

# The Socialist Correspondent

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Can the EU  
be reformed?

Has the EU  
stopped wars?

## Is the European Union DEMOCRATIC?

Will the EU mean  
more austerity?

Will the EU  
benefit workers?

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# The Socialist Correspondent

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## EU Referendum

The deep divisions within the Tory Party over the EU referendum reflect the long-held differences within that party.

These differences mirror the divisions within the British Ruling class over the issue of how best to maintain capitalist Britain's role and place in the world. There is unity on wishing to retain the USA as the main ally but division over how to deal with their other capitalist allies and rivals, notably Germany and France.

The referendum debate within the Tory Party has brought to the fore the jockeying for the position of leader after David Cameron's departure, which he has indicated will be before the next General Election in 2020. Among the current leadership contenders, Boris Johnson and George Osborne, stand on either side of the debate.

The differences within the Tory Party have dominated the debate and as John Moore points out in his article, "there is not a powerful left campaign for exit".

In 1975 at the time of the previous referendum on the issue there was a much greater understanding that the European Economic Community (EEC), now the EU, was in essence a capitalist club.

The EU's principle aims were, and still are, to further capitalism and to weaken working people's resistance and their fight for an alternative.

These capitalist principles, including the free movement of capital and labour within the single market, are designed to weaken workers' organisation and their ability to maintain and improve wages and conditions and thus to maximise profitability.

Those who argue that the EU protects workers rights are ignoring what

## Commentary

has happened in Greece, Portugal and Spain in recent years. Workers' rights are gained and maintained by struggle, not gifted by the EU.

As John Moore argues, the EU, given its design, is undemocratic, unreformable, does not defend workers' rights and is not a force for peace.

## Immigration

One of the main issues in the Referendum debate is that of Immigration. Noah Tucker in his article, "The Immigration dividend", reminds us that it was Yvette Cooper, who declared that "we won't enter an arms race of rhetoric on immigration – and we hope the Prime Minister won't either" and then in other parts of that same speech took the initiative in that downward spiral of anti-immigrant (not merely anti-immigration) policies and rhetoric."

The right-wing of the Labour Party has echoed and often sounded more strident than the Tories in this regard. However, as Tucker points out it will always be the Tories (or UKIP and the far right) who will be the beneficiaries of this, not the Labour Party nor working people.

## Set-back for coup against Corbyn

The sustained attack on Jeremy Corbyn ever since his election as leader and then, on the eve of the May elections, the well-orchestrated 'anti-semitism' row, was not as successful as intended or hoped for by Corbyn's opponents.

Questor, in the article, "Pro-Israel lobby attacks Corbyn", points out that, "The aim of this latest campaign ...

was not just to lay the basis for the removal of Corbyn ... but also to rework the definition of anti-Semitism ... This wider aim is to make opposition to Zionism and Israel's actions against the Palestinians synonymous with anti-Semitism."

Predictions made by the Tory press and many leading right-wing Labour people that the Labour Party under its new leader, would lose hundreds of seats in the English local elections proved wrong.

Labour did rather better than predicted and so, for the time being at least, a coup against Corbyn's leadership has been set-back.

## UK's May Elections

The May elections in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England do not reveal a simple picture. That is why we have given a relatively detailed account and analyses of the election results from the different parts of the country.

In Scotland the SNP continue their dominance after nine years in government. Before and since the 2014 Independence Referendum the constitutional issue has replaced class as the fault-line in Scottish politics.

This suits both the SNP and the Tories as it diverts people from blaming capitalism for their problems.

The Scottish Labour Party - having arrogantly taken for granted its pre-eminent place among working people for decades - is now paying a heavy electoral price for the long years of managing, rather than challenging, capitalism.

It is now being squeezed between the self-proclaimed 'progressive' SNP camp and the Tories as the self-proclaimed 'mainstay' of the union.

The Scottish Labour Party should reflect on the victory of Corbyn in the leadership election and the thousands who have been inspired to join the party. Corbyn's continuing success in galvanizing support for a pro-socialist anti-austerity agenda is the most fruitful basis for a fightback against the nationalists.

Scottish Labour should remember it is solidarity with working people everywhere, including the rest of the UK, that holds the key to a better future.



**Boris Johnson and George Osborne**  
Tory party leadership rivals



**Jeremy Corbyn**



European Central Bank



# Is European Union undemocratic?

**The bulk of Britain's establishment is behind Prime Minister, David Cameron's campaign for the UK to remain in the European Union (EU), though substantial sections are not, including several media barons and British manufacturers.**

By **JOHN MOORE**

The EU referendum debate has been dominated by the right in British politics reflecting the deep divisions especially inside the Conservative party between those campaigning to remain - *Britain Stronger in Europe* - and those for Brexit - *Vote Leave*.

There is not a powerful left campaign for exit. Apart from the small *Labour Leave* group, which began in disarray over which main Brexit campaign to endorse, other left Brexit groups are isolated or unhelpfully sharing platforms with rightwing Eurosceptics.

Official Labour policy is for staying in. Corbyn has endorsed this position - one of many compromises he's had to make.

Clear arguments against the EU can help expose the narrow limits of capitalist democracy, hemmed in by the British state and by the EU.

As Tony Benn said: "In Europe, all the key positions are appointed. The way Europe has developed, the bankers and corporations dictate terms."

Not that a Brexit would usher in democracy - but it would weaken the enemy, depriving the ruling class of its EU reinforcement.

Cameron's deal on a range of British opt-outs - including a halt to restrictions on the City, an 'emergency brake' on benefits for EU workers, and limits on child benefits to the rate of workers' home countries - was intended to assist a vote to remain but that shoddy deal has been overtaken by events and the cut and thrust of the campaign.

Cameron's deal has exposed the fact

that there is some flexibility - not in the EU's treatment of its poorer or more defiant members - but when it comes to ensuring a key anti-working class player like Britain remains inside to buttress the austerity drives underway in Germany, France and elsewhere.

The refugee crisis has shown how quickly the EU's humane window-dressing is abandoned, with the United Nations' Refugee Agency condemning as illegal the EU's latest scheme to ship millions of refugees back to Turkey.

The EU's Schengen agreement on borderless Europe is de facto dead. Staying in the EU feeds the right, as EU membership imposes restrictions on solidarity as well as on state spending, both of which are weapons against xenophobia.

It is the EU as an institution which is intensifying racism and xenophobia as EU countries compete within it to drive down wages and benefits in a race to the bottom.

## The EU is anti-democratic

Left arguments against the EU should include basic democratic ones:

- the EU has an unelected European Commission;
- it has an unelected European Court of Justice;
- a weak European parliament, which cannot initiate laws;
- EU laws are made in secret by the Council of Ministers and can be imposed on nation states.

The European Central Bank's governors are all appointed - they're the heads of member nations' central banks. The European Court of Justice consists of judges who are all appointed, and who have ruled against any checks on EU institutions and treaties, such as making them accountable to the European Convention on Human Rights.

The EU has already ousted several elected governments, in effect, conducting legal coups - in Italy, where it imposed a technocrat as Prime Minister, as well as Portugal, where the president blocked the formation of a Eurosceptic left majority government.

In Greece, the EU overrode the democratic process in the most brazen manner.

Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission, called the Syriza election victory in January 2015 irrelevant, which in effect it was. Juncker said, "To suggest that everything is going to change because there's a new government in Athens is to mistake dreams for reality ... There can be no democratic choice against the European treaties."

When referendums have produced inconvenient results - Denmark voted against the Maastricht Treaty in 1992; Ireland against the Nice Treaty in 2001; and Ireland (again) against the Lisbon Treaty in 2008 - these were re-run until the 'correct' result was obtained.

The EU constitution is the main anti-democratic straitjacket for ensuring capitalist rule. It imposes on all member states a neoliberal economic model of privatizing public provision and capitalist monopoly.

Under the constitution, EU treaties are changeable only with a unanimous vote of all member states; a single country can veto treaty change.

