'll be totally open and have access to energy markets and remove barriers to energy trade, such as the floating LNG

Continued on page 8

Qatar exposes limit of Saudi power

The summer 2017 blockade against Qatar - led by Saudi Arabia, and backed by United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt - has exposed the limits of Saudi power to control the rivalrous Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) after weeks of warlike rhetoric.

By **SIMON KORNER**

At issue are Qatar's growing economic and military ties with Iran - a country that stands in the way of Saudi, Israeli and thus US, hegemony in the Gulf.

The Saudi demands were for Qatar to follow Saudi policy in every sphere. This meant cutting diplomatic ties with Iran and expelling the Revolutionary Guards with whom it co-operates, as well as stopping Qatari-Iranian co-operation in the shared North Dome/South Pars energy fields.

Other demands sought the shutting down of the Turkish military base in Qatar, an end to support for the Muslim Brotherhood and terrorist groups such as IS and al Qaeda, and the closure of Al Jazeera, which is a disproportionately powerful mouthpiece for Qatari foreign policy.

Most commentators regarded these demands as unrealistic and a provocation. The air, land and sea blockade of Qatar's food imports, half of which normally come through Saudi Arabia, has been circumvented by flights through Iranian airspace.

More difficult for Qatar have been the economic sanctions causing damage to its banks, airlines and media, such as *Al Jazeera*.

By late July, after US attempts to defuse the crisis had failed, a spate of US media stories embarrassing the Saudis forced them to reduce their demands to six watered down 'principles'. The closure of *Al Jazeera* is no longer on the list but the blockade remains in force.

Background

Qatar's discussions with Iran over energy began after Russia's military intervention in Syria, which changed the balance of forces in the war.

The negotiations were for a new gas

pipeline to run from Qatar's massive Gulf Pars energy fields through Iran, Iraq and Syria to Europe - known as the 'Friendship pipeline'.

This pipeline would replace an earlier Saudi plan for piping Qatari natural gas through Saudi Arabia and a fragmented Syria to Turkey. Qatar, which had earlier made a \$3 billion contribution to the



May 2017: Qatar Emir, Tamin bin Hamad Al Thani with Donald Trump.

war against the Syrian government, adapted its foreign policy when it became clear that western-backed forces would be unable to topple Assad.

The success of the 'Friendship pipeline' would represent a significant weakening of Saudi power, as well as a wider threat to western energy control. Hence the Saudi attempt to disrupt it.

The Saudis are also concerned at the reach of Qatari power through its support for the Muslim Brotherhood.

Despite the Muslim Brotherhood's reactionary politics, its youthful mass base in Egypt and Gaza poses a threat to both the absolute monarchies of the Gulf and Sisi.

The Muslim Brotherhood connection extends to Turkey, bringing that power-

ful regional player directly into the conflict, with Turkish troops stationed in Qatar posing a further obstacle to Saudi domination.

The Saudi demand that Qatar stop funding terrorists is widely regarded as hypocritical. Both countries fund IS, al Qaeda and the Taliban.

Qatar's foreign minister admitted in 2012 that he was 'very much against excluding anyone' among the Islamist terrorist groups from funding by his country.

Saudi Arabia has spent £3.1 billion for the promulgation of Wahabist ideology in the UK and elsewhere, according to rightwing British think-tank the Henry Jackson Society.

Historian Mark Curtis comments: "The British elite is perfectly aware of the insidious role that Saudi Arabia plays in fomenting terrorism."

Indeed, leaked documents published in the Egyptian *Al-Badil* newspaper recently revealed direct Saudi (and UAE) ruling family support for terrorist groups.

A report into Saudi terror links was blocked in mid-July by Theresa May for reasons of 'national security' - in other words, protecting the huge arms trade with Saudi Arabia which takes 83% of total UK arms exports.

Saudi anger with Qatar arises, then, not from Qatari support for terror groups as such, but for backing the wrong kind - the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as Shia militants in eastern Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, and Hizbollah in Lebanon.

Trump's role

The trigger for the crisis came during Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia in May, in which he wholeheartedly endorsed the regime and branded Iran a threat to peace.

His aim is to create an 'Arab Nato' led by Riyadh, based on the GCC's armed entity, the Peninsula Shield Force. A Saudi-led Arab military alliance would crush all non-compliance with imperialism in the region: Iran, Hamas, Hizbollah, the Houthi rebellion in Yemen, and any signs of democratic struggle.

Though Trump appears to have encouraged the Saudi aggression against Qatar, White House policy is being diluted by the US state department.

Qatar has the second-largest US military presence in the Gulf, including its command center for Syrian action. Many US air raids leave from the al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar, and the US has recently sold Qatar \$12 billion worth of F-15 fighters.

At the same time, US arms sales to the Saudis worth \$100bn show its clear intention to promote a major regional gendarme. But Qatar's refusal to cave in to Saudi threats has led to a messy stalemate. Hence Rex Tillerson's visit to Qatar again in July - ostensibly to agree collective counter-terrorism measures, but really to try to restore order.

However, Qatar's upstart foreign policy against Saudi Arabia's bullying cannot easily be negotiated away. And the ousting of the CIA's preferred Saudi leader Mohamed bin Nayef - who opposed the Qatar blockade - by hothead crown prince Mohamed bin Salman suggests increased instability ahead.

Wider causes of the conflict

There is a wider aspect to the crisis, according to commentator Pepe Escobar, who points to Qatar's natural gas exports to China and the fact that these will soon be paid for in Remnimbis not dollars, threatening US petrodollar domination.

The US takes dollar dominance very seriously. Part of its animosity towards Gaddafi, according to a Wikileaks email from Hillary Clinton's adviser Sid Blumenthal to his boss in April 2011, derived

from the fact that Gaddafi was initiating a Pan-Arab bank with Tunisia's Ben Ali and Egypt's Mubarak, with the aim of establishing an Arab gold dinar and being paid for oil exports in it rather than dollars.

This, along with France's push to control Libyan oil, became a threat to US influence. In the same way, the Qatar conflict can be seen as part of large-power rivalries.

With 35% of all shipped oil passing through the Straits of Hormuz to China and the Far East, if the US can control Qatar and the chokepoints of Suez and the Straits of Hormuz, it can squeeze China - and by extension other Gulf energy users like Russia and Europe too.

This explains the recent naval exercises in the Straits by the Chinese and Iranian navies, part of the growing closeness between Iran and China - with Iran soon to become a full member of the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (a rival to US economic supremacy) and a strategic participant in China's New Silk Road project.

The outlook

Saudi threats against Qatar have failed, in the face of Qatari intransigence and US state department disquiet.

A Saudi war with Qatar was never very likely, given the presence of US and Turkish troops on Qatari soil, and Qatar's own massive arms stocks, including British weapons worth £120 million in a deal signed two years ago - as well as Qatar's growing ties with Iran, Turkey and Iraq.

Overall, Saudi regional leadership has been weakened by the blockade, with Kuwait and Oman breaking ranks to urge restraint and refusing to expel Qatar from the GCC.

The new Saudi crown prince, the hawk in charge of its failing war in Yemen and probably behind the terrorist bombing of Teheran, represents an unreliable partner for US policy, which itself is strategically unclear.

Given this Saudi incompetence, the wider threat of a Saudi war on Iran is also currently unlikely - with the Saudi military bogged down in Yemen. Not that this precludes such a war breaking out through an accident or mistake.

As for Trump's election pledge to tear up Obama's 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, he has so far not done so. His equivocation reveals US isolation.

Europe is seeking rapprochement with Iran - France's Total, for instance, has just signed a \$4.8 billion deal with Iran for natural gas. China and Russia support Iran too. Thus, US options are limited.

By encouraging the Saudis to threaten Qatar, Trump hoped at least to rein in the latter and limit its autonomous policy. But his bid to strengthen Saudi leadership of the region has backfired, pushing Qatar closer to Iran.

The GCC, formed in 1981 as a counter to Iran, is unlikely to recover. As the individual GCC powers increasingly seek advantage for themselves, co-operation will turn to antagonism. With no choice but to continue dividing and ruling the Middle East, the US is creating problems it cannot control.

US sanctions: trade war or much worse?

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terminal on the Croatian island of Krk.

"Did you ever hear of that? Right? Huh? You know all about that. I bet you know all about it. And the Greece-Bulgaria Interconnector.

"These projects and many others are crucial to ensuring that your nations continue to diversify your energy sources, suppliers, and routes. I also applaud Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Austria for pursuing a pipeline from the Black Sea. The United States is proud to see that our abundant energy resources are already helping the Three Seas Nations achieve much needed energy diversification. In fact, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the government and people of Poland for receiving their first shipment of U.S. liquefied nat-

ural gas last month. And you made a very good deal, I understand.

"America will be a faithful and dependable partner in the export and sale of our high-quality and low-cost energy resources and technologies. We make the best technology and we make the best, best technology for fighter jets and ships and equipment, military weapons.

"There's nobody even close, and that's acknowledged. All over the world they talk about the greatness of our military equipment. Nobody comes close. So when you buy and as you buy military equipment, hopefully you'll be thinking only of the United States."⁶

FOOTNOTES

1. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/08/02/statement-president-donald-j-trump-signing-count>

ering-americas

2. The vote in the Senate was 98-2. Democrat Bernie Sanders and Republican Rand Paul were the two senators voting against.

3. https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Infoservice/Presse/Meldungen/2017/170615_Kern_Russland.html

4. The EU countries are the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Lithuania and Ukraine.

5. The 12 countries are Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Croatia, Slovenia, Austria..

6. <http://time.com/4846780/read-donald-trump-speech-warsaw-poland-transcript/>

Yemen devastation backed by US & UK

The Saudi war in Yemen is causing a humanitarian disaster. The Saudi bombardment of Yemen, with the support of Britain and the US, has so far killed at least 10,000 civilians and made 3 million homeless.

By JOHN MOORE

The conflict – which widened into a regional war when Saudi Arabia began bombing Yemen in a reckless bid for hegemony in the Gulf – has left 18.8 million out of Yemen's 28 million population in need of humanitarian assistance – in a country which is already the poorest in the Arab world.

Millions of Yemenis face food and water shortages. On July 12, UN figures for those going hungry stood at 7 million people, including 2.3 million children “on the cusp of famine, vulnerable to disease and ultimately at risk of a slow and painful death.” 500,000 severely malnourished children are under the age of five.

The main cause of the famine is the US navy-led blockade of Yemeni ports, a war crime in which the British government is complicit.

Famine, water shortages and poor sanitation have led to a cholera epidemic – over 332,600 cases to date, according to the World Health Organisation, with 1,800 dead.

The International Committee of the Red Cross reports 7,000 new cases a day, making this the worst cholera outbreak in the world. Predictions are that the disease will infect 600,000 by the end of the year.

Meanwhile, due to the war only 45% of Yemen's hospitals are functioning,

So far the British government denies any culpability for the destruction of Yemen, apart from an admission that “a limited number” of the British cluster bombs have been used in the war.

Yet British military personnel operate in the Saudi command centre, along with the CIA, for the purpose of selecting bombing targets. Britain also selects targets for the US-led drone programme.

This targeting is deliberately aimed at hitting civilian centres – to the extent

that the British Ministry of Defence has tried to provide cover by running workshops for the Saudis on “targeting guidance.”

Theresa May has defended the close link between Britain and Saudi Arabia. On her visit to Riyadh this April, she said: “It is in our national interest to ensure that the values that underpin us as Britons are values that we promote around the world.”

The main cause of the famine is the US navy-led blockade of Yemeni ports, a war crime in which the British government is complicit.

... British military personnel operate in the Saudi command centre, along with the CIA, for the purpose of selecting bombing targets. Britain also selects targets for the US-led drone programme.

The High Court supported the government's line. In July, it rejected a Campaign Against the Arms Trade case arguing that British-Saudi arms sales used against civilians are illegal.

But opposition to the Saudi war, and Britain's role in it, is growing. Shadow international trade secretary Barry Gardiner told parliament in July that indiscriminate bombing of civilians and the targeting of food production amount to war crimes. 62% of British people now oppose arms sales to Saudi Arabia.

And in the US, the Senate only narrowly agreed a sale of \$510 million guided weapons to the Saudis, against almost unanimous Democrat opposition.

The Saudi war on Yemen has been raging for almost two and a half years. The mainly Shia Houthis still control most of the north of the country and hold the capital San'a – in spite of the killing of many of their military leaders.

Supported by ex-president Saleh and by Iran, they are fighting several Saudi-backed forces grouped around the figurehead of another ex-president, Hadi, who is in exile in Riyadh. In broad terms, they represent part of the bloc – Iran, Hezbollah, Syria – standing in the way of imperialist control of the Middle East.

Meanwhile, the Saudi war coalition is in danger of breaking up. With the war having reached stalemate, the invading countries are pulling in different directions. The UAE has used the conflict to install itself permanently in southern Yemen, with plans to partition and rule Hadramaut province.

It has also switched support from Hadi to Saleh, according to Intelligence Online, putting itself at odds with the Saudis and Qatar, despite the latter having been excluded from the war coalition in June. Oman, which has stayed out of the war, also opposes the UAE's overweening approach.

Meanwhile, Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood Islah party in Yemen, as well as for the thriving Al Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula (AQAP), has fed into the wider Gulf quarrel between Qatar and the Saudis (as well as the UAE). Overall, the war has intensified the splits within the GCC, which may never heal.

The lack of progress in the long and expensive war represents a failure for the Saudis. The conflict is costing them \$700 million a month. With the depressed price for oil, the effect on the Saudi economy is severe and recession looms.

The failure to win has also damaged Saudi credibility as a military power, and its war crimes, though under-reported, are nevertheless damaging its reputation.

The Saudi bid for dominance over the Gulf is faltering. Its Yemen disaster – on top of its failed blockade of Qatar – could prove a turning point.

Syria success has forced US to retreat

Syrian successes are producing a new reality with which the US has to deal. Six years after the US-fomented demonstrations in southern Syria were quickly fanned into full-scale war against the government, Syrian resilience has forced the US to retreat from its regime-change strategy.

By SIMON KORNER

The war has cost over 450,000 lives and created 5 million refugees.

Advances made by the Syrian forces and their allies have now liberated every major city and town in the country. The recapture of Aleppo proved a turning point, forcing the US to reassess its use of Sunni militias under the guise of the Free Syria Army, which had failed to deliver.

The US has also failed to achieve its 'Salafist principality' strategy, revealed in a leaked memorandum in 2012 – to create an Islamist statelet stretching from Saudi Arabia, through part of Iraq and into eastern Syria.

As a sign of its change of direction, the US agreed to a Russian deal in July, setting up Russian-supervised de-escalated safe zones in various areas – the first in south-west Syria near the Jordanian border – with US and Jordanian soldiers in control of the territory closest to the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

Other safe zones will be in Idlib, in the north, under Turkish supervision, and in Ghouta, near Damascus, patrolled by Russian military police battalions and Iranian peacekeepers.

As part of the deal, Trump announced plans to stop the huge CIA programme training Free Syrian Army fighters – indistinguishable from al Qaeda groups such as Ahrah al-Sham and Levant Conquest Front, who have killed 100,000 Syrians according to some estimates.



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad

The training operation, known as Timber Sycamore, was carried out by the Green Berets in Jordan and Turkey, with the CIA paying the fighters' salaries.

Ilan Oldenburg of the Centre for a New American Security described Trump's change of policy in Syria as a "nod to reality". With US allies, such as Turkey and France, also softening their stances, only the Saudis are still insisting no negotiations can begin until Assad is removed.

But hawks in Washington have denounced Trump's policy change as a US climbdown.

John McCain, who has loudly sup-



Former US airforce pilot, Vietnam veteran and PoW, Republican Senator John McCain (right) in Baghdad in 2007 with US Army Chief, General David Petraeus.

ported the arming of anti-Assad terrorists, said the US is playing into Putin's hands by agreeing to a deal.

Charles Lister of the Middle East Institute thinktank said: "We are falling into a Russian trap." The ceasefire deal has also been condemned by Israel.