So unless leftwing governments were to gain office in all 28 European countries simultaneously, EU treaty change in a progressive direction is impossible.

As the former head of the British Chambers of Commerce, John Longworth said, the EU is "incapable of reform."

If amending the treaty is barred, trying to pass left-leaning EU laws within its terms is also virtually impossible.

If a national government puts forward a law allowing countries to nationalise public services, it would come up against the unelected EU Commission, which vets all proposed legislation put to the EU Council and parliament.

Only unanimous action from the EU Council (consisting of all the different



**Tony Benn**

## Referendum on the UK's membership of the EU

national ministers) could push the proposal forward – and, again, any single country has a veto.

As for the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) – the EU-US trade treaty that will, among other things, allow corporations to sue governments where national laws impede their profits – Britain would never be able to withdraw while remaining within the EU.

It would take unanimous support from all member states, under Article 352, to allow Britain to leave. Even outside the EU, leaving the tightly binding TTIP could prove extremely difficult.

### Does the EU benefit workers?

Social Europe is often depicted as a haven of social-democracy against vicious Anglo-Saxon capitalism.

During Thatcher's sustained attack on

ments with employers, building on Thatcher's attacks on trade union rights.

Social Europe has been exposed most clearly in the brutal treatment of Greece.

Yet many here still argue that conditions would worsen in Britain without EU 'protection'. This is despite the fact that zero-hours contracts have been legalised under flexible labour market rules and – as part of the EU's black-mailing bailout conditions – collective bargaining has been outlawed in several peripheral EU countries.

Even relatively effective Social Europe regulations such as TUPE – allowing for the continuation of workers' contracts when their employers change – was brought in for an anti-working class purpose, to smooth the way for the privatization of the public sector (and has since been eroded by European Court of Justice judgments), just as the Working

European Act of 1992, when EU neoliberalism became fully institutionalized. But a capitalist institution like the EU will not shield the working class. That's down to class struggle.

Indeed, progressive advance in Britain has been achieved above all by working class struggle: the right to form trade unions; the right to strike; health and safety at work; equal pay for women; a national minimum wage. Successive Labour governments reinforced these rights through legislation. These were not gifts handed down from the EU.

### Can the EU be democratised?

Former Greek Finance Minister, Yanis Varoufakis's Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM 2025) believes the EU can be reshaped as a social democratic entity.

DiEM 2025 is calling for a constituent

## UK political establishment divided over the EU

### REMAIN



Tony Blair



Theresa May



George Osborne



David Cameron

### LEAVE



Boris Johnson



Michael Gove



Iain Duncan-Smith



Liam Fox

the working class, the concept of Social Europe – as drawn up by Jacques Delors in 1984 and sold to the TUC Congress in 1988 – appeared to offer softening measures. Thirty years on, however, it is clear that the EU has not delivered as promised.

Social Europe has failed to safeguard the fundamental right to work. The EU, with its low growth, has 22.98 million unemployed workers, around 10%.

Social Europe failed to prevent the European Court of Justice from ruling that member states may not legislate to raise migrant workers' pay to local levels.

Similarly, the Court has blocked unions from collective bargaining to defend local wage levels against 'social dumping'. This is a gift to the anti-immigrant right in their campaign against cheap foreign labour.

In Britain, Social Europe did not prevent Tony Blair from undermining workers' protection through the introduction of 'voluntary' opt-out agree-

ments with employers, building on Thatcher's attacks on trade union rights.

Many of Jeremy Corbyn's social-democratic policies would be held back by EU directives – Social Europe notwithstanding. Under Article 106, public monopolies are not allowed to hinder competition – a directive that has implications for the NHS.

The EU blocks utilities from being nationalised wholesale, as directives require third parties to be given access to the national grid. Nationwide rail renationalisation would likewise be hampered because, despite Article 345 that permits nationalisation, the European Court of Justice ignores it in practice. Corbyn would thus be restricted to partial rail nationalisation, or be forced to argue that nationalisation was in the national interest – which the Court could rule against.

Social Europe helped dampen working class resistance to growing capitalist exploitation – leading up to the Single Eu-

assembly to deliver a fully democratic Europe by 2025. The European parliament would become sovereign, replacing the current pooling of decision-making between the 28 national governments. DiEM 2025 claims that national governments would share power with the supranational parliament, though exactly how is not specified.

In reality the EU parliament would act as the legislature to a single European government, taking all the big decisions at a further remove from the people. National governments would have little power to overrule the higher body.

DiEM 2025's other demand is for transparency, with all trade talks conducted openly, all meetings of the secretive EU institutions streamed live. This is no solution to the problem of secretive ruling class decision-making, which takes place outside official forums.

What levers are there to achieve a 'democratised' Europe? How would the left mobilise for it? Turnout for the 2009 elections to the European Parlia-

## Referendum on the UK's membership of the EU

ment was just 43%. People need to be won to action where they feel it can have an actual effect; they simply don't vote for something remote and meaningless.

Corbyn's rise shows that people are willing to act when they feel something can be achieved, that is, within the context of a national class struggle they understand.

Internationalism is vital, but has to be worked for, not assumed – one has only to look at the lack of response of the European labour movements to the crushing of Greece to see how weak intra-EU working class solidarity currently is.

Calling for the EU to be democratized – when unanimity is required for any such change – is reminiscent of Trotsky's call to abandon Socialism in the USSR until all Europe simultaneously rose up. One could wait forever. Danny Nicol, Professor of Public Law at the University of Westminster, describes the DiEM 2025 proposal as relying on “spontaneous combustion”.

In an EU composed of unequal member states, with German imperialism pre-eminent, it is the stronger powers which rule over the weaker ones, as Germany rules Greece. This neo-colonial rela-

tionship would in no way be alleviated by a European government imposing decisions on member states – the same situation as now but lent ‘democratic’ legitimacy.

### The EU and the military

The idea that the EU is a force for peace is a myth. Wars in Europe are on the rise and growing increasingly dangerous.

First, there was the dismantling of Yugoslavia, hastened by the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia by Germany. Now, there's the continuing war in the Ukraine, sparked by German ambitions to dominate Ukraine's economy via the EU Association Agreement.

It's true that longstanding rivals France and Germany haven't fought for over 70 years. But initially that was because both countries had to rebuild their economies after WW2 – under US tutelage. And because they had to confront the common enemy of Socialism. More recently, it's because France has accepted its position subordinate to a united Germany.

As the EU has grown, so has its military component, along with pressure for the establishment of a permanent EU military structure.

The Ukraine conflict has shown how closely intertwined the EU is with NATO – notwithstanding divergences between Germany and the US over levels of bellicosity. NATO's major expansion into eastern Europe includes troops and arms from several EU member states. Most of the wars in the Middle East have been supported, or even led, by EU member states, alongside the US.

As for Britain, membership of the EU binds it into the Lisbon Treaty, which means Britain can be called on to aid a fellow member state – for instance, siding with possible future EU member Turkey in a war against Russia.

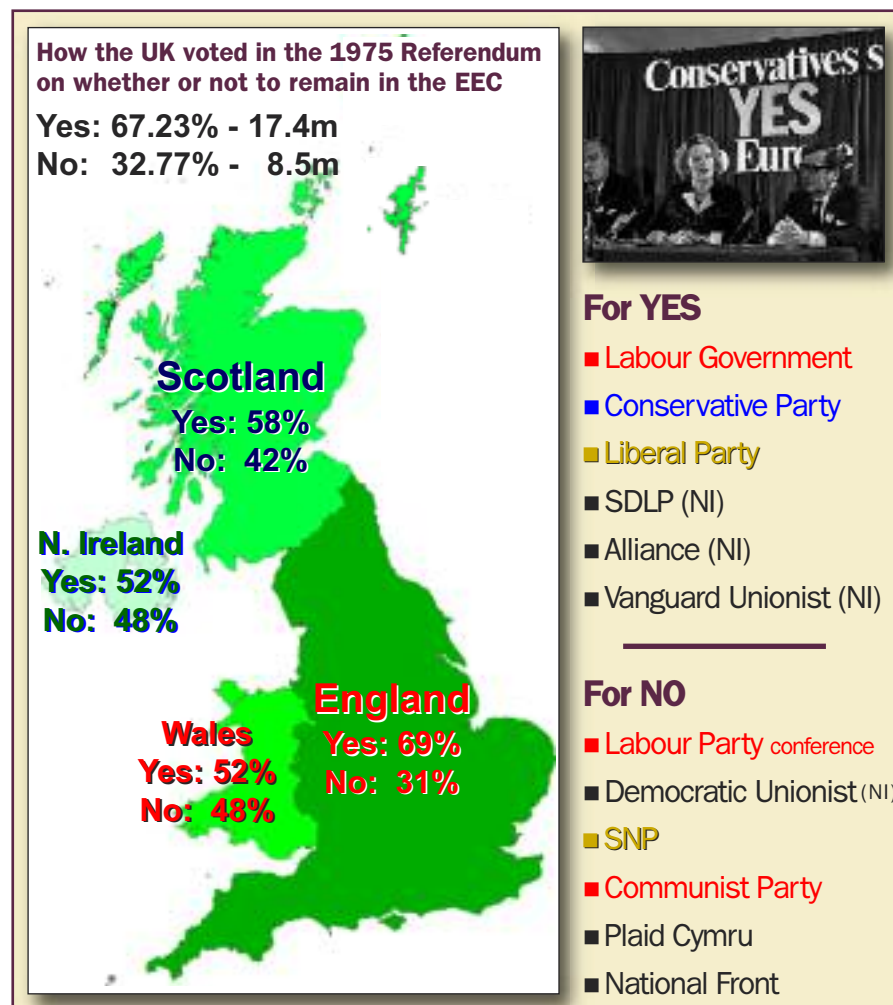
This doesn't mean that leaving the EU would in itself undermine British militarism. Liam Fox, ex-UK Defence Secretary and a Eurosceptic, put it clearly: “The day after we were to leave the European Union, Britain still has a permanent seat on the [United Nations] Security Council, and we're still in NATO. We will still have the world's fifth biggest defence budget, we've still got a ‘special relationship’ with the US, we're still in the G7, we're still in the G20, we're at the centre of the Commonwealth ...”

On the other hand, 13 leading British generals have called for Britain to stay in, for military reasons, on the grounds that, “The EU today is a tool through which Britain can get things done in the world ... Britain's role in the EU strengthens the security we enjoy as part of NATO ... and allows us to project greater power internationally.”

The head of the US army in Europe, Lt-Gen Ben Hodges has voiced a similar view, citing a resurgent Russia as a reason for Britain remaining. Nicholas Soames and Peter Mandelson, likewise, argued jointly in the *Daily Mail* that the need to confront Putin was a key argument for Britain remaining within the EU.

Germany, too, wants Britain to remain, in part to prevent the traditionally NATO-sceptic French from flexing their military muscles in Europe via the EU military entity they would seek to dominate. Remaining in the EU allows Britain to project itself more forcefully than it would otherwise be able to do – using its special relationship with the US to strengthen it in relation to rival powers in the EU, and using its EU membership to give it weight with the US.

Britain's seat at the top table of nations is secured, apart from its existing nuclear status, through its membership of the two alliances. Conversely, Brexit could create space to hold Britain's military alliances up to question – both in terms of the damage they do domestically and to those on the receiving end.



# EU diktat forces austerity in Europe

The European Union has, in recent years, become synonymous with austerity and the impoverishment of millions of people across the continent.

By **FRIEDA PARK**

The origins of this lie in the founding principles of the EU and its continued expansion and integration.

Key developments have been the creation of the single currency, the Euro, along with a neo-liberal consensus in ruling circles.

The “Fiscal Compact” and its forerunner the “Stability and Growth Pact” were established, among other things, to create a single fiscal framework across the EU, especially the Eurozone.

They are among the chief mechanisms for imposing austerity on member states. Even countries which are not subject to a bail-out are governed by these rules and can be required by the EU to cut their budgets.

These agreements embody neo-liberal assumptions about levels of government debt and the responsibility of governments and peoples to pay the price for financial problems even if they were not responsible for creating them in the first place.

Recently the Portuguese government lost a legal battle in London over its refusal to pay money owed on a toxic financial derivative sold to state owned transport companies by Santander Bank.

This case could leave the government with liabilities of €1.5bn and is not unique. Bank bail-outs are also part and parcel of this. For example, of the €86bn agreed in July 2015 for Greece by the Eurozone, €25bn was earmarked for supporting banks.

EU treaties and its competition law enshrine the primacy of the “free market”, outlaw state subsidies to industry and, along with EU directives, facilitate the privatisation of public assets and services.

The objective-sounding, technical language of these programmes conceals the fact that it is a political choice to impose these economic policies. There are alternatives. However, the possibility of

actually implementing alternatives is stymied by the lack of democracy within the EU, so the neo-liberal juggernaut rolls on.

EU bail-out agreements come with conditions, similar to the IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programmes imposed on countries across Africa and Latin America.

These conditions often include privatisation, increasing taxes such as VAT and cuts in public services and in wages and conditions for workers.

This has included cutting pensions and raising retirement ages. It is easy to see who the winners and losers are here.

The effects of this on Greece and the total disregard for the democratically elected government of the country, were well documented in issue No. 24 of *The Socialist Correspondent* by Alex Davidson in his article, “Germany leads on Greek privatisation”.

Other countries have also suffered through their bail-out programmes. In Cyprus, Ireland, Spain and elsewhere ordinary people have been thrown to the dogs whilst financial institutions have had funds pumped into them.

In all Portugal had 400 conditions imposed on it as part of its bail-out. The main trade union confederation has estimated that public sector workers lost be-

tween 20 and 30% of their income in the three years between 2011 and 2014.

This comprised cuts in wages, tax increases, longer hours, reductions in overtime pay, some bank holidays being abolished and a freeze on promotions.

There is a freeze on state pensions. Unemployment hit a high of 17.6% and is now 12%, however youth unemployment remains above 30%. In the 4 years

to December 2014 almost 4% of the population emigrated.

It is no wonder that people across Europe are voting for left-wing anti-austerity parties or are seduced by the xenophobia of the ultra-right.

No government which has come to power in Europe with a mandate to oppose austerity has been allowed to implement its policies.

The most recent example was the rejection by the European Commission of the Portuguese government's budget. The government is an alliance of the Socialist Party, the Communist Party and the Radical Left and is the first time the Socialists and Communists have worked together like this since the overthrow of Fascism in 1974.

The European Commission decided that the budget would mean Portugal exceeding the deficit limit of 3% of GDP imposed on members of the Eurozone. To comply with this diktat, the government was forced to make further cuts and raise taxes.

Combating austerity and EU membership seem to be increasingly incompatible.



# No to neo-liberalism, yes to cooperation

The history of neo-liberalism, with its rampant free-market capitalist ethos, has been a nasty one.

By **FRIEDA PARK**

Everywhere it has slashed and privatised public services and state owned assets, whilst attacking workers' rights and undermining wages and conditions at work.

The coup which overthrew President Salvador Allende (pictured) in Chile in 1973 ushered in a military dictatorship which allowed the country to be used as a laboratory for these ideas which were then enacted across the continent.

Latin America laboured under debt burdens that countries could not re-pay, but kept them in thrall to the IMF.

After a couple of decades of this, inequality had increased, poverty had increased and there was barely any economic growth. These policies are similar to those being forced on EU countries subject to bail-outs.

This tyranny was rejected by the people of Latin America as the wave of left and socialist governments were elected at the start of this century.

A major turning point was reached in 1998 when Hugo Chavez became President of Venezuela. Avowedly socialist and vigorously anti-neoliberal he introduced sweeping social and economic reforms, including the nationalisation of key industries and assets.