The US has not given up on its overall strategy of fracturing Syria, but is shifting ground to "areas outside government control in Syria where the US will want to maintain influence," ac-

ording to Andrew Tabler of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Commenting on the US switch away from the Free Syrian Army, Russian foreign minister, Lavrov, said: "I understand that the US supports many more groups than the ones announced as being left without American weapons."

The US is expanding its control of the oil and gas-rich desert in Syria's south-east close to the Syrian border with Iraq and Jordan.

From its Special Forces base nearby, it has been directing its proxy militias – Maghawir al Tahwra and Shohada al Qaratayn – to attack the Syrians advancing on the border town of Tanf.

While these two terrorist groups have now supposedly been instructed to fight IS only – as part of the shift in US terrorist policy – the latter group is nevertheless continuing to attack government forces.

The US aim here has been to unite its southern terrorist fighters with the Kur-



Donald Trump plans to stop CIA training Free Syrian Army fighters.

dish fighters it controls to the north, so as to prevent a road link being established between Syria and Iraq, which would facilitate co-operation between the two countries, as well as with Iran.

Further north and west, the US is bombing IS in Raqqa to support its Kurdish proxies in the YPG, the Syrian sister organization of the Turkish PKK. Fighting under the US-imposed name

Continued on page 12

Fragmenting Iraq is the US strategy

Iraq faces fragmentation based on sectarian divisions. The recapture of Mosul from IS represents a major victory for the Iraqi government, but major challenges stand in the way of achieving a unitary Iraq.

By JOHN MOORE

In many ways, the challenges facing the Iraqi government echo those faced by the Syrians – the same western strategy of violent occupation stoking sectarian tensions, with the result of a fragmented nation.

The victory in Mosul came at a huge cost in lives. 40,000 people were killed in the 9-month siege of Iraq's second-largest city, according to Patrick Cockburn in the *Independent*, citing figures from Iraqi Kurdish intelligence.

UK-based monitoring group Airwars estimate 5,805 civilians killed in airstrikes by the US-led coalition between February 19 and June 19 alone.

Russian foreign minister Lavrov said that “no conditions were created to allow civilians to leave in an organized way.”

An Amnesty International report also criticized the failure to protect civilians and described the indiscriminate air strikes and artillery bombardment as “violations of international law, some of which may amount to war crimes.”

The media outcry over Aleppo was not matched when it came to Mosul – part of a concerted cover-up. Only now is the scale of the destruction becoming clear. Lise Grande, UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator for Iraq, estimates emergency reconstruction costs of over \$1 billion.

The pressures on Iraq to fragment are many. *Small Wars* journal, with links to the US marines but with a maverick reputation, believes that the victory in Mosul will lead to state failure on the scale of Libya. There are reasons to take the analysis seriously.

First, IS still holds large pockets of territory, in spite of the loss of its ‘capital’ Mosul.

Many IS fighters were allowed by the

US to leave Mosul before the siege, with the aim of reinforcing IS strongholds on the border with Syria in al Anbar province, close to Syrian IS centres – in Raqqa and around Deir ez Zor.

By holding these strongholds, IS is preventing Syrian government forces from retaking Syrian territory up to the Iraqi border.

This could explain the US rejection of an Iraqi army plan – backed by the pro-government Iraqi shi’ite militias, the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) – to attack IS in this area before liberating Mosul.



November 2016 - Mosul

IS also remains strong in a string of towns along the Tigris river south of Mosul, and it also controls the city of Hawija, which is ruled by the new IS ‘caliph’, al Obadi. Another IS stronghold remains Tal Afar, to the west of Mosul, with about 1000 fighters.

Though IS has clearly been weakened, with a fall in new recruits, it will defend the areas it holds fiercely, while turning increasingly to guerilla tactics.

A second, and greater, danger to Iraqi territorial integrity is the US presence itself. The US plans to keep at least 5,200 officially acknowledged soldiers in Iraq,

as part of Operation Inherent Resolve which co-ordinated the battle for Mosul.

The US presence will seek to disrupt the influence of Iran – through those Iraqi shi’ite militias which it arms and trains – and the growing co-operation between the Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian governments, as well as feeding sectarianism across Iraq.

Its presence in Iraq will also feed into its Syria campaign, where its strategy is changing due to Syrian army advances.

To this end it is moving troops towards al Anbar province on the Syria border, close to its proxy terrorist groups and to IS – to block any future land-bridge between Syria and Iraq.

A third danger to Iraqi unity is Kurdish secession. The referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan this September is likely to result in a Yes vote, though it is unclear whether the Kurdish leadership will use the result to declare independence immediately.

A similar referendum in 2005 delivered a near unanimous Yes vote, and the results were then used to force a change in the Iraqi constitution to enshrine federalism.

The Baghdad government is not raising objections to the referendum, though prime minister Abadi criticized its timing and method.

Anxious to dispel rumours of an Iraqi attack on the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) should it secede, defence minister al Hayali praised the KRG’s Peshmerga for co-operating with the Iraqis at the start of the attack on Mosul.

On the other hand, hardliners in Baghdad have threatened the expulsion of Kurds from Baghdad should Iraqi Kurdistan vote to separate.

The Kurdish side has made various concessions, hinting that they may exclude Kirkuk from the referendum – a city within the Kurdish region but with a mainly Turkmen population which objects to Kurdish domination.

Other concessions are a declaration that a future Kurdistan would not be defined by ethnicity following the Israeli model.

Nevertheless, the dangers of a violent

rupture remain. And an independent Iraqi Kurdistan could destabilize the wider region. Turkey, in spite of its cooperation with the KRG over oil production, has raised concerns. Iran, too, with a Kurdish minority could object, though so far it has refrained.

A fourth threat to unity is the scale of sectarian divisions in the rest of Iraq.

After the US killed Saddam Hussein, the Sunni minority suffered discrimination during the sectarian de-Baathification process conducted by then prime minister al Maliki, in favour of the Shi'ite majority.

Many Sunni Baathists turned to rebel groups, including IS, hence the ease with which IS established its 'caliphate' in 2014. Because minorities are still being marginalized, *Small Wars* believes that "different groups will eventually seek military solutions to secure their perceived interests ... mobiliz[ing] on sectarian grounds within highly fragmented patronage networks."

The danger is of warlords ruling their own fiefdoms.

Integrating the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), which now number over 120,000 men, will also prove hard. The PMU are mainly Shi'ite but also contain Sunni and Christian militias.

Prime minister Abadi has declared support for the PMU, which saved the Iraqi capital from being overrun by IS in 2014, and which will be needed against future IS insurgency.

But Abadi's desire for US support puts him at odds with some PMU leaders, who "consider themselves an important part of the Iran-led Axis of Resistance alongside... Hezbollah and the Syrian regime," according to *Al-Monitor*.

Meanwhile, Iraqi Shia leaders, such as nationalist clerics like al Sadr and al Bidayri have called on the PMU to disband, fearing Iranian influence in Iraq.

But some PMU leaders such as al Muhandis and al Ameri are resisting

such calls and will seek political office in next year's national elections.

But rumours of sectarian killings by some PMU militias mean that they will have to ensure a clear non-sectarian approach, if they hope to gain wider political purchase.

The root cause of Iraq's fragility is the US strategy, outlined by Joe Biden a decade ago, to give "each ethno-religious group - Kurd, Sunni Arab and Shiite Arab - room to run its affairs."

A weak central government in Baghdad would then be easily controlled by the US, and western companies would more easily exploit Iraq's energy resources - with fewer checks from central government.

Trump appears to be pushing towards such an outcome. Meanwhile, low oil prices and water scarcity are both making it easier for him and more difficult for the Iraqi government to provide essential goods and services to its population.

Syria success has forced US to retreat

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the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) – to mask the fact that so few Arabs belong to it – the YPG are sustaining heavy losses and progress is slow.

Earlier, the US allowed IS fighters to leave Raqqa and head eastwards to Deir ez Zor, a Syrian-held city besieged by IS since 2014 and key to Syrian oil production. It has also pushed YPG soldiers in the same direction – to prevent Syria from breaking the siege of Deir ez Zor.

But Syria is making advances towards Deir ez Zor, supported by Iraqi planes which are bombing the besieging IS troops. And the ceasefire deal in the south-west is freeing up more Syrian troops to rescue the city. The Turkish Communist paper *Sol* sees this campaign as the "final phase of the war."

And while IS remains strong in this part of Syria, it is confined to a limited area – operating from its base in the Iraqi border town of al Qaem further down the Euphrates, where it has about 1,000 fighters.

To the north, the US could decide to create a Kurdish statelet in Syria under the YPG, once Raqqa has fallen.

The problem with such a plan – backed by Israel – is that Turkey objects to the US arming of the YPG.

Ultimately, the US would probably choose good relations with its NATO

ally Turkey than a new Kurdish statelet, but meanwhile it has a stick with which to keep Turkey on side and a bargaining chip against Russia in any future negotiations.

To this end, ten illegal US bases have already been established in northern Syria, as reported by the official Turkish news agency. This shows the US intention of remaining in Syria in some form, to prevent a unitary and secular state from re-emerging.

... the US carried out a massive missile strike on a Syrian airforce base on April 6, as punishment for an alleged chemical weapons attack by the Syrian government.

No evidence was found against Assad's military, and doubts have arisen as to the reality of the attack itself.

Meanwhile, parts of Idlib in the north, one of the last Syrian provinces still outside government control, are currently in the hands of al Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS), after Turkey's 'moderate' proxy militia gave way to it following fighting between the two groups.

Turkey will ensure that the province remains in its sphere of its influence, however, if necessary fighting HTS to do so. Turkey's role in policing the projected ceasefire in Idlib could present a further impediment to Syrian unity in future.

Only three months ago, the US carried out a massive missile strike on a Syrian airforce base on April 6, as punishment for an alleged chemical weapons attack by the Syrian government. No evidence was found against Assad's military, and doubts have arisen as to the reality of the attack itself.

A further escalation took place on June 18, when the US shot down a Syrian plane near Raqqa. The Russians then warned the US not to fly west of the Euphrates. The US have so far complied with the Russian warning.

Although government control of Syrian territory is gaining pace, it will nonetheless be extremely hard to expel all the occupying forces.

These successes, while aided by their allies Russia, Iran and Hizbollah, would not have been possible without backing from the majority of the population for the government's defence of the Syrian state.

One sign of this popular support is the fact that, according to the UN, nearly 500,000 refugees have returned to Syria, and chosen areas under Syrian government control.

Palestinian hunger strike victory

The previous issue of *The Socialist Correspondent* reported that since the start of the Palestinian prisoners' hunger strike in prisons across Israel, which began on 17 April ('Prisoners' Day'), the number of strikers had risen to 1,500.

By **BRIAN DURRANS**

The previous article itself, and the accompanying letter from the hunger strike's leader, Marwan Barghouti, which had been published in the *New York Times* the day before the strike began, made clear how the prisoners' cause dovetails with the wider Palestinian struggle for freedom, justice and equality.⁽¹⁾

What does a hunger strike mean for Palestinians?

Past hunger strikes⁽²⁾ have proved that the Israeli authorities are vulnerable to this form of pressure, which impacts both inside and outside Israel-Palestine.

Such an action is never entered into lightly and always carries a risk to the health, especially the long-term health, of those taking part.

It puts additional strain on the families and communities of the hunger strikers, from whom they are already cruelly separated not merely by imprisonment but by Israel's contravention of international humanitarian law in transferring prisoners from their homes in the illegally Occupied Territories to prisons in Israel.

How does the world react?

This intolerable situation invites widespread outrage and is one of the many ways in which, by its own actions and policies, Israel exposes the cynicism of its public claim to 'civilized values'.

Even organisations not known for their unequivocal support of anti-colonial struggle find Israel's hypocrisy hard to stomach. For example, in a statement issued ahead of the latest hunger strike, Amnesty International de-

clared: "Israel's ruthless policy of holding Palestinian prisoners arrested in the Occupied Palestinian Territories in prisons inside Israel is a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. It is unlawful and cruel and the consequences for the imprisoned person and their loved ones, who are often deprived from seeing them for months, and at times for years on end, can be devastating.

"Instead of unlawfully transferring prisoners outside the occupied territories, Israel must ensure all Palestinians arrested there are held in prisons and detention centres in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

"Until then, the Israeli authorities must stop imposing excessive restrictions on visitation rights as a means of punishing prisoners and their families, and ensure that conditions fully meet international standards."⁽³⁾

The *New York Times*, by publishing Marwan Barghouti's letter, and Amnesty International, by issuing the above statement, show that this particular action can reach well beyond the usual discourse on Israel-Palestine.

That said, mainstream media coverage of the hunger strike did not reflect its im-

portance, despite the distraction, for UK media, of the General Election campaign.⁽⁴⁾

We could bemoan the influence of the opponents of Palestinian rights in this respect, but their efforts are a given.

More productively, the solidarity movement needs to help supply news channels with authoritative and well-prepared commentators and to help journalists and editors overcome their timidity and bias.

Whatever level of publicity is achieved, however, none would be possible without the courage, determination, unity and clear focus of the prisoners themselves, which at the same time has a direct effect in Israel-Palestine.

Solidarity within

As in the past, this hunger strike inspired tremendous support across the entire Palestinian community not just because of the love and solidarity shown by their families to the 1,500 strikers themselves, but precisely because Israel's long-term systematic use of imprisonment as a tool of intimidation has given almost every family a similar and therefore unifying experience.

Just as the prisoners' movement transcends factions, so such solidarity brings together Palestinians regardless of political affiliation, and is an expression of shared purpose across the three main territorial divisions of the Palestinian people, the diaspora in the refugee camps and beyond, those of the Occupied Territories and the Palestinian citizens of 1948 Israel itself.

Adept as it is at fomenting and exploiting inter-Palestinian divisions, and at feigning indifference to international criticism, Israel is actually more vulnerable both to international criticism⁽⁵⁾ and to internal resistance than its supporters care to admit.

The prisoners' hunger strike is one example of internal resistance, and it



Israeli troops in the West Bank Palestinian town of Kafr ad-Dik. The yellow banner being waved at them in protest is a portrait of Marwan Barghouti (pictured) the hunger strike leader

is one to which Israel is even more vulnerable because of its capacity to mobilise international opposition to Israeli breaches of humanitarian law.

Although undertaking and maintaining a hunger strike takes deep personal commitment, it is not at all a desperate gesture but an astute political action done in unity with others.

It is designed not to sacrifice lives but to win concessions and, through winning those concessions, to develop unity through the prison walls, garner support from further afield, narrate the Palestinian cause as widely as possible, and exploit weaknesses on the Israeli side.

Vindication

In almost every respect, the hunger strike that began on Prisoners' Day was a substantial success. By the united decision of the prisoners themselves, the strike was suspended on 27 May, after an amazing duration of 41 days.

The prison authorities agreed to start negotiating with the strikers' leaders. The Israeli side were coerced by the courage of their inmates and by the knowledge (a further tribute to the organiser's politically astute timing) that 5 June marked the 50th anniversary of the start of the 'Six Day War' which led to the present Occupation of Palestinian territories outside Israel's 1948 borders.⁽⁶⁾

The Director of the Palestinian Prisoners Affairs Commission, Issa Qaraq, hailed the hunger strike as "an important achievement to build on in the future on the basis of the protection of the prisoners' rights and dignity" and reported that 80% of the strikers' demands had been conceded.

The prisoners' demands themselves were not widely publicised, yet the very fact that they need to be demanded at all underlines the politics of Israeli attempts to demoralise and dehumanise its Palestinian prisoners by restricting their social interaction and wellbeing.

The prisoners' demands

Here is a selection of most of the demands of people who should not be in prison at all:

First, social demands:

- end solitary confinement and administrative detention;
- kitchens to be under prisoners' supervision;
- access to books and newspapers;
- landline phones for communication with family members;
- permitted visits from family to be resumed at twice per month and not to be restricted as punishment;
- visits to be allowed from other relatives;

- duration of family visits to be doubled to an hour and a half;

- permission to have photo of prisoner with family every three months;

- facilities for comfort of visitors and their families at prison gates;

- allow children and grandchildren under age 16 to visit prisoners;

- especially for female prisoners, improve transfer conditions and revise use of physical barriers between prisoners and visiting family members;

- treat prisoners in a humane way when transferring them by specially secure van.

Second, medical demands:

- allow regular and specialist medical checks and surgery as needed;

- release sick detainees, especially those with special needs and chronic illnesses; and

- exempt prisoners from having to pay for their medication.⁽⁷⁾

Conclusion

Although it remains to be seen how far Israel meets its commitment to the Palestinian prisoners, it is already clear that the hunger strike and demonstrations of support in the Occupied Territories, in Israel itself, in the wider solidarity movement and beyond - while there is still room for improvement in UK mainstream media coverage - rattled not just the prison bars but the apartheid state itself.

FOOTNOTES

1. Palestinian journalist Ramzy Baroud, writing for Al-Jazeera, points to the parallel between Palestinians 'imprisoned' in the Occupied territories and those kept in Israeli prisons. He also argues that the hunger strike draws further political significance from its leader's greater popularity inside and outside the Fatah party than the Palestinian Authority's largely discredited President Mahmoud Abbas: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/05/palestinian-prisoners-hunger-strike-170509121104077.html>.

2. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2017/05/timeline-palestinian-mass-hunger-strikes-israel-170510130007023.html>.

3. The words are those of Magdalena Mughrabi, Amnesty International's Deputy Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2017/04/israel-must-end-unlawful-and-cruel-policies-towards-palestinian-prisoners/>.

4. Despite media silence or bias on this issue in Israel itself, there were also expressions of solidarity there: <https://972mag.com/fighting-media-silence-on-the-palestinian-hunger-strike/127518/>.

5. Earlier this year, for example, the Reut Institute, a Tel Aviv-based think tank close to the Israeli government, issued a report in which it admits that after Israel spent tens of millions of dollars to combat the rise of pro-Palestine solidarity, "results remain elusive". It also concedes that the solidarity movement has created an "unfavorable zeitgeist around Israel" in many parts of the world; expanded from Europe to the US and elsewhere; deepened its alliances with major minority groups and social justice coalitions; migrated into mainstream left-wing parties in Europe and may be gaining traction in the US: <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/leaked-report-highlights-israel-lobbys-failures>. This source is cited here in preference to the Reut Institute's own website not only because it offers insightful comments on the report, but also because it includes a link to the original version of the report before its authors amended it in response to hostile criticism.

6. Interestingly, Peter Beaumont, the *Guardian's* correspondent in Jerusalem and not first choice for even-handed reporting on Israel-Palestine, suggested on 27 May that the deal was a 'rare recent success' for Palestinians and a climb-down for the Israeli authorities despite their insistence that they hadn't accepted any of the prisoners' demands nor even negotiated with their representatives. Notwithstanding uncorroborated notions that the hunger strike was brought to an end through interventions by Presidents Trump or Abbas, most of the article effectively vindicates the prisoners' action by including contextual information on the strike with quotes from some of its supporters and, in passing, even calls Hamas an 'Islamic militant group' rather than a 'terrorist' one: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/27/mass-palestinian-hunger-strike-israel-ends>.

7. E.g. <http://alternativenews.org/index.php/headlines/394-the-demands-of-1-600-palestinian-political-prisoners-on-hunger-strike>.

Grenfell Tower residents ignored

In July 2009 six people died in a fire at the 14-storey Lakanal House tower block in the London borough of Southwark. Rafael Cervi, a hotel porter from Brazil, lost his wife Dayana Francisquini and two children, Thais, six, and Felipe, three.

By **PAT TURNBULL**

Mr Cervi had rushed home from work when his wife phoned him and was standing helpless outside the flats, speaking to his wife on the phone.

The Daily Mail reported at the time: ‘He told how [his wife] said: “I can’t breathe very well. I’m struggling to breathe and Felipe’s really scared.” They were the last words he heard from her. When he tried to ring her again, there was no answer.

‘Mbet Udoaka, 37, also had to watch helplessly as his wife, Helen, and baby died in the fire. Helen called him to say she was trapped in their flat and he raced home from work. He stayed on the phone until she lost consciousness, but was not allowed to enter the burning building.’

Catherine Hickman, the other victim, was repeatedly urged by emergency services to stay in her flat rather than escape.

A ‘Super-Inquest’ was convened to investigate the deaths. *The Guardian* reported in March 2013: ‘..the inquest [into the fire] heard the Lakanal House blaze moved unusually quickly and in unexpected ways. Within half an hour of the first 999 call it had spread to several other floors, moving downwards as well as up, something so unusual that transcripts show emergency operators initially refused to believe this was happening. The jury heard that a change in the law in 2006 meant Southwark was responsible for fire safety checks at its flats, but by July 2009 the council had carried out no such checks at Lakanal or any other residential blocks...

‘Mbet Udoaka, whose wife and daughter died, read a statement welcoming the verdict. Standing next to Rafael Cervi, Dayana Francisquini’s husband, he said: “Nearly four years later and after a long inquest, no authority, organisation or body has said

sorry to us or accepted the blame. We fear very much that lessons have not been learned and that it could happen again.” ’

How must he and Rafael Cervi have felt eight years later, on 14 June this year,



to see another tower block on fire, to hear the same dreadful stories, but many times multiplied?

Grenfell Tower, a 129-flat, 24-storey block in the London borough of Kensington and Chelsea – the whole building in flames. There are recordings of the moment the shocked firefighters glimpsed Grenfell Tower for the first time: “How is that even possible?” “Mate, is that .. that’s not a real block with people in it?” “Oh my God, there’s kids in there.” “Right, how are we gonna do that?” “It’s a towering inferno here.”

Because this wasn’t supposed to happen. As Dave Green, national officer of the Fire Brigades Union, says: “1970s buildings like Grenfell Tower were designed so each flat was a box that contained fire within itself, with a non-flammable concrete exterior.”

Firefighters say that there have been many fires in tower blocks, but they have been contained in one flat.

This fire itself had started in one flat, and firefighters even thought they had put it out - until they realised fire was spreading over the outside of the building. Grenfell Tower’s fire safety had been compromised.

Over 600 firefighters fought the blaze. The fire on the outside of the building hindered rescue - firefighters with breathing apparatus had to force their way through choking black smoke, in darkness, up the single staircase as far as they could up the building, in a desperate attempt to save lives.

The people who lived in Grenfell had to brave their way through that same smoke and down that same now crowded staircase. People died trying to escape. Survivors tell of stepping on bodies as they struggled to safety.

80+ dead

The police have declared 80 people dead or missing presumed dead – local residents suspect the figure is much higher.

Police say there are survivors from 106 flats in the tower but that 18 people from those flats are also dead or missing presumed dead. There are 23 flats where they have not been able to trace anyone alive. Around 255 survivors escaped

Grenfell Tower.

An inquiry into the Grenfell fire has been set up, and the police are considering criminal prosecutions, currently against Kensington and Chelsea Council and the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation which the council set up in the 1990s to take charge of all 10,000 of its council properties, and which has little connection with tenants themselves despite its name.

Among the issues residents have asked the inquiry to look at are:

- building regulations,
- cladding and insulation,
- piped gas in the tower block, and
- the role of supervision of works.

Fire regulations were mentioned in the Lakanal House inquest findings. In 1971 the Fire Precaution Act was created, partly in response to a large night club fire in Bristol.

The Act gave fire services the legal right to enter any building and declare it fit for purpose and safe from fire.

In the 1990s after some heavy lobbying of MPs by landlords, the Act was scrapped and replaced by a Regulatory Reform Bill, the power to act after a tragedy rather than to prevent one from happening in the first place.

So where fire officers once had detailed knowledge of a building, now they rely on the information available to them. Builders can also now deviate from plans and specifications at will.

In a letter to the Daily Telegraph, Robert A. Graham put it like this: "As a former assistant chief fire officer of the Greater Manchester Fire Service, it seems to me that the most significant change was to take the responsibility for certifying the fire safety of high risk buildings from the Fire Service, which had trained and experienced officers, and to place this responsibility on the employer or responsible person, who had neither of these qualities ... Means of escape in case of fire and related provisions should be the responsibility of the Fire Service. Inspection of high-risk occupancies should be a statutory duty for fire authorities."

Of course, to implement such a change, the cuts in the fire service would have to be reversed. In the post-Grenfell situation, the fire service has already said they are not in a position to make the checks on other public buildings that they are now being asked to do.

The *Independent* has reported on the Building Regulations Advisory Committee, which advises Sajid Javid, the Communities and Local Government Secretary, on making building regulations and setting standards for the design and construction of buildings: 'Fire

safety experts have reportedly complained that the committee is "heavily weighted towards the building industry" and has proved "difficult to engage with".

There is concern that regulations have failed to keep pace with changes in construction techniques and development of new types of materials, including the kind of external cladding used in the £8.6m Grenfell refit.'

The weaknesses of the current safety regime are obvious in a fire risk assessment for Grenfell Tower submitted by the fire consultant employed by the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (an ex-firefighter as many such consultants are) in November 2012.

He noted a number of safety failings: a failure to test emergency escape lighting, to inspect escape staircases and to maintain fire extinguishers.

When burning, these products give off toxic gases, which when inhaled are the cause of most deaths and injuries in fires; yet the UK and most of Europe have no regulations on the toxicity of fire smoke from construction products even though, as Grenfell Tower has shown, escape from a high-rise building may be impossible.

But under the heading 'Legal Statement' he wrote: 'You do not have to give a copy of your fire risk assessment to anybody, not even the fire authority, if you do give them a copy this could be used against you at a later date'. Little incentive, then, for the safety failings reported to be rectified.

Grenfell Tower was recently refurbished. At the end of June it was reported that detectives conducting the criminal investigation had identified 60 firms involved in the refurbishment.

Part of the refurbishment was the addition of cladding to the outside of the building. It is claimed this was to improve insulation.

Residents suspect that it was for cosmetic reasons. Concrete Grenfell was not considered pretty enough for a rich borough like Kensington and Chelsea, especially if the council want to bring the area upmarket.

It didn't match the look of the new academy built right beside Grenfell, against the wishes of the residents, blocking off one exit from the tower and depriving local people of a little bit of green

space.

It is hard to understand how a product can be manufactured and sold to cover buildings which says in its specifications that it is highly flammable - but that is what happened in the case of Grenfell Tower and, we now discover, in hundreds of buildings up and down the country.

Reuters reported on 24 June: 'Arconic ... manufactures three main types of Reynobond panel: one with a polyethylene (PE) core, one with a fire retardant core and another with a non-combustible core, according to its web site. Diagrams in a 2016 Arconic brochure for its Reynobond panels describe how PE panels are suitable up to 10 metres in height.

Panels with a fire resistant core - the FR model - can be used up to 30 metres, while above that height, panels with the non-combustible core - the A2 model - should be used, the brochure says. Grenfell Tower is more than 60 meters tall.'

Reynobond PE is £2 cheaper per square metre than Reynobond FR.

The Arconic brochure says: "When conceiving a building, it is crucial to choose the adapted products in order to avoid the fire to spread to the whole building. Especially when it comes to facades and roofs, the fire can spread extremely rapidly. As soon as the building is higher than the fire fighters' ladders, it has to be conceived with an incombustible material."

Emails from 2014, seen by *Reuters*, between Arconic's UK sales manager and executives at the contractors involved in the bidding process for the refurbishment contract at Grenfell Tower raise questions about why PE cladding was therefore supplied.

Reuters continues: 'When asked about the emails, Arconic said in a statement that it had known the panels would be used at Grenfell Tower but that it was not its role to decide what was or was not compliant with local building regulations.'

Life is cheap when you have a product to sell, and when the buyer will overlook the dangers to save a few pounds.

When burning, these products give off toxic gases, which when inhaled are the cause of most deaths and injuries in fires; yet the UK and most of Europe have no regulations on the toxicity of fire smoke from construction products even though, as Grenfell Tower has shown, escape from a high-rise building may be impossible.

Omar Belkadi, 32, his wife, Farah Hamdan, 31, Malak Belkadi, eight, and Leena Belkadi, six months, who lived on

the 20th floor, are just one of the Grenfell Tower families who died of inhaling fire fumes and smoke. Leena was found in her mother's arms, Westminster coroner's court was told. Six-year-old Tazmin was later found alive in hospital. What must it be like to be Tazmin?

Residents ignored

One of the saddest aspects of the Grenfell tragedy is that residents had been drawing attention to problems at Grenfell for years and being ignored.

Minutes from an emergency residents' meeting held on 17 March 2015 show that more than 100 people living in the block produced a long list of issues about the refurbishment.

The minutes detail anxieties about the way the firm Rydon was doing the work and mention the "concern that the Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) / Rydon are using cheap materials" and "cutting corners" on workmanship. Other problems included "grave concerns at the standard of works inside a number of residents' properties".

A Grenfell Action Group post stated: "It is a truly terrifying thought but the Grenfell Action Group firmly believe that only a catastrophic event will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our landlord."

Concerns about the TMO go back at least to 2007 and 2008 when tenant members of the TMO tried in vain many times to have extraordinary general meetings called to hold the board to account over fears over safety and other issues of finance and governance.

The housing situation of the Grenfell survivors, who lost everything in the fire, is not being resolved.

On 17 July the *Independent* reported: 'Of the 220 households affected [this figure included displaced families from round the tower] just nine are in temporary accommodation with the rest still in hotels or staying with friends and family'.

Jeremy Corbyn suggested early on that empty homes round about should be requisitioned for the homeless families.

Another suggestion has been that Kensington and Chelsea should use some of its £274 million reserves to buy homes.

A young father told the council, "Me, my wife and three kids are in a hotel room, one bedroom and a double bed

for five of us. I was forgotten about."

The longer the Grenfell families do not have permanent and secure housing, the longer families with young children have to share a room and a bed in a hotel, the longer it will take for them to recover from their nightmare experience.

The government has said that every Grenfell survivor will have the right to a permanent home in their borough with the same rent and security of tenure that they previously had; but survivors are understandably suspicious.

Will these promises be kept when Grenfell Tower is no longer in the news?

The inability of Kensington and Chelsea Council to respond meaningfully to the crisis is a reflection of the run-down of council services over many years.

Since 2011 alone many councils in London have lost 40 per cent of their government funding. This has led them to embrace an agenda which is fully in

brokered by the government's Homes and Communities Agency.

It was reported that developer Berkeley Homes, who are building the development under the St Edward brand, had generously offered to sell the homes at cost price of around £10 million and had speeded up their construction so that they would be available by the end of July.

But Berkeley Homes is no benefactor; owner Tony Pidgley took home over £20 million in 2015. The selling price of homes in the luxury part of the development starts at £1.5 million. Penthouses are expected to go for £13 million.

After the Grenfell Tower fire, Sophie Khan, a lawyer representing a relative of the victims in the Lakanel House fire, wrote on 26 June in the *Independent*: 'At the time the Lakanel House Fire was the UK's worst ever tower block fire and a 'Super-Inquest' was convened to investigate the deaths ... the Coroner recommended a number of actions that needed to be taken by the Government to safeguard the lives of residents living in tower blocks.

'Sadly, the Government did not act upon the recommendations, apart from commencing a 'programme of simplification' of the Approved Document B, in relation to Building Regulations.

'This meant that 4,000 tower blocks across the country were not retrofitted with sprinkler systems

and a lax regulatory framework around fire safety assessments remained in place.... This sent a clear message to the local councils that the safety of residents in tower blocks was not a Government priority and the recommendations could be ignored.'

This is the climate in which a Grenfell Tower can happen: a climate where Boris Johnson could claim "health and safety fears are making Britain a safe place for extremely stupid people" – where David Cameron, when prime minister, could write off legal protections as "an albatross around the neck of British business".

What will be the result of the inquiry and the police investigations into the Grenfell Tower fire? Will we see the first convictions for corporate manslaughter? What will be the recommendations? Will they be implemented?

What is the real value of human life in capitalist Britain today?



Volunteers sort the donations from the public to the victims of the fire

tune with that of the government – spending less on public services, favouring luxury house building over council house building, and in general replacing their working class residents with wealthier ones, or with absentee owners who regard their purchase in London as an investment or at best as a 'pied a terre'.