## A new kind of international pact

Born out of this was the initiative to establish ALBA, the Bolivarian alliance of the peoples of south America, a new kind of international pact founded on mutual support, not exploitation.

It started out as an agreement between Cuba and Venezuela to swap

resources that each needed and the other had in abundance - Venezuelan oil for Cuban medical and educational resources. This is the principle that continues to motivate ALBA.

There are 11 members of ALBA: Cuba, Venezuela, Antigua & Barbuda, Bolivia, Dominica, Ecuador, Grenada, Nicaragua, St Kitts & Nevis, St Lucia and St Vincent & the Grenadines.

ALBA seeks to build on the diversity, rich natural and human resources and strengths of all its members to the mutual benefit of each and all. Indeed, it aims to support the weakest, most vulnerable countries rather than exploit them more.

The pillars of ALBA are:

- Complementary action, based on the potential of each nation;
- Cooperation;
- Solidarity; and,
- Respect for sovereignty.

ALBA rejects neo-liberalism and aims to forge a path away from "free" trade.

It has the following objectives:

- To promote trade and investment between member governments, based on cooperation, and with the aim of improving people's lives, not making profits.

- For member states to cooperate to provide free healthcare and free education to people across the ALBA states.

- To integrate the ALBA members' energy sectors to meet people's needs.

- To create alternative media to counterbalance US and regional neo-liberal media and promote an indigenous Latin American identity.

- To ensure land redistribution and

food security within member states.

- To develop state-owned corporations.

- To develop basic industries so that ALBA member states can become economically independent.

- To promote workers' movements, student movements, and social movements.

- To ensure that projects under ALBA are environmentally friendly

Under the umbrella of ALBA there are joint collaborations in a number of areas. Some initiatives are:

- literacy and vaccination campaigns,

- new systems of health care,

- a network of public universities and colleges, an alternative network for media and communications, an association for Latin American and Caribbean workers,

- an association for farmers and a network to defend natural resources.

Millions of people across the ALBA countries are benefiting from improved health care, energy supplies, jobs, food supplies, education and literacy.

By 2015, in the first ten years of existence ALBA had:

- Established alliances of energy producers and consumers - PetroCaribe and PETROSURR to provide fairly priced oil and fund social programmes.

- Set up TELESUR an internet-based television channel providing news and current affairs programmes.

- Established UNASUR, which promotes intergovernmental collaboration.

- Produced 21,075 doctors and 1,590 medical specialists

- Provided treatment so that more than 3.5 million people had their vision improved or restored for free under Operacion Milagro.

- Provided literacy programmes which enabled almost 4 million people to learn to read

- Developed a new currency for international trade, the Sucre, to challenge dependence on the US dollar

The example of ALBA, demonstrates the huge gap between genuine international collaboration and the exploitative nature of the EU. It also demonstrates that there is another way to do things.



Salvador Allende



# Divisive EU gave rise to Comecon

After the Second World War the capitalist countries in western Europe founded the Organisation for European Cooperation in 1948.

By MILLY CUNNINGHAM

Its task was to administer the US Marshall Plan, and its purpose was to preserve capitalism in western Europe. It also reflected the West's instigation of the Cold War.

Up until then the Soviet Union and the people's democracies in Eastern Europe had held out the hope of preventing the splitting of Europe by the capitalist powers and wanted to work together in the framework agreed within the United Nations, that is, through the Economic Commission for Europe

However, with this development of the forerunner of today's European Union and the end of the possibility of a real united Europe, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA, usually referred to in the west as Comecon) was established in January 1949.

The CMEA was a different type of alliance based on international solidarity among the working people. The founding members of CMEA were Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union. CMEA grew over the years.

Albania joined in February 1949 but stopped participating in 1961. The German Democratic Republic joined in 1950.

Other countries and their years of joining:

- Mongolia – 1962;
- Cuba – 1972;
- Vietnam – 1978.

Some countries joined with observer status:

- Democratic People's Republic of Korea – 1956;
- Yugoslavia – 1964;
- Finland – 1973;
- Iraq and Mexico – 1975;
- Angola – 1976;
- Nicaragua – 1984;
- Mozambique – 1985;
- Afghanistan – 1986;
- Ethiopia – 1986;

- Laos – 1986;
- South Yemen – 1986.

Mieczyslaw Jagielski, Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Poland, paid testimony to how solidarity worked: 'It would be no exaggeration to say that for the less industrially-advanced countries [the CMEA] was the decisive factor for ensuring the success of industrialization.

'The high rate at which power engineering, metal manufacturing, electric motor manufacturing and the chemical industry were developed in several CMEA countries, including Poland, became possible owing largely to deliveries of industrial equipment, exchange of technical know-how, and assistance with personnel.

'This was the main direction in which economic relations developed ... The part played by the Soviet Union, which displayed a profoundly internationalist attitude towards us, was of great historical significance.'

The structure of the CMEA which developed was the Session of CMEA, the Executive Committee of the Council, the Secretariat of the Council, four council committees (Cooperation in Planning, Science and Technology, Material and Technical Supply, and Machine Building), 24 standing commissions (by 1986), six interstate conferences, two scientific institutes, and several associated organizations.

Prime ministers usually headed the delegations to the Session, which met by rotation in a member country's capital. The CMEA itself adopted decisions only on its own organization and procedures.

The Council Committee for Cooperation in Planning coordinated the joint aspects of the national economic five-year plans of CMEA members, and ranked in importance only after the Session and the Executive Committee.

Decisions were subject to the approval

of national governments.

There were a number of affiliated agencies, including the International Bank for Economic Cooperation, established in 1963, which managed the transferrable rouble system, and where each member country had one vote, regardless of the size of its contribution; and the International Investment Bank, which was opened in 1971 to concentrate and make more effective use of the material and financial resources of the CMEA countries in the field of capital construction.

Not a profit-seeking organisation, it was governed on democratic lines, with a council comprised of representatives of the countries making up the Bank, where again each country had one vote, regardless of the proportion of its banking capital.

## The Sofia Principle

The Sofia principle, adopted at the August 1949 CMEA session in Bulgaria, made each country's technologies available to the others at a nominal charge, which was of special benefit in enabling the less developed countries to build their own industries.

CMEA operated according to certain important principles. Its Charter, adopted in 1959, declared that 'the sovereign equality of all members' was fundamental.

Under the Charter, each country had the right to equal representation and one vote in all organs of the CMEA, regardless of its economic size or its contribution to the budget.

The Comprehensive Programme adopted in 1971 emphasized that processes of integration were 'completely voluntary and do not involve the creation of supranational bodies'.

The programme had the aim of equalising differences in relative scarcities of goods and services between states through the deliberate elimination of barriers to trade and other forms of interaction.

A clear area of achievement under the Comprehensive Programme was the joint exploitation and development of natural resources.

The Orenburg project of 1975-80 was the largest project under the Comprehensive Programme. It was undertaken by all the East European CMEA members and the Soviet Union.

A natural gas complex at Orenburg in Western Siberia and the 2,677 km Union (Soyuz) natural-gas pipeline were completed in 1978. The Soviet Union owned the Orenburg complex and repaid its East European co-investors at a two per cent interest rate with an agreed amount of natural gas.

The development of the Soviet oil fields allowed the CMEA countries to benefit from low prices for fuel and other mineral products. As a result, CMEA economies generally showed strong growth in the mid-1970s. They were largely unaffected by the 1973 oil crisis, when OPEC proclaimed an oil embargo, causing the price of oil to rise from \$3 per barrel to nearly \$12.

Prices in the CMEA were based on adjusted world market prices averaged over the preceding five years. They were agreed through negotiation.

At first they were fixed for five-year periods, corresponding to the synchronised five-year plans of the members, but in 1975 intra-CMEA pricing policy was reformed, so that prices were fixed every year, but still on the basis of the average of world prices for the preceding five years. So they rose with world prices, but with a lag.

In 1979 the CMEA countries produced as much in a single month as they did in the whole year of 1950. During the period 1951 – 79, the CMEA countries achieved a growth rate of their national income and manufacturing output that was three times as high as that of the capitalist industrial nations

Socialist economic integration resulted in the production of goods capable of competing on the world market.

In the early 1980s, intraregional trade rose to 60 per cent of foreign trade for CMEA countries as a whole.

### **CMEA different from EEC**

The CMEA was a very different body from the European Economic Community (EEC) and its previous incarnations. In the 1980s the EEC included 270 million people in Europe in an economic association aimed at maximising profits and efficiency, in capitalist terms, on a national and international scale.

The EEC was a supranational body that could adopt decisions (such as removing tariffs) and enforce them. Treaties mostly limited government activity, allowing the market to operate freely across national boundaries.

The CMEA in the 1980s joined to-

gether 450 million people in ten countries and on three continents. It linked underdeveloped countries with some highly industrialized states.

Cuba, Mongolia and Vietnam had a special relationship with the other seven members. The CMEA made major contributions to their economic development.

The difference between the EEC and CMEA is nowhere more clearly seen than in the treatment of the economically weakest members.

The CMEA was structured in such a way that the more economically developed members provided support for the less developed ones. The three less developed countries were very different in size: Mongolia (population of 1 million), Cuba (9 million) and Vietnam (40 million).

As of early 1987, three quarters of the CMEA's overseas aid went to the three countries – almost US\$4 bn. to Cuba, US\$2 bn. to Vietnam, and US\$1 bn. to Mongolia. Assistance included buying the products of the three countries at well above world market prices, Cuban sugar, for example, which consisted of 80 per cent of its exports. Loans to the three countries from the International Investment Bank were at cheaper interest rates than to the other CMEA countries.

The three countries benefited substantially from CMEA resources as well. In 1984 the economies of the three developing countries registered the fastest growth of all the CMEA members.

### **Assistance to Developing Countries**

CMEA also provided economic and technical support to some 34 developing countries (1960), 62 countries (1970), and over 100 (1985). As of 1987, the CMEA had assisted in the construction or preparation of over 4,000 projects (mostly industrial) in Asia, Latin America and Africa.

From the 1960s to the mid-1980s, the CMEA sought to encourage the development of industry, energy, transportation, mineral resources, and agriculture of Third World countries. The aim, according to A. Kodachenko, was 'to organise equal and mutually beneficial cooperation among nations', promoting economic independence for the developing countries. 'There are no classes or social groups in the socialist countries which could be interested in the seizure of colonies, raw material sources and markets, in the enslavement of other peoples,' he added.

The CMEA countries, because of their planned economies, could conclude long-term trade and payments agreements which enabled the developing

countries to protect themselves better from the arbitrary practices of the imperialist monopolies on the world market.

Prices in trade within the CMEA system, agreed upon for a long period in advance, while based on world prices, guaranteed agreements against the vicissitudes of the capitalist market.

From 1950 to 1973 trade between the young states and the CMEA countries grew 22 times. Financial assistance usually took the form of credits and loans for a term of 12 to 15 years at 2.5 per cent interest.

The terms of CMEA credits and loans did not require repayments to start until all equipment had been delivered, or even until a project had been completed and put into operation – that is, when it started to bring in a return.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the interest rates on government credits granted by advanced capitalist countries in 1970 were:

- USA – 3.6 per cent;
- France – 3.7 per cent;
- Britain – 4.1 per cent;
- Italy – 4.3 per cent;
- Federal Republic of Germany – 4.3 per cent;
- Japan – 4.8 per cent.

The interest rate on credits to developing countries from the capitalist International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) had risen from 6 per cent in 1966 to 8.5 per cent in January 1975.

The usual terms on which loans and credits were granted by the IBRD at the time were 20 years for repayment, which meant that in the case of a loan granted in late 1974, when interest was at 8 per cent, the sum to be repaid would be more than twice the amount of the loan by the end of the stipulated period.

The terms on which loans and credits were granted by the IBRD, and industrial capitalist countries in general, called for repayments of the main debt to start immediately upon expiry of the so-called grace period, which was usually set at 4 – 5 years, during which interest only was paid.

This period of grace was usually not long enough to launch a large enterprise, so that the developing countries had to draw funds from their budgets to start repaying the IBRD before the project had got under way and started producing.

Enterprises built with CMEA assistance became the sole property of the developing country in question. There was no outflow of capital from the country in question as in the case when developing countries had recourse to

foreign private capital, where profit levels were not usually restricted and might be as high as 20 – 25 per cent.

Enterprises built by foreign private capital remained the permanent property of the foreign owner. These negative effects were further aggravated by the periodic economic crises of the capitalist world.

CMEA's approach contrasted with that of the international capitalist monopolies, which, afraid of losing their markets and the source of their super-profits in India, Turkey, Iran and other countries, did everything in their power to prevent the developing countries from building their own metallurgical industry and other industries producing the means of production.

Speaking at the opening, on March 16, 1973, of the first section of an iron-and-steel plant built in Iran with Soviet economic and technical assistance, USSR Premier Alexei Kosygin said, 'We know from our own experience that the iron-and-steel industry is the basis of industrialization. Without steel it is impossible to develop the oil industry or mechanical engineering, or many other economic branches.'

Hungary was assisting India in the building of iron-and-steel dressing mills, coal mines and a plant to produce steel pipes for oil and gas pipelines.

Also in India, the German Democratic Republic had participated in the construction of acetylene and oxygen plants; Poland in the construction of ore dressing mills, a refractories-producing plant, coking coal mines and foundries; while Czechoslovakia had helped India with the building of large plants to produce castings and forgings.

Industrial cooperation among the CMEA members enabled Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Hungary and the Soviet Union together to provide India with assembly units and parts for the manufacture of tractors, excavators and other machinery and equipment.

In Algeria the El Hadjar steel plant was being built with the assistance of CMEA countries. Turkey's largest iron-and-steel enterprise was being built with Soviet assistance in Iskenderun; when the first section of the plant was put into operation, Turkey's steel output would nearly double.

Burma had a foundry constructed with the assistance of the CMEA countries; Syria had an enterprise producing small rolled-steel items and wire; Sri Lanka, a steel-rolling mill; Pakistan was receiving

assistance in the construction of a steel mill near Karachi, which would have an annual output of one million tons. In Kabul, Afghanistan, large automobile repair workshops had been built with the assistance of the socialist countries.

In the case of the Aswan hydro-engineering complex in Egypt it had, built with Soviet assistance, brought in a profit of 2,000 million Egyptian pounds for the national economy.

The Aswan hydropower station was supplying nearly half of the electricity generated in the country, which had helped to cushion the impact on Egypt's economy of the energy crisis caused by the policy of the international oil monopolies.

The station formed the basis of Africa's first countrywide integrated power grid. The huge artificial lake, Lake Nasr, had made it possible to irrigate an

power generating capacity by over 30 per cent.

In Latin America CMEA countries were helping to develop hydropower in Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil and Peru.

Long-term state credits, and economic and technical assistance in general, from the CMEA countries to developing countries had no political and economic conditions attached.

To implement their economic programmes the developing countries needed engineers, economists, agronomists, technicians, teachers, doctors, and skilled labour.

Higher education establishments were practically non-existent in the former colonial territories, so that most of these jobs were held by foreign specialists. One of the first actions of the government of independent Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia) was to open a university in Lusaka.

The CMEA countries helped by training local labour in the course of building enterprises. In this way thousands of working people in the developing countries became skilled workers. In Iraq more than 1000 local workers were trained at courses during the construction of a canal linking Lake Tharthar to the Euphrates.

More than 100 industrial training centres had, as of January 1, 1974, been built in developing countries with CMEA assistance.

As of that date they had turned out about 150,000 skilled workers in a range of trades. 26 secondary technical and higher education establishments had been set up in Asian and African countries, which had trained over 9,000 specialists. Half of the educational establishments set up in the developing countries with Soviet assistance were built and equipped free of charge.