One such luxury housing development near Grenfell Tower, Kensington Row, could become home to some former Tower residents.

Not the luxury part – the 'affordable' adjunct that is sometimes constructed off to the side. If Grenfell families are rehoused there, they will not have access to the swimming pool, 24 hour concierge, and other add-ons in the luxury section.

The 68 flats have been bought by the City of London Corporation in a deal

May miscalculates Corbyn succeeds

Conservative Prime Minister, Theresa May's decision to call a snap General Election on 8 June 2017 was based on a number of political miscalculations.

By **SCOTT McDONALD**

These miscalculations included:

- The huge Tory lead in the polls and Jeremy Corbyn's poor ratings suggested that she could win by a landslide. This was encouraged by the mainstream media and believed by many.

- The Parliamentary Labour Party with no confidence in their Leader, often presented as unelectable, even by his own side would mean a poor, weak and divided Labour campaign. A divided party with a weak and embattled leader is usually regarded as not popular with the public.

- Tarring Corbyn as a friend of terrorists would work with the public.

- May thought the election would all be about Brexit with her being presented as the only one strong enough to properly negotiate a good deal for Britain.

- She would stand above the petty fray of electoral campaigning and debate, and act Prime Ministerial. Hence the decision to avoid television debates and speak only to audiences of invited supporters.

- A snap election meant that manifestos had to be produced hurriedly and on this occasion, did not need to be substantial. Her calculation must have been that this didn't really matter in a short campaign all about Brexit.

However, it all began to unravel very quickly.

Jeremy Corbyn had an excellent election campaign, touring the country and speaking to large crowds in public places unlike Theresa May, who spoke to small private groups often in warehouses.

The underestimation of Jeremy Corbyn began to be revealed as the campaign developed and the broadcast media, due to electoral rules, had to give him more exposure. Jeremy Corbyn's personality and politics contradicted the media's characterisation of him.

And, then there were the gaffes: when the thin Tory manifesto announced, what became known as, the "dementia tax" and the Tories were forced to retreat on the policy, May's pathetic attempts to deny any change in policy undermined her slogan "strong and stable" and led to the charge of "weak and wobbly".

On the other hand, the Labour manifesto, usefully leaked, and so giving two bites of the cherry, proved to be extremely popular with its commitments to end austerity, nationalise the railways, build council homes, stop aggressive foreign wars, end student fees, and to pay for it by taxing the rich.

The election debate became about



**Washington January 2017:
Britain's new and delighted Prime
Minister, Theresa May meets the
USA's new President Trump**

other issues concerning people rather than simply Brexit. However, one calculation that May would have made and got generally right was that UKIP voters would mainly desert to the Tories.

Theresa May's refusal to take part in television debates turned into another own goal as she increasingly looked scared of appearing before the public rather than Prime Ministerial. Corbyn grew in stature as May's credibility diminished. Running a presidential-type campaign had become counter-productive for the Tories.

Corbyn's response to the Manchester bombing in linking the cause of terrorist attacks to that of wars in the Middle East resonated with the public. In his speech following the terrorist attack, he said that, "We must be brave enough to admit the 'War on Terror' is simply not working."

Incensed Tory and right-wing Labour candidates, egged on by the Tory media, branded the speech "appalling" and "offensive" and claimed that it was out of touch with the mood of the country. How wrong they were!

Rather than running away from the issue, given the attack on him as a "friend of terrorists", Corbyn had taken a calculated risk and it worked.

People are not stupid and can see that these appalling wars of destruction, with tens of thousands of innocent people killed like those in Manchester, does not make us safer.

Ironically, the Tories, usually presented as the defenders of law and order, were exposed as the cost-cutters of the police under May when she was Home Secretary.

The London terrorist attack further exposed the Tory cuts on public services. The response of the Emergency services, including firefighters, paramedics, doctors, nurses and police to the Manchester and London terror attacks made the case all the more powerful for an end to the Tory cuts.

As Home Secretary, May's abysmal record of failure on the Tory promise to bring down immigration numbers also worked against her.

Jeremy Corbyn's success

The Tories may have won the largest number of seats in the House of Commons but the election result was regarded by everyone as a victory for Labour and Jeremy Corbyn in particular.

The Tories who had gone into the General Election with a small majority now found themselves without an overall majority. Theresa May, in order to stay in power, chose to do a deal with the



Labour catches the mood in London

Nearly 5% more Londoners cast their votes on 8 June than did so in 2015: a bigger increase than anywhere else in England and nearly twice the percentage increase that brought the UK turnout to the highest level since 1997.

By BRIAN DURRANS

In London as elsewhere, there was a clear sense that this election mattered.

London's 'Brexit' factor?

In last year's referendum, Londoners voted largely to remain in the EU. By respecting the Brexit vote and building unity across it, Jeremy Corbyn has evidently caught the popular mood and outmanoeuvred Labour's 'Remoaner' MPs, mainly critics of the leadership, who are now increasingly out of touch with the party's expanded membership and reduced to sterile gestures.

Nothing better illustrates the maturity of London's electorate compared with some pro-Remain MPs than the Labour surge that re-elected prominent Labour

Leave MP Kate Hoey in Vauxhall, even though Lambeth, where her constituency is located, returned London's highest Remain vote in the referendum.

Many Corbyn-sceptic Remain MPs in constituencies that voted that way last year told their voters this year how passionately they cared about local issues and the EU cause, and said as little as



possible about Labour's manifesto or leader, at least until, on June 9th, it became expedient to do so.⁽¹⁾

In retrospect, there was no clear way of accounting for which way the votes

had gone, except that Labour's principled UK-wide campaign benefited both Remain and Leave constituencies and MPs/candidates almost equally well.⁽²⁾ Theresa May had claimed that the election was about Brexit, on which basis she hoped to win a hundred-seat majority. It was not and her hopes were dashed.

Vote share

The swing to Labour in London was more than twice the increased turnout and cannot therefore be explained by the support of new voters or previous abstainers alone.

Conservative and Lib Dem shares barely changed (Conservatives down 1.7%, Lib Dem up 1.1%). Although it seems clear that many Green and some Lib Dem votes came Labour's way, and that the Conservatives were better at collecting former UKIP votes, there are too many exceptions and uncertainties to cover in a short article.

The new political map of London features a fat and rather wonky central red cross of Labour constituencies against

Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). Her much weakened authority was further undermined.

Following the General Election the Grenfell Tower fire tragedy happened and in the immediate days following the fire the different approaches of Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn were stark.

May didn't meet the victims of the fire on her visit to the borough and she stood charged with a lack of compassion. Under pressure she consented to a meeting with residents, not at the scene of the tragedy, but at 10 Downing Street.

Jeremy Corbyn, on the other hand, visited and met victims and residents, showing compassion and understanding of their plight.

His statement about the acquisition of empty properties in the borough to house the victims, who had lost everything, was met with applause whilst the Tory media and their apologists derided the idea as illegal. Many of the victims of the fire have still to be properly accommodated.

It was a humiliating few weeks for a

Prime Minister, who had expected to return to Downing Street with a landslide.

The slogan "a strong and stable leadership with Theresa May", had been the mantra posed against a Parliamentary Labour Party in which the majority had no confidence in their Leader.

Seven weeks later, after May's calling of the General Election, at the first Prime Minister's Question Time, Jeremy Corbyn entered the Chamber to the unimaginable sight of a standing ovation from the Labour benches, and was able to state that the Labour Party stood ready to form a "strong and stable" government with him as Prime Minister

Lame Duck Prime Minister

Theresa May is not only regarded as a lame duck Prime Minister but a prisoner, as the Tory Party have yet to sort out who might replace her and do not want an early election.

Mrs May must have welcomed the Parliamentary summer recess like no other MP. She could stay out of the public glare for a few weeks and avoid any

more embarrassing incidents, further gaffes and humiliations.

On her summer walking trip in Switzerland Theresa May would lament her decision to call a snap General Election. She had presented it as being necessary because of the small Tory parliamentary majority and the need for a clear and strong mandate to enter the Brexit negotiations.

Her miscalculations had ended in humiliation. Theresa May is in the words of George Osborne, "a dead woman walking".

Meanwhile Jeremy Corbyn took once again to the campaign trail visiting marginal constituencies, largely unreported by the media no longer constrained by election rules.

Despite those who did all they could to oust him and continue to plot against him and his policies within the Parliamentary Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn's position as Leader has been strengthened. No one, including the Tories and their media, can now say that he is unelectable.

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four blue quadrants of less crowded Tory strongholds out towards the corners. This corresponds to a tally of 49 seats (4 gains) to Labour, 21 (1 gain, 6 losses) to the Conservatives and 3 (2

worst results for London Labour were in the northwest constituencies of Finchley and Golders Green (+4.1%) and Hendon (+4.5%). These modest swings were less than half those of the average up-

that ‘Labour has a problem with anti-Semitism’, concluded that it would be very surprising if Labour had won in Finchley and Golders Green or in Harrow, despite the clear refutation of this allegation by the Chakrabarti Report⁽⁵⁾ and reiteration of the party’s clear and principled position on this and all other forms of racism by Jeremy Corbyn and others in the Labour leadership.

Although there was still criticism of Corbyn for having shared a platform in the past with supporters of Palestinian rights whom those advocating for Israel call ‘terrorists’ (a charge ably rebutted by the Chakrabarti Report and by Jeremy Corbyn himself), it is notable that in criticism of the Labour leader during the 2017 election campaign, by the mainstream media and by his political opponents inside and outside the Labour Party, the issue of Israel/Palestine took second place to (and was conflated with) ‘anti-Semitism’.

For example, in its election night blog as the results came in, the Jewish Chronicle consistently referred to ‘anti-Semitism’ rather than to criticism of Israel.⁽⁶⁾

It is therefore worth recollecting an article in the *Spectator* on 18 April 2015 - a month before the previous general election - in which political journalist Robert Philpot declared that Labour had

PARTY	Labour	Conservative	Liberal Democrat
Total seats (won/held)	49 (4/45)	21 (1/20) 6 seats lost	3 (2/1)
Average swing to Labour	11.6%	9.2%	0.47%

Table - June 2017: Average vote swing to Labour in London by % over 2015.

gains) to the Lib Dems.⁽³⁾

What this map doesn’t show is that increased support for London Labour not only gained new seats and raised majorities where it retained those already held, but also, with only two exceptions, the Labour surge improved the party’s vote share even where another candidate won, especially when it was a Conservative: (See Table below.)

Southwest London

In the two exceptions, Labour came third in constituencies it had little chance of winning, where the Conservative-Liberal Democrat contest involved at least one controversial personality and consequent high-profile attention.

In Richmond Park, where the Conservative and unsuccessful mayoral candidate Zac Goldsmith scraped home, Labour’s first-time parliamentary candidate, who had no local base, dropped 3.2% of Labour’s previous vote.

In nearby Twickenham, where Liberal Democrat and former Cameron-Clegg coalition minister Vince Cable beat the Conservative, the Labour candidate - another first-time contestant who was also a local councillor - scored 2.3% fewer votes than the previous Labour candidate managed two years ago.

As averages often do, the average percentage increases in the Labour vote between 2015-June 2017, shown in Table 1, mask some interesting variations. The actual increases per constituency are by no means evenly spread between the highest and lowest, but instead cluster into two groups.

Labour candidates did well in almost all London constituencies where there was a Conservative winner, but they did especially well in 17 of them where the average vote swing to Labour was 10.75% - less than 1% short of the average swing where Labour actually won.

Northwest London

Leaving aside Richmond Park and Twickenham, already discussed, and two other Liberal Democrat wins, the two

swing in the top 17 constituencies where Labour lost, although in both cases the Conservative majorities were much reduced.

If Labour’s poor showing in Richmond and Twickenham can be explained as the result of unusual local factors, this also seems to be the case in Finchley and Golders Green, and in Hendon.

At over 20%, Finchley and Golders Green has the largest proportion of Jewish residents of any constituency in the UK; in Hendon, the proportion is only a little lower at 17%.⁽⁴⁾

Several commentators, apparently accepting the mainstream media allegation



Labour Party campaigners in Chipping Barnet, London.

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already lost the 'Jewish vote' because its (Jewish) leader, Ed Miliband (pictured), showed sympathy for Palestinians and especially because he criticised Israel's attack on Gaza in 'Operation Protective Edge'.⁽⁷⁾

At that time, there were no 'useful idiots' making off-the-cuff remarks that could be cited as evidence of anti-Semitic prejudice for which Miliband could then be criticised for failing to condemn or punish: the problem was simply criticism of Israel by someone who might conceivably become the UK's next prime minister.

And that, from the point of view of Israel's supporters, is still the problem, only now in 2017, the tactic has been first to conflate criticism of Israel or support for Palestine with anti-Semitism and then to demand action against 'anti-Semitism' in this new, distorted, definition.⁽⁸⁾

Jeremy Newmark, Labour's June 2017 candidate for Finchley and Golders Green, and Mike Katz, its candidate for Hendon, are respectively National Movement Chair and Vice-Chair of the 'Jewish Labour Movement' (JLM).

The JLM not only promotes Israel's interests in the Labour Party and supports the pro-apartheid Israeli Labor Party,⁽⁹⁾ but its relationship to dubious activities by the Israeli Embassy in London was the subject of an investigative report broadcast in four gripping episodes by *Al-Jazeera* in January 2017.⁽¹⁰⁾

Given their own criticism of Labour's leadership as (at best) 'soft on anti-Semitism', it is scarcely surprising that their candidacies were opposed by some in their constituencies' Jewish communities who preferred unambiguously pro-Israel Conservatives; but it is not hard to see that a main incentive in standing was to keep attention focused on alleged 'anti-Semitism'.

Two conclusions

Labour's generally strong performance gives a context in which to understand these two sets of anomalies.

First, the two failures in Richmond Park and Twickenham were rare exceptions to the 'two-horse race' of Labour versus Conservative, a clarification of the political stakes in which Labour can retrieve the trust of the working class and its allies as they exist in contemporary Britain.

A better result in both constituencies could have been secured if the Labour candidate had had strong local support and a track-record of campaigning on



issues that affect key sections of the community, as reflected in the manifesto.

Second, the lessons of the two low swings in Finchley and Golders Green and Hendon are about attempts to delegitimise Labour. Israel's cheerleaders in the JLM seem to be running out of options.

When, with massive pro-Tory media help, Jeremy Corbyn's opponents blast him as a wimp or terrorist sympathiser, or find him guilty by association with people they don't like, he refutes

the charges with clear arguments and quiet dignity, and his approval ratings improve.

Given that the Conservative party and its candidates in these two constituencies agreed with the 'JLM' on Israel and on the idea that Labour has an 'anti-Semitism' problem, and given that it would be impossible to say which Labour votes were cast for the party and which for the candidate, we might charitably assume that the two 'JLM' candidates were above all committed to Labour's manifesto offers of anti-austerity and social renewal.

But criticism of the party (that is, its leadership) is seldom far behind. After the count when Conservative Mike Freer was returned as MP for Finchley and Golders Green, Newmark spuriously

claimed electoral support for his position within Labour.

Newmark said, "To reduce Freer's majority by such a margin is a signal that key messages of my campaign that people in Finchley and Golders Green are worried about the politics of resentment and intolerance that comes as part and parcel of the Brexit debate. That people here want to protect local schools and invest in world-class education.

"I will continue to fight racism and anti-Semitism in society, in Parliament and, if necessary, in my own party; the results across Barnet indicate that many people think it is."⁽¹¹⁾

There are two strange things in that last paragraph. One is that caveat "if necessary". If there really is an anti-Semitism problem in the Labour Party, how could he not find it necessary to fight it?

On the other hand, he does not say why people apparently critical of Labour's alleged 'anti-Semitism' should bother to vote for the party at all in preference to the Conservatives.

At any rate, whatever the local electorate made of all this, in all their variety of views and religious affiliation, most Labour voters across London and across the UK, who can scarcely not have heard criticism that Labour and its leader are anti-Semitic or spineless or terrorist sympathisers, or all three, do not appear convinced.