In 1973 CMEA set up a special scholarship fund for students from developing countries studying at higher education institutions in the CMEA countries. Like all other students, they paid nothing for the tuition.

In 1974, there were more than 25,000 students from the developing countries studying in CMEA educational institutions. The most renowned was the Patrice Lumumba University, founded in Moscow in 1960.

With the defeat of socialism in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe the countries of CMEA shifted their dealings with one another to a hard currency market basis and trade between them radically decreased. In 1991 CMEA was disbanded.



**May 1964: Egyptian President, Gamal Nasser and Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev at the ceremony to divert the river Nile.**

additional 840,000 hectares of land and to obtain two or three harvests a year instead of one. Navigation on the Nile had improved and the danger of devastating floods on the Nile had been eliminated.

In Syria a hydropower complex, the 'new Aswan' as they called it, was being built on the Euphrates with Soviet assistance. The first three turbines of the eight to be installed at the Euphrates power station were brought into operation in 1974, increasing the country's

# The Immigration Dividend

Speaking in 2013, the Labour Party's (then) Shadow Home Secretary coined an apt phrase for one of the worst features of British politics when she declared: "...we won't enter an arms race of rhetoric on immigration – and we hope the Prime Minister won't either."

By **NOAH TUCKER**

But in other parts of that speech, Yvette Cooper took the initiative in that competitive spiral of anti-immigrant (not merely anti-immigration) policies and rhetoric, including the pronouncement that British child benefit and tax credits should not be paid to EU migrants for their children who are living abroad <sup>(1)</sup>.

In November of the following year, Ms Cooper and Rachel Reeves, who was at that time the Shadow Minister for Work and Pensions, stepped up the 'arms race'.

They declared that the Labour Party would impose a two year ban on unemployed workers from other EU countries claiming Job Seekers Allowance and other out-of-work benefits.

Upping the ante for the Tories, David Cameron announced that EU citizens moving to the UK would be blocked from access (initially for up to four years) to in-work benefits including Tax Credits and Child Tax Credits.

Dubbed the 'emergency brake', agreement to this proposal was later flagged up by Cameron as the biggest achievement of his negotiations with other European leaders prior to Britain's referendum on EU membership.

Such escalating moves to deny benefits and services to migrant workers and their families exemplify the venomous and contradictory nature of the attitude to immigrants promoted by British establishment politicians.

The policies and the rhetoric surrounding them are designed to rouse the indigenous or settled population against people from abroad; channeling dissatisfactions - which would better be directed against austerity and rising inequality - into nationalist vindictiveness.

This succeeds only in hurting the tar-

geted group (particularly children) without bringing any gain whatsoever to working class UK citizens.

In their statements and public policy positions, right wing Labour politicians during and since the Blair years have employed the political method of triangulation - positioning the Party closer to the policies of the Conservatives in order to occupy the supposed 'middle ground'.

In practice, on some issues including that of immigration, the Tories then moved further to the right in order to maintain "clear blue water" between themselves and Labour, resulting in a competitive rightward stampede by both main parties; the Labour Party has echoed - or, worse, sought to sound more strident than - the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the Conservatives; with the important difference that, unlike for the Tories, this has never resulted in any electoral advantage being gained by Labour.

In fact, the reverse has occurred as the political beneficiaries of the discourse have been the Tories and the 'ultra-right' parties. Labour's approach has only encouraged rather than challenged xenophobia.

In 2015, Ed Miliband was persuaded to make 'controls on immigration' one of Labour's five pledges for the general election.

The Party's election 'pledge card' highlighted the anti-immigrant proposals put forward by Yvette Cooper and Rachel Reeves, including the punitive declamation that "People who come here won't be able to claim benefits for two years", fuelling the falsehood that immigrants flock to the UK in order to take advantage of the benefits system, and feeding the corrosive myth of the 'something for nothing benefits culture'.

To be fair, in the immigration section of the manifesto there were also a few worthwhile policies including, "We will make it illegal for employers to undercut wages by exploiting workers" and "We will end the indefinite detention of people in the asylum and immigration system".

These were drowned out by statements such as "We will require people working in public-facing roles in public services to speak English": fanning prejudice by elevating a non-issue (or at the most, a miniscule issue) to the level of a general election manifesto commitment.

## "Fairness" and divisive nationalism

Through the election of its new leader, the Labour movement has expressed, among other things, an overwhelming rejection of the Party's involvement in that kind of politics - but it has not yet put a stop to it.

This was clear from the response of former cabinet minister Alan Johnson, Chair of the Labour Party's pro-EU campaign 'Labour In for Britain', to Cameron's so-called 'emergency brake'.

Alan Johnson supported the proposal while readily admitting that it will do nothing to achieve its stated aim of reducing migration from European Union countries.

The former Home Secretary said that he supported the principle of preventing EU migrants claiming in-work benefits for four years, but did not believe in-work benefits were a "draw factor" for migrants.

Asked if the measures would restrict migration, he said the benefits curb "was never going to do that" [...]

He told the BBC's Today Programme: "The issue of in-work benefits is not a draw factor ... For British people the problem is not xenophobia, it's not anti-Europe, it's not any kind of racism - overt or covert; it's a fairness argument, it's that you should be putting something into the system before you draw anything out."

Despite his denial of xenophobia, Johnson's 'fairness' argument (chiming in also with Conservative rhetoric about the 'something for nothing' culture),

feeds off and encourages a divisive nationalism.

As Alan Johnson knows very well (given that he was a minister in the New Labour government which introduced Child Tax Credits and Working Tax Credits) the benefits that will be impacted by the ‘emergency brake’ were specifically aimed at reducing poverty, hence are non-contributory.

They will continue to be so, for individuals and families of UK origin<sup>(2)</sup>; thus for example where the worker has recently left school or college; was out of employment while caring for children; or indeed, is a British citizen who was previously living abroad; and who may therefore have paid not a penny into the UK income tax and National insurance system - nevertheless they and their children will be entitled to claim the full applicable amount of these benefits.

So the principle of “putting something into the system before you draw anything out” will only be imposed on the families of ‘foreign’ workers from the EU, not those of UK origin.

How can that be based on a ‘fairness argument’?

Conversely, how can it possibly be represented as unfair that a tax credit equally benefits two children whose parents have different countries named on their EU passports but who may work side by side, doing the same job and drawing the same pay, perhaps even living as neighbours; and between whom there are no differences in the amount they have, as individuals, contributed to the UK exchequer?

Here the poison of nationalist ideology plays its part. The equal treatment is regarded as unfair because of an understanding that having contributed (or otherwise) depends not on what that individual or family has or has not done, but on membership of one or other of two ascribed groups: with ‘we’ the British being assumed to have, as a community, already paid our way, whereas ‘the foreigners’, collectively, are supposedly drawing out of the system before putting something in.

In reality of course, migrants from the EU (including, when considered separately, those from Eastern Europe) make an overall tax contribution considerably higher than the payments they receive in state benefits, and their net financial contribution per person is also greater on average than that of people of UK origin.

Of course the ‘emergency brake’ will do nothing - nor is that its intent - to alleviate the problems which people commonly regard as being made worse by immigration from Eastern Europe: competition for jobs, downward pressure

on wages, and pressure on the availability of public services.

That a policy proclaimed as a ‘brake’ on immigration is predicted to result neither in any perceptible reduction in immigration, nor amelioration of any of the problems ascribed to immigration, should not at all be seen as a failure of the policy, but rather as a major plus point for its originators.

Success for the Conservatives, and other establishment and right wing politicians, on the immigration issue is based on balancing on the one hand, the political advantage won for them by fanning anti-immigrant feelings, and on the other hand, promoting the interests of the big companies and the very rich, who accrue big gains from the economic benefits brought by inward migration.

### The context of prejudice

These benefits have a long and significant history. Skills and production methods brought by the Huguenots, who left France due to religious persecution, and also by Dutch workers and technicians who moved to England, were key in preparing the way for the early industrial revolution in Britain, fostering techno-



**Huguenot weavers' houses  
in Canterbury**

logical development in several important sectors including textiles, metalware, paper production and printing.

Of the industrial revolution itself, as Frederick Engels remarked in 1844: “The rapid extension of English industry could not have taken place if England had not possessed in the numerous and impoverished population of Ireland a reserve at command.”

Noting that Irish workers (who were accustomed to lower rates of pay and worse living conditions than were the English workers) were migrating to the main industrial centres in England, Engels commented: “With such a competitor the English working-man has to struggle [...] Nothing else is therefore

possible than that, as Carlyle says, the wages of English working-man should be forced down further and further in every branch in which the Irish compete with him. And these branches are many. All such as demand little or no skill are open to the Irish.”

The advantages that the influx of Irish labour produced in terms of the development of the English economy were not perceived, by the English workers, to result in improvements for themselves.

Rather, as Engels’ collaborator Karl Marx was to observe, there was much resentment by English working class people against their Irish colleagues: “Every industrial and commercial centre in England now possesses a working class divided into two hostile camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life [...] He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the “poor whites” to the Negroes in the former slave states of the U.S.A.”

Today the advantages derived from employing workers from overseas also fall into distinct patterns; ranging from, at the higher paid end of the labour market, access to a much wider pool of skills and knowledge; to, at the lower paid end, a supply of workers who are prepared to perform demanding tasks, often in uncomfortable conditions, for lesser rates of pay than most UK-born workers with comparable skills and qualifications would accept for such work.

Much labour that is in the lower paid categories of employment is currently carried out by immigrant workers. Over a quarter of workers classed as ‘operatives’, and more than a third of those in ‘elementary occupations’ are of non-UK origin, a high proportion of whom are EU citizens from Eastern Europe.

However, despite their high concentration in lower paid occupations, EU migrant workers in the UK, including those from Eastern European countries, have on average a considerably higher level of education and qualifications than their UK-born counterparts - so, for a particular rate of pay, and in a given occupation, employers are in general likely to be accessing workers who are more highly educated when they hire non-British EU employees.

It is important to note that the current downward effect of economic migration on wages in some sectors is expressed in the context of a ‘liberalised’ labour market, characterised by reduced trade union power, private ownership, and

cuts in the public sector.

The immigration from Britain's (former) colonies from the 1950s to the 'mid- '70s, while much of industry was nationalised, trade union membership and influence were rising, and public services were expanding, did not stand in the way of the substantial improvements in pay achieved by manual and 'less skilled' workers in that period.

It is notable that the upsurges in support for specifically anti-immigrant organisations and political figures during that period, associated with openly racist rhetoric, coincided with economic crises and events which, however temporarily, threatened that 'forward march' of working class living standards.

Another way to look at this is that the economic gains from inward migration - as with the benefits of other changes, for instance improvements in production technology - are shared more and more unequally, increasing proportions going to the owners of capital and the very rich, and less going to the majority, particularly the lower-paid, the more that society reverts back towards pure capitalism.

There is clearly a ready potential available for unscrupulous media outlets and politicians to exploit. People's direct experiences are not the main factor in creating a mood of anti-immigrant indignation. With the anti-immigrant narrative barely challenged, it has a harmful impact not least on the electoral fortunes of the Labour Party.

Research shows consistently that a high proportion of people regard immigration as a major problem for the country, but relatively few see the issue as a problem in their own locality or for themselves personally; furthermore, anti-immigration feeling among the 'native' population is lowest where there are relatively high numbers of immigrants, and vice versa.

Indeed, it was in London, and in the other urban areas of England with substantial proportions of non-UK born residents, that the electorate, including the white, UK-born voters, gave big swings to the Labour Party in the 2015 general election and in the election of Sadiq Khan as London mayor.

### Sharing the dividend

Thus there is potential also, for a Labour Party which renounces anti-immigrant rhetoric and punitive policies against migrants, and instead proposes to ensure a fairer distribution of the economic gains of immigration.

Some recent party policies contain what could be described as the malformed seeds of such proposals; one

being the Migration Impact Fund, which was set up by Gordon Brown's government in 2008.

This was a shoddy initiative in three ways: firstly, the funding for it was raised by levying an additional £50 charge on the price of a visa for the (usually not at all wealthy) people from outside the EU who apply to stay in the UK.

Secondly, the amounts available to be allocated to local authorities were miserably low, with a meagre £30 million available per year for the whole of the UK.

Thirdly, as the name of the scheme demonstrated, instead of aiming to redistribute the benefits of migration, it highlighted the downsides of immigration on local communities and provided a paltry, imperceptible sum to mitigate for these.

On taking office in 2010, the Tory - Liberal coalition abolished the scheme, although of course they maintained the £50 increase in visa fees.

In 2014 the Labour Party mooted a revival of the Migration Impact Fund; but, not daring to propose anything that might lay it open to the accusation of increasing public spending, the proposal was that the European Union would be persuaded to set up and fund the scheme on an EU-wide basis and from within the existing EU budget.

Certainly there is a strong case for the EU to provide proper financial support to Greece and other poorer EU members that bear the costs of being the European 'front line' of the refugee crisis.

But how and why an EU-level migration impact scheme would or should benefit regions of Britain - which is not only one of the richest countries in the EU but which also currently reaps a massive overall economic and financial benefit from immigration - has not been explained.

Leaving aside the 'dynamic' positive impacts of inward migration on economic development, and considering only the financial inputs and costs of new immigrants for the British government and public sector, a conservative estimate puts the net fiscal benefit to the UK of immigration since 2001 as approximately £2.5 billion every year.

A modest fraction of this sum (let us say 20%), allocated to local authorities by the British government on the basis of a formula combining local levels of immigration and social need, would make a very perceptible difference to councils' ability to provide decent services. Such a proposal (though without a suggestion for the amount of funding to be allocated) is supported by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants.

It is crucial that the scheme is given a positive title such as the Immigration Dividend, as key parts of its function will be to make the benefits of migration more apparent, and ensure that these are felt via redistribution.

It should be financed within the increase in public provision which is necessary in any case to recover from the effects of austerity; an increase which should itself be funded from higher taxation (both in the rate of taxation and the amount of tax actually collected) on the ultra-wealthy and big business - who have been, directly and indirectly, the biggest financial gainers from immigration.

More broadly, the Labour Party's rhetoric and policies must show that united, rather than divided by nationalistic ideology and xenophobia, and moving away from the 'free market' towards nationalisation, expanding public services, the repeal of anti-trade union laws and the promotion of trade union representation, we can ensure that economic benefits, not just from migration but from other changes including increased international trade and advances in technology, are gained by working class people and are felt widely in society, rather than being accrued or squandered by those who already have the most.

### FOOTNOTES

1. This facile proposal will probably result in additional public expense rather than savings, as parents are likely to respond by bringing their children over from the home country to reside with them in Britain; thus the costs of the children's schooling will be paid via the UK treasury.

2. On the other hand, in the longer term the denial of benefits to EU migrants is likely to become an additional 'thin end' for the wedge of the ongoing cuts and abolition of welfare benefits for UK citizens.

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London  
Elections  
5 May 2016  
Results

# Kahn: London Mayor because of Labour

In comparing Labour's general election performance in London in May 2015 with how the party did in the capital's Mayoral and Assembly elections a year on, it is clear that there are substantial differences between the two occasions.

By **BRIAN DURRANS**

Since last summer, political struggle has entered a new phase with Jeremy Corbyn's election as Labour leader; the relentless and scurrilous attacks on him and his allies from the right both inside and outside the Labour Party; retreats and defeats which growing opposition has wrought on aspects of Tory austerity - assisted by a string of scandals that hit the Tories hard (not least, David Cameron and tax avoidance); and by heightened concern and activism on the NHS, rail fares, foreign wars, the future of the UK steel industry, the EU referendum, refugees, housing and much more.