FOOTNOTES

1. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/labour-voters-reasons-jeremy-corbyn-manifesto-local-mp-mandatory-reselection-a7840856.html>.
2. Opinion surveyors YouGov judge that, in the UK as a whole, voting patterns in the EU referendum didn't much affect those in the general election: <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2017/06/22/how-did-2015-voters-cast-their-ballot-2017-general/>. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, I assume here that the same also applies to London.
3. <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7979>, p.32. The main sources for these figures and those set out in Table 1 below are the cartogram and list of constituencies given in the Sunday Times on 11 June 2017 (p.17) and www.bbc.com/news/politics/constituencies.
4. <http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/2015guide/finchleyandgoldersgreen/>; <http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/2015guide/hendon/>.
5. <http://www.labour.org.uk/page/-/party-documents/ChakrabartiInquiry.pdf>.
6. <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/election-live-blog-1.439696>.
7. <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2015/04/how-ed-miliband-lost-the-jewish-vote/>.
8. <https://ijv.org.uk/2017/03/27/legal-opinion-finds-major-fault-with-government-antisemitism-definition/>.
9. <http://freespeechonisrael.org.uk/who-are-jewish-labour-movement/>.
10. <http://www.aljazeera.com/investigations/thelobby/>. The programmes also prompted a call for an independent enquiry in the UK: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/israeli-embassy-alan-duncan-palestine-spying-subversion-labour-a7515956.html>.
11. <http://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/mike-freer-and-matthew-offord-retain-two-seats-with-largest-jewish-communities/>. Emphasis added. Barnet is the local borough in which this constituency is located. For more tendentious claims, and also some revealing admissions of uncertainty, about what votes 'mean' and whose votes they are, see the Jewish Chronicle blog referenced at Note 6, especially (you have to scroll down for these) the ramshackle musings of Lee Harpin.



Why Labour lost 5 seats in N. England

Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, Labour's election manifesto and the party's vigorous campaign went some way to winning back previously lost Labour votes and inspiring many young voters to vote for the first time.

By **SCOTT McDONALD**

During the New Labour Blair-Brown years, some five million Labour votes were lost across the country.

The June 2017 General Election saw Labour reverse this trend with an increase in Labour's vote and an increase in the party's share of the vote.

This trend was also evident in the north of England yet the five seats

which the Labour Party lost in the General Election were all in the north.

An analysis of these results (see table below) shows that the losses were largely due to UKIP standing down in two of the seats with the majority of their votes going to the Tories.

And in the seats where UKIP did stand most of their votes were shed to

the Tories. In Middlesborough and Cleveland East it was Labour's highest vote since 2001 and its best share of the vote since 2005.

In Stoke-on-Trent South, Labour's share of the vote was up 8.3% over 2015.

In Walsall North, Labour gained its most votes since 2001 and its highest share since 2005.

In Mansfield this was Labour's best vote since 1997 and its highest share of the vote since 2005.

In North East Derbyshire it was Labour's best result since 2005. In the following article we analyse in more depth Labour's electoral fortunes in Mansfield and NE Derbyshire.

Labour's 5 lost seats in 2017 General Election

CONSTITUENCY	PARTY	2015		2017		Change over 2015
		Votes	Share of Vote	Votes	Share of Vote	
Mansfield	Tory	13288	28.2%	23392	46.8%	+18.5%
	Labour	18603	39.4%	22335	44.5%	+ 5.1%
	UKIP	11850	25.1%	2654	5.3%	- 19.8%
Middlesborough S. and Cleveland E.	Tory	16925	37.1%	23643	49.6%	+12.6%
	Labour	19193	42.0%	22623	47.5%	+5.5%
	UKIP	6935	15.2%	DID NOT STAND		
North East Derbyshire	Tory	17605	36.7%	24784	49.2%	+12.5%
	Labour	19488	40.6%	21923	43.5%	+2.9%
	UKIP	7631	15.9%	1565	3.1%	- 12.8%
Stoke-on-Trent	Tory	12780	32.7%	20451	49.1%	+16.4%
	Labour	15319	40.6%	19788	47.5%	+8.3%
	UKIP	8298	21.2%	DID NOT STAND		
Walsall North	Tory	12455	33.8%	18919	49.6%	+15.9%
	Labour	14392	39.0%	16318	42.8%	+3.8%
	UKIP	8122	22.0%	2295	6.0%	-16.0%



2017 GENERAL ELECTION ANALYSIS

Mansfield and NE Derbyshire analysis

Mansfield had been a Labour seat for ninety four years until this year when it was lost by Sir Alan Meale. After scraping-in at the 1987 election, Meale increased his majority at each election. Now, after 30 years as an MP, he lost his seat despite gaining a higher vote and increasing his share of the vote.

By **ANNIE PARKIN**

It was thought that he had intended to stand down at the next General Election, but Theresa May's sudden election call threw the intentions of a number of MPs into confusion.

Alan Meale had done plenty of work to support former miners in various campaigns including the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme, which had been underwritten by the Government after privatisation of the industry.

In order to compensate itself for the "risk" this presented, the government chose to cream off vast amounts of money that should have been paid to former mineworkers in pensions.

Despite his hard work, Alan Meale had not been publicising his efforts effectively, so they went largely unnoticed. Previously he had passed up opportunities to write in the widely-read local newspaper.

When he finally began to write a column he failed to tell people about the valuable work he was doing, so he was often thought to be inactive.

In the 2015 General Election the Labour majority in Mansfield was 5315, with Conservatives second. The 2017 vote was 23,392 for the Tories and 22,335 for Labour, giving the Conservatives a majority of 1057.

Although Mansfield had been a mining and manufacturing town, the old industries were closed down, leaving many former manual workers unemployed, with very little money and in poor health.

This is the sort of environment identified by the Joseph Rowntree Trust as leading to Brexit majorities in the EU Referendum, where low levels of formal education or a depressed local economy and environment seemed to lead to disaffection or despair.

In Mansfield the Brexit vote was one

of the highest in the country at 70.9%, while Alan Meale was known as a Remainer.

In the 2015 General Election the UKIP vote in Mansfield had been only 1438 less than the Conservative vote. When the UKIP vote, in line with the national trend, collapsed in this year's General Election, UKIP lost more than 9000 votes there. It is believed that many former UKIP voters voted Conservative in Mansfield this time.

During the 1984-5 Miners' Strike some leaders within the Nottinghamshire NUM, colluding with the Government, had fatally undermined the strike.

Afterwards, when they formed the breakaway Union of Democratic Miners, our judicial system gifted them the former NUM Offices in Mansfield.

Following the extinction of Britain's mining industry these offices have now been sold by the UDM to developers who, after demolishing the Miners Offices, are building large and very expensive houses on the site.

This pattern differed from events in the neighbouring Ashfield seat, where the Referendum Leave vote was almost as high, but Labour MP Gloria de Piero hung on by a whisker in this year's General Election.

A former Remainer, she seemed to shift position once the size of the Leave vote in her seat was known. The most important factor, though, in enabling

Labour to hold Ashfield was probably the existence of a very right-wing Independent candidate in Ashfield.

As a local councillor, already known to the electorate, she seemed to split the right-wing vote, while in Mansfield right-wing voters had only one choice: Conservative.

The Conservative national leadership chose Mansfield as one of their target seats in this year's General Election, pouring resources into the constituency.

Mansfield District Council has been controlled by Independents since 2015 while two Independent elected executive mayors have been in power during the last 14 years.

During the 1984-5 Miners' Strike some leaders within the Nottinghamshire NUM, colluding with the Government, had fatally undermined the strike.

Afterwards, when they formed the breakaway Union of Democratic Miners, our judicial system gifted them the former NUM Offices in Mansfield. Following the extinction of Britain's mining industry these offices have now been sold by the UDM to developers who, after demolishing the Miners Offices, are building large and very expensive houses on the site.

This of course is helping to change the social and class make-up of the town, attracting affluent commuter residents who may be more likely to vote Conservative.

There are still many areas of high social deprivation in Mansfield whose residents may be less likely to vote at all, given the dramatic decline of the organised working class since the mid 1980's.

North East Derbyshire

Last held by Labour's Natascha Engel, this too had been a Labour seat for many years, with many previous MPs having had close links with the National Union of Mineworkers, as there had been many collieries within the constituency.

In this year's General Election Natascha Engel increased her share of the vote by 2.9%, to 43.5% of the vote, but the Conservative Lee Rowley increased his share by 12.5%, winning 49.2% of the vote. He gained 24,784 votes, while Ms Engel's vote was 21,923.

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Rowley had stood previously in 2015, coming less than 2000 votes behind Natascha Engel. In this constituency too, in line with the national trend, the UKIP vote collapsed.

In North East Derbyshire, Conservative was the only voting option for right-wing voters. Again in line with the national picture, Conservative and Labour dominated the voting pattern.

The constituency is very mixed in several ways. Geographically it curls around the Chesterfield constituency, with its northern parts bordering Rotherham and Sheffield, while also stretching southwards down towards the very different environment of mid Derbyshire.

The social make-up of the constituency is also very mixed, so it is hard to generalise about what happened, a point Natascha Engel herself made after the election.

There are affluent villages such as Ashover, Holmesfield and surrounding areas; larger affluent commuter settlements in Dronfield and Wingerworth, but also impoverished former mining villages, where morale is at rock-bottom. The former mining town of Clay Cross also belongs to this constituency.

In former mining areas jobs are often in short supply, while those that are available are usually low-paid. Residents here are less likely to register as electors, or less likely to turn out on the day.

Over time, though, North East Derbyshire is becoming more middle-class, with new housing developments, even in former mining areas such as Clay Cross and Renishaw, attracting commuters.

The traditional working-class is in decline here, as in many other areas. Many of these people, who would once have been solid Labour voters, have become disillusioned.

Many voted UKIP in 2015 and Leave in the Referendum. Some seemed to vote Tory in the 2017 General Election, while others seemed not to vote at all.

However, the Labour vote in the local elections held up in the north of the county this year. Labour lost control of Derbyshire County Council to the Tories only because the middle and south of the county went Tory.

In the General Election there were some particular circumstances and local issues that seemed to influence the outcome in North East Derbyshire.

A significant and vigorous anti-fracking campaign is being waged in the

northern part of the constituency because INEOS intends to begin operations in the Marsh Lane area of Eckington.

For a while before the General Election, Ms Engels' office displayed an anti-fracking poster, but this later vanished. Immediately after nominations closed, Natasha Engels' team began to circulate a four-page open letter, supporting fracking but with some possible protections.

This letter went inside a local magazine to every house in Dronfield, and was probably distributed in other areas too. At hustings Natascha Engel took this same line, which was basically pro-fracking. Yet previously the Constituency Labour Party had taken an anti-fracking stance at an all-members meeting, in her presence and without any votes against this view.

Her change of position on local fracking was probably very damaging to her vote. The successful Conservative candidate issued several leaflets in which he opposed the Marsh Lane proposal, although he was ambiguous about the wider fracking issue.

After the 2015 General Election Natascha Engel had become one of the Deputy Speakers of the House of Commons. This requires incumbents to withdraw from an active political role: Deputy Speakers must not vote in Commons debates.

While Lindsay Hoyle, the most senior Deputy Speaker, uses his web-sites and the local media to try to overcome this by associating himself with progressive causes, Natasha Engel was not thought locally to be doing as much as possible in this situation.

Some constituents apparently felt dissatisfied with her efforts if they took issues to her.

As in Mansfield, some constituents thought that she would not stand again in the next General Election, but the surprise nature of this election gave MPs little time to take decisions, with very little time for parties to select new candidates.

When first elected Ms Engel had moved into a house within the locality, but it appears that was sold some time ago. Recently there had been no clear Constituency Party knowledge of what links she still had with her constituency.

Some campaigners in North East Der-

byshire were worried that great efforts were put into the election campaign for Chesterfield's Toby Perkins, while the North East Derbyshire seat, thought to be much more vulnerable, required more attention.

It appears that this was more than just a local issue, as the national Labour leadership, worried by pre-election opinion polls, had decided that they needed to work hard for every seat, rather than putting extra resources into seats at most risk.

In fact, Chesterfield's Labour MP Toby Perkins held Chesterfield this year with a majority of 9605, an improvement on performance in the 2015 General Election.

There have been reports that the national Labour leadership may be willing to target resources on more vulnerable seats next time. However, there may be dangers in this.

In the neighbouring Bolsover constituency, where Dennis Skinner (pictured) has been MP for many years, we see that his majority was halved this year, with a strong performance by a Conservative candidate



who came second, despite a split in the right-wing vote.

UKIP, although losing many votes in Bolsover since the previous General Election, still polled 2129, so there is cause for concern here.

Many constituencies previously dominated by the organised working class, especially former mining or manufacturing areas, are now utterly changed, with the dramatic decline in work, in trades union presence and morale.

In these places of poverty it is becoming much harder to get out a Labour vote. The national Labour Party leadership has, during demonstrations, told trades unionists and campaigning organisations that the Labour Party will support their struggles.

Of course this marks an advance, but it will require work by local Labour parties as well as national leadership. In many local Labour parties this change of focus from electoral machine to ongoing campaigning work does not seem to be happening.

In North East Derbyshire there is an active Dronfield Labour Party education and discussion group which seems to have played a positive role in the last few years, and seems to be connected to the anti-fracking campaign.

However, the geographical spread of the constituency seems to limit the influence of this group.

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In Scotland Labour begins to recover

The fact that there is good electoral news from Scotland makes a welcome change with the 2017 general election seeing the dominance of nationalism take a severe dent.

By **FRIEDA PARK**

There was little expectation beforehand that Labour would make much headway, however it won back 6 seats, increasing its number of MPs to 7. Three of the newly elected MPs were supported by the Campaign for Socialism.

The Scottish National Party (SNP) expected some losses from their astonishing success at the last election when it won 56 out of 59 seats on the back of the failed independence referendum.

However, it did not lose just a few seats it lost 21, reducing its tally to 36. In a further blow it lost two of its key figures at Westminster - Alex Salmond, former First Minister of Scotland and Angus Robertson, its deputy leader and leader in the House of Commons.

In every single constituency the nationalists' vote share went down, mainly in double digits. The biggest loss of vote share was 21.1% in Banff and Buchan which had been SNP since 1987, but was a Tory seat prior to that. Their smallest loss of vote share was 3.8% in Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk.

There are now 16 SNP MPs sitting on majorities of less than 2000 of which 9 are less than 1000, including 4 under 100. In Fife North East their majority is just 2.

In 9 of these 16 seats Labour was placed second, with another being a close three-way marginal. In most of the others Labour could easily benefit from a further shift from the SNP overtaking the Tories to be in a winning position. There are undoubtedly seats beyond this number where the SNP is vulnerable and where Labour could win.

Unfortunately as well as good news there is also bad news from the election. The Conservative Party confirmed its position as the second party in Scotland

increasing its tally of seats from 1 to 13. In every constituency apart from Orkney and Shetland, where it fell by 0.2%, its vote share increased mainly by double digit percentages.

The biggest was Gordon where the Tories' vote share increased by 29%. This was the seat that Alex Salmond lost and had previously been a Liberal Democrat (Lib Dem) seat. There and in some other seats, the Lib Dem vote collapsed, aiding the Tories.

The SNP vote fell drastically - they lost nearly ½ a million votes, however, few of these votes seem to have gone to Labour.

Only Labour and the Tories added votes, every other party lost votes.

The Lib Dems and UKIP lost about 40,000 votes each and the Greens over 30,000.⁽¹⁾ Despite losing votes, the Lib Dems increased their number of seats from 1 to 4.

In all 260,000 fewer people voted. It would be a fair guess that this group were largely SNP voters, accounting for half their losses.

The Tories increased the number voting for them by 323,852, whereas Labour's actual net gain was only 9,860. Even if the Tories got the overwhelming bulk of the Lib Dem and UKIP votes, they still made a further gain of around 240,000 votes a figure which looks very much like the other half of the SNP's lost votes.

But how could this be? Why would SNP voters transfer their allegiance to the most strongly pro-unionist party?

Much was made during the campaign of disquiet at the SNP plans for another independence referendum, this was true even among some Yes voters weary of further division and diversion. There was also growing concern at the SNP's fail-

ures in government as it focused on independence at the expense of what they were actually elected to do at Holyrood.

However, this offers no explanation as to why the Tories should be the beneficiaries of this disillusionment.

The seats won by the Tories were in rural or relatively wealthy constituencies and in a sense, therefore, they were returning to type.

A proportion of the Tories gains here were people not very committed to the SNP, but who had voted nationalist in the past as a tactical vote against Labour.

However, there was a good performance across the board by the Tories, not just in these seats.

Although it does not fit with the propaganda that Scottish Nationalism is cuddly and inherently left-wing, there has always been a right-wing in the SNP and among its supporters.

In every other respect, apart from the issue of independence, this section of voters might have found the transition to voting Tory easier than voting Labour which also opposed a second independence referendum.

This on its own, however, would still not account for the number of votes that the Tories picked up.

Though disillusionment with endless referenda and a poorly performing government were part of the reason the SNP lost support, the elephant in the room, unacknowledged before, during or even since the election, was Brexit.

Scotland voted to Remain by 62% to 38% and the SNP leader, Nicola Sturgeon, has used this to further her campaign for independence. She has been extremely voluble about Scotland being "dragged out of the European Union against its will".

This ignored the concerns of the many SNP supporters who voted Leave. If 25% of SNP supporters voted for Brexit, as some polls suggested, that could be 360,000 votes.⁽²⁾ A proportion of these voters more than likely made up a chunk of the Tories additional 323,852 votes along with Lib Dem and UKIP voters.

In this light the Tory success begins to make sense and was similar to the successes it achieved in winning votes and



Alex Salmond lost his seat.

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seats in the Midlands and North of England, where it was seen to be the safest pair of hands to ensure Brexit.

In more working-class constituencies these results challenge Labour in Scotland just as in England.

Other things helped the Tories. The divisions over independence had begun to push protestant unionists into the hands of the Tories even prior to this election and the charge that Corbyn supported the IRA - though it failed to take off in other places - potentially did so some damage here.

Ruth Davidson is an effective leader and has tried, with some success, to position the Scottish Tories as more one-nation and socially liberal than the party nationally.

By contrast Labour's Kezia Dugdale has never really grown into the job. Her presentation is humourless and often unconvincing, doggedly sticking to the anti-independence script during TV debates.

Labour's recovery, though very welcome, was relatively modest. The biggest increase in its vote share was in the seat of its one sitting MP Ian Murray - 15.5%. No others got out of single figures and in 13 seats vote share actually declined.

Sometimes seats were won because the Labour vote was up only a little and the Tories slashed the SNP vote. Rutherglen & Hamilton West was won by Labour with an increase of only 2.3% in vote share, whereas the SNP was down 15.5% and Tories up 12%.

The improvement in Labour's fortunes appeared to happen late in the campaign and has been attributed to a "Corbyn bounce".

With national TV coverage, social media and his personal appearances in Scotland, Corbyn's message of hope and the impressive content of the Labour Manifesto began to make an impact with Scottish voters.

This was in stark contrast to the poor campaign run by Scottish Labour, or rather by a narrow section of the leadership and bureaucracy of the party. They threw everything into attacking the SNP's poor record in government due to its obsession with independence.

These things definitely needed to be said, however, as the dominant motif of the campaign they became annoyingly repetitive. Without making the positive case for Labour's policies it also made the party look as though it was in competition with the Tories, who were pitching the same line. Not a good look.

Above all this approach did not address the Labour voters who had defected to the SNP in big numbers, having voted for independence.

They did this largely because of dis-

enchantment with Labour over decades and the belief that the SNP and independence offered some hope of social progress stymied by Tory and coalition governments in Westminster. Slogans like "only Labour can defeat the SNP" were hardly likely to win people over who were still not convinced that the SNP needed to be defeated. As some were won over by Corbyn so others were alienated by a Scottish Labour negative campaign.

Having said that, Corbyn's success offers Scottish Labour hope for the future. Not only have the SNP got problems, but the Scottish Tories will find it harder to distance themselves from the crisis-ridden party in the rest of the country, not to mention the difficulties which they will have in negotiating Brexit.

This may help reverse some of their advances in Scotland, as will any bigger recovery in Lib Dem fortunes.

The SNP have relied on simplistic and unhistorical assertions about Scotland and England to woo left wing voters' sympathies. They have brazenly adapted these as one by one they were proved faulty and their arguments are now unravelling.

We were told that we needed independence because fairness is in Scotland's DNA and England is irredeemably Tory/UKIP. The election of a UKIP MEP in Scotland did not stall this narrative.

Labour was a neo-liberal Party which Sturgeon described as "Tory-lite" during the 2015 general election. Others branded Labour "Red Tories" a phrase which bizarrely still has some currency. The SNP claimed that they would pull Labour to the left in Westminster. The best options for Scotland were, therefore, independence and the SNP.

Did the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party change this? Hardly at all. Nicola Sturgeon repeatedly dismissed him using words like "pathetic" and scoffing at his leadership and electoral prospects.

Although latterly when the SNP realised that they were beginning to lose ground to Labour in the election and Corbyn was gaining support they put forward the line that they would be better supporters of Corbyn than his own back-benchers, so still best to vote SNP.

Fortunately, however, despite the contortions of the SNP and their supporters ordinary voters are waking up to the possibilities of real change across Britain.

SNP lies have been debunked - Labour is not irredeemably neo-liberal, it is electable and Jeremy Corbyn has demonstrated outstanding leadership.

Scotland is not special - there are plenty of Tories here now.

Though the vote share for Labour was still disappointing in the election it was headed in the right direction. Furthermore canvassers found people on the doorsteps much more thoughtful about how they would cast their votes, more positive about Labour and there was little hostility.

With a more positive campaign they could re-connect with the hopes of voters who abandoned them for the SNP and gain significant successes in future elections.

Under pressure in the election the SNP began to make errors of judgement and their losses have opened up divisions in the party which are usually kept well submerged.

What to do about a future independence referendum is a major headache and has forced Sturgeon to delay the projected date from Spring 2019 to 2021, though she still fudges that to keep her more fundamentalist supporters on board.

These divisions are not just on the surface, but run deep. Corbyn's challenge from the left will open up further conflict within the SNP about the direction it is taking.

Managing the pressures of those who want more instant action on independence, the division between left and right in the party and unhappiness about the narrow clique which runs it will become increasingly hard to manage.

The only party dreading another election as much as the Tories is the SNP. Many of their MPs are sitting on small majorities and the rug has been pulled from under their narrative that only they represent a progressive option for Scotland.

People must now know that Labour can form the next UK government and that the best way to achieve that is by actually voting Labour. If Scottish Labour learns the lessons from Corbyn's campaign it could again be the biggest party in Scotland.

FOOTNOTES

1. At the 2015 general election the Greens stood in 32 constituencies and this time round in only 3. They are strong supporters of independence and there were allegations that they had quit the field to help the SNP, although it may simply be evidence that so-called radical alternatives to the SNP have run out of steam.
2. Based on the SNP having polled nearly 1.5 million votes at the last election in 2015.



How Corbyn cut through: exclusive interview with a senior Labour strategist

Published in - *The Conversation UK* - of which Cardiff University is a founding partner.

The combined impact of social media and the obligation on broadcasters to give fair coverage were the major factors in Labour's unexpected strong showing in the UK general election, according to a key member of leader Jeremy Corbyn's communications team.

By JAMES STEWART - Lecturer, Cardiff University.

In his first interview since the poll, Steve Howell - Corbyn's deputy director of strategy and communications - said Fleet Street's "smear campaign" had backfired.

Howell, who joined Corbyn's team in February, believes the election has exposed a fundamental mismatch between most of the London-based press and the views of the electorate.

He said: "They switched into gear, thinking they could destroy Jeremy Corbyn and Labour with their usual tactics. It was an extraordinary smear campaign and they thought it would work.

"I think the political spectrum of the national press is way to the right of the political thinking of the people of Britain. Our national press is not representative at all of public opinion and can no longer shape it in the way it used to do."

The fact that broadcasters are obliged to give equal - and fair - coverage to political parties during election campaigns gave Corbyn the first real chance to put his views across to the wider public, according to Howell.

This was recognised by researchers from Cardiff and Loughborough universities who found Labour receiving roughly equal broadcast coverage from week two of the campaign - the week that saw Labour's biggest poll surge.

Howell explained: "We knew that once people are exposed to him, they like him. People had not been exposed to him, because they were just getting this very filtered impression of him through 10 second clips on broadcast media - and a very distorted picture through print media. With the election, we had an opportunity to correct that,

because broadcast media has an obligation to be more balanced."

Reaching out

Broadcast coverage was the first key part of the party's media strategy for Corbyn.

The second was the use of social media, including expenditure of £1.3m on digital advertising on *Facebook*, *Snapchat* and *Google* (including "pre-roll" adverts that are shown before videos play on *YouTube*). The aim was to get beyond Corbyn's - and Labour's - own social media footprint and talk not only to the converted.

Before the election, Corbyn had 800,000 followers on *Twitter*, a figure which has now risen to 1.25m - compared to 356,000 for Theresa May.

His *Facebook* page is liked by 1.2m, compared to 427,000 for May. According to Howell, Corbyn's *Facebook* page had a weekly reach of 29m in the final week of the campaign.

He said: "Having a budget [for digital advertising] complimented this massive "organic" reach. Some posts were seen by 15m people - meaning they came up on their *Facebook* page."

Taking risks

Beyond the emphasis on broadcast and social media, Howell believes Labour's team succeeded in turning Corbyn's perceived weaknesses in some areas into strengths.

He said: "Conventional wisdom says if you've got a perceived weakness, you try to deflect and go onto something else.

We took the view that some of these things that were perceived as weaknesses were actually strengths and that we were prepared to take them head-on.

"Some people [in the Labour campaign team] thought this was risky - and it probably was. But I think it's proven to be the right thing to do."

A key decision for the party was regarding how to resume campaigning after the Manchester terrorist attack. Howell says some in the Labour team thought they should focus on domestic issues, such as the NHS.

But they chose to make a speech about terrorism and British foreign policy, which led to a backlash in the press, attacking Corbyn's record on opposing terrorism.

Howell said: "We couldn't know it in advance, but it turned out that what he was saying chimed with what many people felt, that public

opinion shared that view that some of the foreign policy decisions have not actually made us safer."

Behind everything was the awareness that the Labour leader was likely to be attacked as an extremist.

It was reported by the *Daily Telegraph* that Howell had proposed the slogan "The Tories are the real extremists" to a campaign meeting, but had been overruled.

He denies that the proposal was to use the slogan in campaigning: "There was a slide that talked about the Tories as the real extremists.

"The point of the slide was to say that we did need an element of attack in our campaign - and the Tory campaign was almost all attack.

"So all I was saying in my presentation was that we needed to show that if they were going to attack us as extremists, many of the things that they were doing were pretty extreme."

With the election over, Howell says Labour's campaigning strategy will be maintained: "We definitely don't want to lose the momentum - but a degree of focus moves back to parliament, [so] it has to dovetail with campaigning.

"We keep momentum on both fronts - they have to complement each other."



Steve Howell



Jeremy Corbyn

Letter from troubled Latin America

Hope is never lost, but the present picture in Latin America is not good in general, and very different from the sweeping leftward surge of a just a few years ago.

By **DAN MORGAN, Chile.**

Venezuela

The crisis deepens, and a clear pro-imperialist strategy has now appeared.

There is an economic war, created by the right-wing opposition with imperialist help in maintaining low crude oil prices. Venezuela, with the largest proven oil reserves in the world, is too important to the USA to give up easily.

I suspect that the continual refusal of Saudi Arabia to cut production enough to lift prices has to do with pressure from its US ally to maintain the crisis in Venezuela.

Is it too far-fetched to think that the deal made with Iran, to lift sanctions and thus increase oil supply, was also influenced by this factor?

So there are shortages of food and medicines, hoarding, the black market, galloping inflation, speculation and corruption in general.

The violent protests organized by the opposition, are limited in Caracas, the capital, to an upper middle class area, but have no end. Although there is growing feeling against violence, the atmosphere of destabilization will have some effect.

Taking advantage of the discontent caused by the government's inability to solve the economic problems, the right-wing scored a major victory in the December 2015 elections to the National Assembly (Parliament).

The opposition MUD (Table of Democratic Unity) got 56% of the votes (7.7 million), and the Great Patriotic Pole 41% (5.6 million). This latter includes the PSUV (United Socialist Party), with 52 seats, and the Communist Party, 2 seats.

The results of the election of four deputies (MPs) in the Amazonas region were declared void by the Supreme Court (TSJ) because of irregularities but the opposition insisted on counting them. Thus the National Assembly put

itself in contempt of court, and its decisions have been ignored by the government since.

Faced with opposition violence and the deepening crisis, President Maduro repeatedly appeals for peace. In a surprise measure, on May first he called for elections to a new National Constituent Assembly (NCA) to write a new constitution.

There is an economic war, created by the right-wing opposition with imperialist help in maintaining low crude oil prices.

Venezuela, with the largest proven oil reserves in the world, is too important to the USA to give up easily.

... the continual refusal of Saudi Arabia to cut production enough to lift prices has to do with pressure from its US ally to maintain the crisis in Venezuela.

This promises peace, a solution to financial speculation, and a move to a new economic model.⁽⁴⁾ It will at least buy time to try and solve the dramatic economic situation.

The MUD organized an unofficial 'plebiscite' on Sunday 16th July, demanding rejection of the NCA, and calling on the armed forces to support decisions of the National Assembly.

They claimed 7.6 million votes but no check is possible, as the ballots were publicly burned the same day. This was followed by a call for a 'civic strike' on the following Thursday.

This was said to be very partial by the

government, apart from affecting commerce, but public transport was affected in opposition-held areas of Caracas. There were road blocks, an attack on the national television station, people burned alive, and armed attacks on police and barracks, including now the use of rifles.

Then, the Assembly illegally voted to appoint new judges on the Supreme Court. Their strategy seemed to be: Sabotage the 30th July elections and try to achieve a low voter turnout; Declare the NCA to be illegitimate, and the National Assembly (NA), its appointed Supreme Court, and Election Council to be the legitimate powers, and call for foreign intervention to back this up.

The viciously neoliberal governments in Brazil and Argentina, the big powers in Latin America, would support them and a coup d'état might follow, dependent of course on achieving significant support in the armed forces.

Is the political process in Venezuela revolutionary? Certainly, because a change in class power is at stake.

The Communist Party of Venezuela has formed, with other left-wing forces, a 'Popular Anti-Imperialist and Anti-Fascist Front', which calls for a revolutionary solution to the crisis, power moving definitively to the working class and the people. It has called for unity with the PSUV.

Maduro has said the judges 'appointed' by the NA to the supreme court will be arrested, a strong, positive move.

The opposition called a 48 hour civic strike for Wednesday and Thursday 26th and 27th July, just before the NCA election. These ever more violent protests have increased the desire for peace.

In any revolutionary process there are critical points, decisive for the future. I may be too sombre, but I have been reminded of the title of an article by Jorge Insunza, the Chilean communist leader, some months before the coup in 1973: 'You must be a hammer or an anvil'.

He was quoting from Georgi Dimitrov's speech when on trial for his life in 1933 in Germany for the Reichstag fire.

The great Bulgarian communist leader quoted in turn from the poem 'Another' by the renowned German poet, Goethe:



".. You must either conquer and rule or serve and lose, suffer or triumph, be anvil or hammer."

Dimitrov continued: "Yes, he who does not want to be an anvil, must be a hammer. The German working class did not realize the truth of this either in 1918, or in 1923, or on July 20, 1932, or in January 1933 ...".

Faced with an ever more intransigent and aggressive opposition, backed by imperialist money and plotting, it is to be hoped that the Venezuelan working class will choose to be hammer, and not anvil.

The NCA is a good start. Elections took place on Sunday 30th July. The result was a massive vote of over 8 million, 41% of the total possible, despite the boycott with intimidation by the opposition.

Note that the voting machines give a paper record for each vote, so claims of fraud are laughable. It was a vote above all for peace.

Many of the countries in Latin America have fallen in with the US State Department line of calling for an 'end to violence, and dialogue' implicitly and falsely blaming the government for the violence and crisis.

ALBA

At the recent meeting of the Organization of American states (OAS) an attempt to censure Venezuela was defeated by the majority of Caribbean islands, who have received important solidarity from Venezuela in the form of cheap oil.

The countries of the ALBA - the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of

Our America - have rejected the recent threats of intervention by the government of the USA.

Apart from Venezuela, the ALBA countries are: Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and the islands of St Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Granada, Antigua & Barbuda, Dominica, St Kitts & Nevis. Suriname and Haiti are also observer nations.

Cuba is in the process of discussion of a new economic model, which aims to protect its economic independence.

Bolivia has the highest economic growth rate in the continent this year, and continues to improve social welfare and reduce poverty.

Ecuador has also suffered from low oil prices but is now recovering. The right wing there also made a push for the re-

cent general elections, with the mass media as usual having the most impact.

However, Lenin Moreno was elected in the run-off with 51%, having got 39% in the first round.

Lenin is the successor to Rafael Correa who, in 10 years as president, achieved remarkable social and economic success, having inherited a country almost in bankruptcy and chaos.

Lenin Moreno is another Latin American politician whose name reflects the influence of communist parties on the continent. There are several Vladimirs.

He seems to be very different, however, and even Correa, no hard-liner, has criticized him for being too conciliatory with the rabid opposition.

Nicaragua

Nicaragua - since 2007 - under President Daniel Ortega again, is probably the most stable of the Central American



Daniel Ortega after his election victory in 1984 and (below) today as President once again.



countries, with economic progress and social gains, at the cost of giving up the aim of moving to socialism.

Colombia

After 53 heroic years, and several attempts to win a peace agreement, the

guerilla army FARC-EP has finally been able to disarm and pass onto political struggle.

President Santos fought hard against his predecessor Uribe to achieve this, and now the agreement is not being properly fulfilled by the Colombian state – whether with Santos’ connivance, or by state forces opposed to the agreement, is not known.

The situation is not easy by any means: political violence in Colombia has been almost continuous since 1948, and many leaders of previous guerrilla groups were assassinated after peace agreements.

Murders of trade unionists, social and political activists are common and the means to stop these are difficult to find.

Argentina

President Macri, after wining just 51% of the votes against a weak candidate chosen as the successor to Cristina Fernández, has now reversed many of the progressive policies of Cristina and Néstor Kirchner before her.

This has been helped by the weak political base; Peronism is such a diverse movement. Now it seems to be re-organizing, and forming alliances with more solid and left-wing movements.

There have been successful strikes against Macri’s policies – opposition to them is massive, and what is needed now are the political alliances to defeat them firstly at the ballot box.

Brazil

Here in the continent’s giant, the situation is similar. The fraudulent impeachment of Dilma Rouseff for non-existent corruption, by the wholly corrupt Congress, has been followed by the imposition of vicious neoliberal policies.

The reaction is developing but the obvious opposition leader, Lula de Silva, may be prevented from standing next year as president by a recent conviction for corruption – followed by the freezing of his assets.

He will appeal but the reactionary supreme court may well uphold the decision.

Another Workers’ Party (WP) candidate might be found but would not have the popularity of Lula.

The WP itself is far from free of corruption, and a long furrow needs to be ploughed to develop other, more consistent socialist forces.

Chile

The elections in October this year will be hard fought. There is much feeling against the traditional political parties, because of the revelations of illegal

financing of them all (nearly) by big business in Chile.

The right-wing press and a lot of posts on *Facebook* hammer away at this, and the centre-left will suffer as right wingers do not worry about it.

The Communist Party, with 6 deputies in congress, has had a significant impact in improving the policies of the ruling coalition, the New Majority (NM) but has suffered electorally because of its association with the others.

The main candidate for the NM is an independent, a senator but a former journalist. The hope is, he will suffer less than a party political candidate.

He is against Sebastián Piñera, the devious former president, a teflon man who shrugs off the evidence of his shady business dealings.

A new political movement has also arisen, due to the revulsion against the traditional parties - the ‘Frente Amplio’ (Broad Front).

This is a varied alliance of left-wing, green and liberal parties and movements and has got a lot of publicity from ‘El Mercurio’ the consistently right-wing and pro-imperialist daily. Its candidate, Beatriz Sánchez, will split the progressive vote but probably not achieve going to the second round of voting.

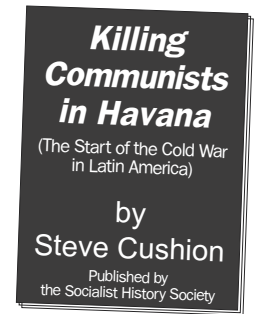
These elections, for Congress also, will be the first under new rules: perhaps the biggest gain of this parliament has been the prohibition of companies financing politics, and the end of the binominal system. There will now be a limited form of proportional election, with at least 3 deputies or senators elected from each constituency.

FOOTNOTES

1. The 9 objectives of the NCA, as given by President Maduro, are:

- 1) To restore peace,
- 2) Develop a new economic model, a post-oil economy,
- 3) Give the Social Missions constitutional status,
- 4) Strengthen the judicial system to tackle corruption, impunity, speculation, etc.,
- 5) Recognise the new forms of democracy like the ‘Comunas’,
- 6) Defend Venezuelan sovereignty against foreign intervention,
- 7) Promote pluriculturalism, to overcome racial and social hatred,
- 8) Recognise youth rights, including to a first home, and
- 9) Preserve biodiversity and promote ecological culture.

Cuba's resilient working class



Killing Communists in Havana
(*The Start of the Cold War in Latin America*) by Steve Cushion
Published by the Socialist History Society

Review By GINA NICHOLSON

Cocooned as we still are - just - in one of the citadels of imperialism, where the stability of the system made it necessary to buy off the workers, and imperialist super-profits made it possible, it is sometimes difficult to imagine what class war can be like. Incidents like Orgreave are the exception, not the rule.

In contrast Steve Cushion demonstrates, in his short account 'Killing Communists in Havana', the savagery that the ruling class can descend to; but that it can also make mistakes; and that the Cuban working class was very resilient despite a long murderous campaign against it.

He also shows the anti-communist AFL acting as the frontrunner for the American State Department in Latin America.

Published by the Socialist History Association and subtitled *The Start of the Cold War in Latin America*, this booklet covers in detail about fifteen years from the beginning of the Second World War, and describes the battles between the organised working class and the big US firms invested in Cuba and represented by the Cuban government.

Having quickly shown how American capital, in particular sugar capital in the name of the United Fruit Company, came to dominate and constrain the Cuban economy, Cushion describes the development of the Cuban trade union movement, which, with over one sixth of the population organised in the CTC (Workers' Confederation of Cuba), had, by the late nineteen-forties, 'the highest percentage of trade unionised workers in Latin America.'

The CTC was dominated by the Cuban Communist Party, founded in 1925, later known as the PSP (Partido Socialista Popular).

In consequence of the perceived need to defend the Soviet Union by helping the war effort, during the Second World

War the Cuban Communist Party, like many other communist parties in Allied countries, had temporarily come to terms with the government and big employers, in return gaining certain reforms.

However with the defeat of the Axis powers, the Soviet Union once again became, to the capitalist class and America in particular, the enemy, along with the communist parties in the countries hitherto allied with it.

Thus in Cuba the aim of the employ-

Steve Cushion demonstrates ... the savagery to which the ruling class can descend; but that it can make mistakes; and that the Cuban working class was very resilient despite a long murderous campaign against it.

ers was, of course, to remove the gains made by the workers during the war, to diminish the power of the working class, and to remove the influence of the PSP.

American Federation of Labour

In the United States the American Federation of Labour (AFL), an anti-socialist organisation which placed 'the interest of the union bureaucracy over any notion of workers' solidarity', during the Second World War offered its services to the US government in combating communism in Latin America.

An Italian anti-communist, Serafino Romualdi, under its auspices toured Latin America towards the end of the war and in February 1946 he was appointed as AFL special representative to Latin America. Philip Agee described him as, "The principal CIA agent for Labour relations in Latin America."

His task was to destroy the CTAL (Confederacion de Trabajadores de America Latina), set up in 1938 to unite all the workers of Latin America.

It contained communists and its leader was regarded as a fellow-traveller. Romualdi saw the Cuban CTC as crucial to the CTAL, and set about destabilising the CTC.

In the CTC at that time the important political parties were the PSP and the Partido Autentico, the ruling party in Cuba, known as the Autenticos.

Because the latter party had little working class support it was convenient for it to co-operate with the PSP.

These two groups plus other independent trade unionists willing to work with them referred to themselves as the unitarios - probably what we would call the broad left. The overtly anti-communist Autenticos formed the Comision Obrera Nacional (Autentica) (CON(A)).

During the war the US State Department had reined in the CON(A) in its attempts to take over the CTC, but in 1946 the Cuban President Grau won a majority in the mid-term parliamentary elections, which meant he no longer needed the support of the communists. He encouraged the CON(A) thenceforth in its anti-communist crusade.

Around the 1947 Congress of the CTC a battle was waged which started with arguments about delegates' credentials and ended with a member of the CON(A) killed and a PSP member wounded.

The Minister of Labour, Carlos Prio, suspended the Congress. The CTC offices were then raided and several people including Aracelio Iglesias, a leading docker, were arrested on trumped-up charges of possession of arms.

The new government-appointed credentials committee then dragged its feet and had not reported a month later, so, following a successful May Day rally, the General Secretary of the CTC, Lazaro Pena, 'decided not to wait for the credentials report and the CTC executive convened the fifth congress on the 4th May.'

Despite a call from the CON(A) to boycott the congress, three quarters of

the labour movement sent delegates.

The CON(A) and the independents then held their own Congress on July 6th, and elected Angel Cofino, an 'independent' and leader of the electrical workers' federation, as General Secretary. This congress was financed by the Ministry of Education with \$40,000 intended for primary education.

Carlos Prio, the Minister of Labour, had been working, behind the scenes, with Eusebio Mujal, who soon became the effective leader of the CON(A).

Cushion describes him: 'Mujal had never been a worker, but was an ex-Communist, ex-Trotskyist, now Autentico parliamentary representative from Guantanamo ... He did not allow this to stand in his way; his political connections, personal corruption, and murderous ruthlessness amply compensated for his lack of a base in the trade union movement.'

The Ministry of Labour recognised the CON(A) congress and held the unitarios' congress to be null and void, expelled the unitarios from the CTC HQ and handed over the keys to Angel Cofino.

The consequent protest strikes were put down with 'considerable brutality' and hundreds of arrests. The PSP radio station was closed down.

Then the CON(A) moved against the unitarios in the constituent unions. In some this presented no problem; in others there was a more entrenched tradition of struggle and this demanded stronger methods. The government turned to armed gangsters.

Gangsterism

Cuba had a history of gangsterism. President Machado had used police and army against the street protests aroused by the 1929 slump, and had also set up

unofficial death squads to murder his opponents. Inevitably counter-death squads arose, with little politics but a hatred of Machado.

Under President Grau (1944-48) two of these gangs became embedded in the police force, leading to an armed battle between two factions of the police, known as the Orfino affair.

Under President Carlos Prio (1948-52) gangsterism was raised to a method of government.

Cushion explains: '[Prio] had particularly close links with a gang called Accion Revolucionaria Guiteras (ARG) who did much of the dirty work of removing those unitario CTC leaders who would not go quietly and could not be bought; a task facilitated by Prio giving ARG leader Eufemio Fernandez a job as head of the Policia Secreta Nacional ... and appointing Jesus Gonzalez Cartas (aka El Extrano), another prominent ARG hoodlum, as Chief of the Policia Maritima del Puerto de la Habana'.

Public transport was well unionised and the union was dominated by the PSP. A leading member of the ARG, Marco Hirigoyen, 'gained control of the transport workers' union in a particularly ruthless manner.'

A peaceful deputation of bus workers was ambushed and shot at by police and three workers wounded, one of whom, Anton Lezcano, later died of his injuries.

The police with Ministry of Labour officials then ejected the elected leadership from the Autobuses Modernos union offices and installed the 'official' CTC.

There followed a wave of assassinations, and shooting attacks (for example three train drivers were wounded in a shooting attack, and see table below for some of the assassinations) which Hirigoyen used to gain control of

the transport union.

In the tobacco industry mechanisation was accepted by the tobacco workers' union (Federacion Tabacalero Nacional (FTN)) for the export market but resisted for the domestic market.

When at the end of January 1948 Aguirre, the new Minister of Labour, annulled the FTN elections, the union 'took scant notice and on 28th February 1948 launched a campaign to defend hand rolling of cigars for domestic consumption'.

The Minister of Labour then appointed one Manuel Campaneria Rojas as the new head of the FTN. Campaneria on April 1st attacked the headquarters of the Sindicato de Torcedores (Cigar Rollers' Union) where the 'displaced unitarios leadership of the CTC had taken refuge', but the building was successfully defended by a large crowd of workers.

The next day Campaneria with ten others attacked a cigar factory and killed a popular leader of the Havana cigar makers, Miguel Fernandez Roig. 'The gunmen escaped with the aid of the police'.

Later that year the FTN held further elections which the unitario candidates won; the government then seized the building of the Cigar Rollers' Union; the Havana tobacco workers responded with a general strike during which nearly 1,000 pickets were arrested.

Attempts by the 'official' CTC to get scab labour failed, and the strike continued until all those arrested had been released. The campaign of violence continued for some time but the PSP was able to maintain a significant presence in the industry.

In the sugar industry the union - the FNTA - was controlled by the unitarios. During the late 1940s the sugar industry

Some Assassinations 1947-49

2.10.47	Anton Lezcano	Transport workers' leader	Killed by police
10.11.47	Manuel Montoro	Leading communist activist on the buses	Shot in café by ARG gunmen
22.01.48	Jesus Menendez	Sugar workers' leader	Shot in back by army officer
02.04.48	Miguel Fernandez Roig	Tobacco worker- shop floor activist	Killed by newly appointed Campaneria (ARG)
11.04.48	Hector Cabrera	Rank and file communist on the buses	Killed by ARG gunmen
15.10.48	Aracelio Iglesias	Dockers' leader	Killed by two gunmen
20.10.48	Carlos Febles	Bus driver, union activist	Shot dead while asleep in his bus
18.09.49	Jose Oviedo	Communist, sugar workers' militant	Shot by Oscar Faez, a CON(A) appointee
18.09.49	Amancio Rodriguez	Communist, sugar workers' leader who had been removed during the purges	Shot by gunmen

was suffering through the fall in sugar prices worldwide.

An alternative - very small - FNTA was set up and recognised by the government. The unitario FNTA ignored this and began a campaign of strikes and demonstrations against wage cuts at the end of 1947. The government sent soldiers to attack union meetings in the localities.

Jesus Menendez Larrondo, General Secretary of the FNTA, toured the localities and at Matanzas station an army officer shot him in the back, an assassination ordered by the Chief of the Army General Staff. The funeral of Menendez was a huge protest in itself and there were many protest strikes.

In the Havana docks rampant inflation had been partly met with wage rises, due to the militancy of the dock workers and the inspired leadership of Aracelio Iglesias, who was on the national executive of the National Maritime Workers' Federation (FOMN).

Cushion writes: 'In February 1948, the Ministry of Labour imposed Gilberto Goliath and Juan Arevalo as leaders of the FOMN and the communist daily, *Hoy*, reminded its readers of Arevalo's links with Serafino Romualdi and the AFL, whose hand they saw behind this particular move.'

When Iglesias was re-elected FOMN secretary for the port of Havana the government annulled the election and gave control of the union to supporters of the CON(A).

Strikes and demonstrations followed, and two days after a mass meeting Iglesias was shot in the back and murdered by two gunmen.

Notes of a US Embassy meeting in Havana the following year make it clear that a gangster named Soler had 'deliberately killed Iglesias at the instance of the Suri Castillo faction' and that there were 'about 12 more Communist leaders that must be eliminated as soon as possible.'

In 1949 Eusebio Mujal, by a series of manoeuvres, took over as General Secretary of the CTC. In this year the headquarters of the anti-communist CIT, which had been set up in opposition to the CTAL in Latin America, was moved to Havana.

In 1951 the CIT changed its name to Organizacion Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores (ORIT). In the mid-fifties ORIT out-maneuvred and replaced the CTAL in Latin America, thus achieving a more complete victory for anti-communism in the region than was possible in Cuba itself.

While the assassinations of a number of workers' leaders had been setbacks

and it took some time for the workers' movement to recover, that recovery was well under way in the early fifties.

The corrupt Mujalista leadership of the CTC and some constituent unions proved incapable of completely reining in the workers' demands, and on the ground the unitarios network remained and was able to organise quite effectively.

"Dead Cities"

In July 1951 an outbreak of strikes in the tobacco industry (against mechanisation) culminated in a wave of 'dead cities' (ciudades muertas) a form of action in which a general strike is accompanied by the voluntary closing of businesses and shops in an entire town.

During one such action, a protestor, Alfredo Lopez Brito, was shot dead by police in Cabaiguan and the townsfolk began taking up arms. Seeing that it was losing control of the situation, the government capitulated.

When Batista finally staged his coup the business community were his most enthusiastic supporters.

The previous year had seen considerable turbulence in the sugar industry, in which the 'official' leadership was marginalised by the still-existing unitarios organisation in the localities.

Cushion points out that the strikes, which broke out simultaneously in a number of provinces, could not have happened without 'an effective network of militants able to generalise and plan such action.' There were also strikes in a number of docks which the government finally settled at some cost.

The mujalista control of the unions had destroyed the official organisation which collected subscriptions, and it became important despite a government subsidy for the 'official' unions to

recover the union subscriptions.

The solution was a compulsory check-off of union dues. This proved unpopular and in many cases unworkable, with the employers in the sugar industry forced to pay one percent of their wage bill to the FNTA and the CTC and the workers threatening to strike if the deduction was made to their wages - thus the payment was made out of company profits and greatly resented by the employers.

This was not the only debacle which increased the unpopularity of the government, already widely despised because of rampant corruption and criminality.

The chaotic state of Havana's public transport system was due to William Pawley, owner of Autobuses Modernos, and the gangsters of the ARG who ran the transport unions. (For further fascinating details of William Pawley, fraudster and incompetent spy, the reader must refer to the book itself.)

In this situation the government chose to increase fares, which caused a public outcry and gave the PSP newspaper *Hoy*, which had just won a legal battle and restarted publication, a popular cause. After massive protests the increase was dropped in September 1951.

The magazine *Bohemia* in January 1952 ran an opinion poll in which the Ortodoxos came out 12 points ahead of the ruling party, the Autenticos.

President Prio feared an Ortodoxos victory because they had promised to investigate him, so he ignored all warnings of Batista's projected coup and intervened to prevent the ARG from murdering him. When Batista finally staged his coup the business community were his most enthusiastic supporters.

Cushion concludes that the brevity of Batista's hold on power was partly due to the resilience of the working class whose organisation had been forced to develop new structures due to the attacks of the post-war years, and had survived them.

The Socialist Correspondent

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CENTENARY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Ten Days that Shook the World



John Reed

Ten Days That Shook the World - by John Reed
 First Published - March 1919

Review By FRIEDA PARK

It is impossible to over-estimate the significance of the Russian Revolution of November 1917, when for the first time in history the working-class gained state power and held it in the face of all kinds of de-stabilisation and adversity.

Right at the heart of events as they dramatically unfolded John Reed, an American journalist and communist, was eye-witness to the *Ten Days that Shook the World*.

The vivid title is typical of his writing as he brings to life events both historic and everyday so that the reader can feel what it was like to live through the Revolution in Red Petrograd, Moscow and at the front in the fight against the counter-revolutionaries.

It is so skilfully written that it reads like an adventure story, but also manages to illuminate the key issues facing the Bolsheviks and the revolutionary working-class.

He draws together what he himself witnessed along with excerpts from speeches, proclamations, newspaper articles and decrees. It is a must-read for anyone who wishes to understand not only the Russian Revolution, but any socialist revolutionary process.

Reed gives a bit of background at the start of the book to the development of the revolutionary movement from the strikes and mass political activity of 1905.

Russia was a backward country, with a relatively small working-class and a huge peasantry under the heel of large landowners.

It was governed autocratically by the Tsar, however, the struggles of 1905 began to pressurise Tsarism for democratic change. Reforms, however, were too little too late and did not address the many grievances of workers, peasants and soldiers.

Reed also gives an index of the different political parties, popular and government organisations of the time. This is helpful as the sheer number of these and their shifting positions in an array of different government and popular meetings can be confusing. Official government bodies were increasingly being challenged by organs of popular power, the Soviets, committees directly representing workers, soldiers and peasants.

The action proper starts in Chapter 3, which covers October 30th to November 6th.

During this time Reed gives a picture of the debates and preparations leading up to the revolution. He is present in the Bolshevik headquarters in the Smolny Institute. At the centre of the Revolution the Petrograd Soviet (pictured below) is in continuous session with delegates scarcely sleeping.

The struggle rages in the streets, in working-class organisations and among the soldiers. This is a battle involving armed power and force, but is also a battle of ideas and of propaganda where the support of each section of the class and the peasants and each regiment of the army has to be fought for.

“In the barracks and the working-class quarters of the town the Bolsheviks were preaching, ‘All Power to the Soviets!’ and agents of the Dark Forces were urging people to rise and slaughter the Jews, shop-keepers, Socialist leaders...

“On one side the Monarchist press, inciting to bloody repression – on the other Lenin’s great voice roaring, ‘Insurrection! ...We cannot wait any longer!’”⁽¹⁾

Each of the next seven chapters cov-



**1917:
 A meeting of the
 Petrograd
 Soviet Assembly.**

CENTENARY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

ers a single day capturing the exciting ebb and flow of the revolution.

At the start the Bolsheviks were not a mass party, nor did they command majority support, however, they worked to win people over to their bold and principled position, that the situation in Russia provided the opportunity for capitalism's defeat and for the working-class to take power.

Chapter 4 chronicles the decisive turning point on the 7th of November when the Provisional Government falls and the Soviets assume power.

Using their American passports, Reed and his colleagues talk their way into the Winter Palace, at that point still the government building.

He describes the demoralised chaos all around and it is later that same day that the assault on the Palace takes place, defining the victory of the revolution.

Reed is out once more in the streets in the thick of the action: "As we reached the Nevsky again another armoured car came around the corner, and a man poked his head out of the turret-top. 'Come on!' he yelled. 'Let's go on through and attack!' The driver of the other car came over, and shouted so as to be heard above the roaring engine. 'The Committee says to wait. They have got artillery behind the wood-piles in there...'"⁽²⁾

"At the Mikhailovsky a man appeared with an armful of newspapers, and was immediately stormed by frantic people, offering a rouble, five roubles, ten roubles, tearing at each other like animals.

"It was Rabotchi i Soldat, announcing the victory of the Proletarian Revolution, the liberation of the Bolsheviks still in prison, calling upon the Army front and rear for support...a feverish little sheet of four pages..."⁽³⁾

Though a decisive turning point had been reached victory had not yet been

secured.

Among the working-class, peasantry, soldiers and others, key groups still had to be won for the revolution and the forces of reaction were organising military action and de-stabilisation to try to overthrow the new revolutionary power.

Reed was there on the 8th of November when Lenin appeared at the Congress of Soviets. He draws a pen picture of his appearance and demeanour and the electrifying moment when he announces: "We will now proceed to construct the Socialist order!"⁽⁴⁾

In the first place that meant turning the slogan of the Revolution, "Peace, Bread and Land", into practical measures.

That day congress debated and agreed as the priority - The Proclamation to the Peoples and Governments of all of the Belligerent Nations - proposing that there be a negotiated end to the slaughter of the first World War ensuring a just and democratic peace.

In the same session the Decree on Land was agreed, abolishing private ownership of land and transferring it from the big estates to the peasants.

This was followed by the Decree of the Constitution of Power, which transferred power to a new state structure based on the Soviets.

By the standards of our own ponderous political processes the swiftness and ability of the new Soviet power to agree these positions demonstrates the dynamism of a revolutionary situation and the seemingly limitless possibilities it provides.

The debates in the Congress were intense and hard-fought, however, putting its decrees into practice proved even more challenging.

Internally and externally there were huge problems in holding power and being able to use it effectively.

Civil servants at all levels refused to collaborate with the Soviet Government, preventing access to, and sometimes destroying, vital records, including financial information.

Funds were cut off to the needy, with the government unable to counter such actions. Banks refused to deal with it and the government had no cash. Utilities and telephones were cut off to the Smolny.

It was a day to day struggle for power and resources.

Reed describes the scene in the telephone exchange, where despite the offer to improve the pay and conditions of the telephonists, most of them fled the building, leaving only a handful of women who then had to train from scratch a motley selection of volunteers.

Food which had been hoarded by speculators was seized and emissaries sent out with goods to barter with the peasants for grain.

The use of electricity was limited to save power. The banks were nationalised.

Despite the chaos and defying the odds stacked against it, the Revolution found solutions to the problems it encountered, doing whatever had to be done.

Efforts at destabilisation went further. Counter-revolutionaries declared war on the Soviet government and were backed up in this by foreign powers.

On November 9th, Kerensky placed himself at the head of the regiments which "remained faithful to the fatherland".⁽⁵⁾ Kerensky had been prime minister in the toppled Provisional Government and was on the right of the reformist forces in Russia.

The capitalist press played its part in spreading untruths and stoking up fear, leading to the banning their newspapers.

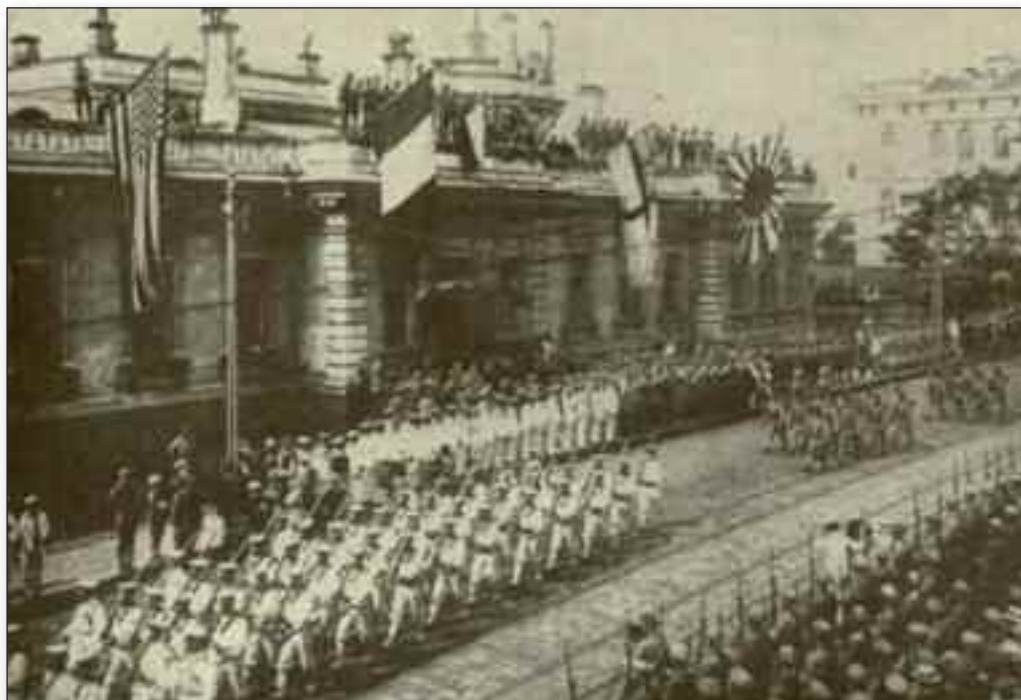
On the 10th of November Reed visits



February 1917 - "Red" Petrograd: revolutionaries (left) and Red Army soldiers (right) march in support of the revolution.

Petrograd - originally named St. Petersburg in 1713 - became Leningrad in 1924 and again St. Petersburg in 1991.

CENTENARY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION



US, British and Japanese troops parade in the Russian Pacific port of Vladivostok in support of the Tsarist counter-revolutionary White Army.

the front-line, describing graphically the fight for Petrograd.

“As we came out into the dark and gloomy day all around the grey horizon factory whistles were blowing, a hoarse and nervous sound, full of foreboding. By tens of thousands the working-people poured out, men and women: by the tens of thousands the humming slums belched out their dun and miserable hordes.

“Red Petrograd was in danger! Cossacks! South and south-west they poured through the shabby streets toward the Moskovsky Gate, men, women and children, with rifles, picks, spades, rolls of wire, cartridge-belts over their working clothes ... Such an immense, spontaneous out-pouring of a city was never seen! ... the revolutionary proletariat defending with its breast the capital of the Workers’ and Peasants’ Republic!”⁽⁶⁾

Ultimately this attempt to over-throw Soviet power is defeated by troops loyal to the revolution, the Red Guards⁽⁷⁾ and the armed working-class that Reed describes. Kerensky flees and his troops surrender on November 15th.

“I went back to Petrograd riding on the front seat of an auto truck, driven by a workman and filled with Red Guards. ... The old workman who drove held the wheel in one hand, while with the other he swept the far-gleaming capital in an exultant gesture. ‘Mine!’ he cried, his face all alight. ‘All mine now! My Petrograd!’”⁽⁸⁾

During all this ferment the Congress

of the Soviets continued to meet and issue decrees. On November 15th there is the Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia, signalling the end of imperial domination of the minorities of the Russian empire. Secret treaties between Russia and other imperialist powers are published and Russia sues for peace effectively ending its involvement in the First World War.

On the international stage the new Soviet government demonstrates its radical departure from the norms of imperialism, dominating and exploiting other nations.

It is an end to Russia’s involvement in carving up the world by agreement between great powers and to the fighting of wars to serve these interests.

The final chapter of the book covers the Peasants’ Congress. By that point, 18th November, 11 days after the storming of the Winter Palace and the fall of the Provisional government the peasants of Russia still had not been fully won for the Revolution. Given the vast numbers of peasants, compared to the working-class this was a necessity.

Reed describes the cut and thrust of debate, with the congress eventually declaring unanimously its support for the Revolution and the victory of Socialism.

There are many lessons about the revolutionary process that can be drawn from Reed’s account:

■ There was already mass unrest across Russia leading up to the Revolution. This did not initially have a revolu-

tionary or socialist character, nevertheless, Lenin and the Bolsheviks understood the depths of the crisis of Tsarism and capitalism and that the people were prepared to act to address their grievances.

■ Disaffection among ordinary soldiers worn out by being cannon-fodder for Tsarism in the First World War meant that the state could not rely on them to put down an insurrection, indeed many were also being won over to revolutionary, socialist ideas. The Bolsheviks correctly identified that this had the potential, not just to achieve change in Russia, but to be a revolutionary moment.

■ Though not a mass party, the Bolshevik’s organisation and political analysis won over workers, soldiers and peasants, defeating the other parties which had more cautious, reformist programmes.

■ Using a Marxist analysis, the Bolsheviks were clear about the nature of class power and the necessity of defeating the ideological and armed might of the capitalist state, completely replacing it with the institutions and ideas of working-class power.

■ They anticipated and resolutely combated counter-revolutionary attempts at destabilising and over-throwing Soviet power.

The success of the Russian revolution was not a foregone conclusion but, seeing that it could be possible to achieve socialism, the Bolsheviks acted decisively to make it happen.

They also saw the significance of the revolution as not just national, but as international, ending the imperialist slaughter of the First World War, offering freedom to the oppressed peoples of Russia and leading the way for the working-class elsewhere to follow its example.

FOOTNOTES

1. All quotes from Progress Publishers Edition of *Ten Days that Shook the World*. P60
2. P87
3. P88.
4. P117
5. P132
6. P156
7. These were militias of working people, not part of the regular armed forces of the state.
8. P200