If all these factors (and others) played out across the UK, London, like other cities and regions, also had its own special preoccupations, of which the chronic shortage and high price of housing is the most urgent.

Turnouts suggest that in caring more about national than local, city-wide or regional politics, voters recognise where the main, if diminishing, power of our representatives lies.

Comparing simultaneous mayoral and assembly votes shows that, however charismatic the mayoral candidate is projected to seem, people vote more for the party than the person.

So how did Labour do in London in 2016? Are votes for parties other than the two main ones, and the ethnic composition of the electorate, still relevant to the outcome as they seem to have been in 2015?

Table 1 shows the main breakdown of

results for London's Mayor, Table 2 for the London Assembly. At the time of writing, percentages of actual votes by age, gender and ethnicity are not yet available, but the accuracy of the YouGov poll for the London Evening Standard on the eve of the election (Table 3) suggests that its figures for these categories may come close to the pattern of votes actually cast.<sup>(4)</sup>



Sadiq Khan



Zac Goldsmith

## London's Mayoral election

It is hard to be sure how far Khan's success was achieved despite or because of his party label and the reputation of its leadership.

Although distancing himself from Jeremy Corbyn did not protect him from racist innuendo and claims of 'terrorist' links from his Conservative opponent Zac Goldsmith, he benefited from consistently strong Labour canvassing and voting support and - to judge from comparison with the Assembly votes on the same day (see Tables 1 and 2) - depended only minimally on disillusioned Tory voters, and probably did best among his competitors from the poor

performance of the Liberal Democrat who came fourth after the Green.

Khan and Goldsmith each received considerably more votes than were cast for their parties' London Assembly candidates, an indication of the 'single-combat' personalised aspect of the mayoral contest; but the fact that for Goldsmith this difference was over 50% higher than for Khan suggests that as the Conservative candidate was picking up substantially more votes than loyal support for Tory Assembly candidates could expect, Khan's campaign relied less than Goldsmith's on support beyond his party base.

How far the result of the mayoral election was affected by differences on the EU (Khan is strongly pro, Goldsmith strongly anti) or by the suspiciously-timed "antisemitism" campaign against the Labour leader's well-known pro-Palestinian views (both candidates played along with it), can only be speculation. Differences between Khan and Goldsmith in terms of announced policies - take housing and public transport, for instance, both appealing strongly to younger people (see the age profile in Table 3) - were significant, with Khan promising a fares freeze and a crash building programme against less clear-cut alternatives from Goldsmith, but the latter's disadvantage was also being heir to Boris Johnson's and the Tory government's ongoing austerity policies for which he paid the appropriate price.

We can be sure, however, that despite Conservative scaremongering about Mayor Khan putting the security of Londoners at risk and exposing them to leftist "experiments" by dangerous Corbynites, most voters preferred Khan (and, for the most part, Labour) to Goldsmith (and, for the most part, the Conservatives).

Whatever role Khan will play in the coming months and years, he would be wise to remember that it was above all existing Labour supporters, with the multi-cultural working class at their core, who elected London's first Muslim mayor.

If he is able to stick to the key parts of his manifesto he will need the help of a

united Labour party and the younger electorate inspired by the alternative to austerity and greed.

**London Assembly election<sup>(3)</sup>**

Wikipedia assesses the outcome of the LA election as follows: “Labour received the largest ever number of votes for a party in a London Assembly election, becoming the first party to poll over 1 million votes. The Conservative Party won just 8 Assembly seats”,<sup>(4)</sup> “its worst ever performance in a London Assembly election”<sup>(5)</sup>.

On existing evidence, it is impossible to say whether this new Tory low is because some pro-EU (and/or anti-Corbyn) Conservatives voted for Khan or some anti-EU Conservatives voted for UKIP, though in either case the outcome is unlikely to have been greatly different if they had all voted Conservative instead.

In their campaigning and on the LA ballot paper, the fifth-placed Lib Dems called themselves Caroline Pidgeon’s

**Table 1: Votes for London’s Mayor** Turnout: 45.6% - Votes cast: 2,596,961

	<b>Labour</b> Sadiq Khan	<b>Conservative</b> Zac Goldsmith	<b>Green</b>	<b>LibDem</b>	<b>UKIP</b>
1st preference	1,148,716	909,755	150,673	120,005	94,373
+2nd preference	1,310,143	994,614	(618,991) <sup>(2)</sup>	(455,936)	(317,626)
% of vote (1st+2nd preference for top two only)	44.2 (56.9)	35.0 (43.1)	5.8	4.6	3.6

**Table 2: Votes for London Assembly Members** Votes cast: 2,596,961

	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Conservative</b>	<b>Green</b>	<b>UKIP</b>	<b>LibDem</b>
	1,054,801	764,230	207,959	171,069	165,580
out of 25 seats (gain/loss) <sup>(6)</sup>	12 (-)	8 (-1)	2 (-)	2 (+2)	1 (-1)
%vote	40.33	29.22	7.95	6.54	6.33

London Liberal Democrats.

If this was a desperate attempt to capitalise on the individual persona of their personable mayoral candidate, and to put as much water as possible between, on the one hand, her and London, and on the other, the nationally-loathed ex-Tory coalition partners known as Lib

Dems under their former leader Nick Clegg, it was not successful.

In the current political climate, the line is drawn more clearly for many decades between working people and those who live off them, and to judge from how most Londoners have voted people are deciding which side they are on.

**Table 3: Voting intentions** 2-4 May - YouGov poll - sample size 1,574 Londoners, published in the *Evening Standard* - Thursday 5 May 2016, p. 4.

	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Conservative</b>	<b>UKIP</b>	<b>Green</b>	<b>LibDem</b>	<b>Final round intention</b>	
						<b>Labour</b>	<b>Cons.</b>
% (change since 15-19 April)	43 (-5)	32(no change)	7(no change)	7 (+1)	6 (+1)	57 (-3)	43 (+3)
gender: m/f	41/46	35/29	7/7	7/6	6/5	53/61	47/39
age: 18-24/25-49/50-64/65+	48/51/36/28	27/24/37/51	4/6/9/8	6/7/7/4	6/6/4/8	65/67 48/35	35/33 52/65
inner/outer London	55/37	20/38	7/6	5/8	5/6	73/49	27/51

**FOOTNOTES**

1. In all three tables, only the five highest-scoring parties are listed, from left to right in vote-size order.
2. Although aggregated figures are used only to decide between the top two, 1st and 2nd preference totals for the remaining three candidates are enclosed in brackets as an indication of their electoral support.
3. In the absence of more detailed figures for voter ethnicity in these elections, the contrast between inner and outer London boroughs roughly corresponds to higher and lower proportions of the so-called Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) voters (only ‘roughly’, because an Assembly constituency combines two or more existing boroughs, in some cases both inner and outer ones).

4. There are fewer constituencies than seats because, in addition to the 14 constituency seats, another 11 seats with cross-London responsibilities are allocated to the top-scoring parties: three each to Labour and the Conservatives, two each to the Greens and UKIP and one to the Lib Dems.
5. Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London\\_Assembly\\_election,\\_2016](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Assembly_election,_2016), accessed 9 May 2016.
6. Source: <https://www.londonelects.org.uk/sites/default/files/London-wide%20Assembly%20Member%20Results%20Calculation.pdf>, accessed 9 May 2016.



English  
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# Labour wins in the north of England

The actor Maxine Peake, loyal to her Bolton roots, got it right before polling day. Speaking from Los Angeles she said of Jeremy Corbyn: "There are constant attacks on the Labour Party, but I think he is holding his own. Support for him is still very strong. He appears unflappable. He is a man of the people, and I think people can see the Tory attacks."

By **PETER LATHAM**

So it has proved. The Labour vote held up in the north.

Paul Dennett is the new Salford Mayor with a majority of 14,000 over the conservative candidate.

In Liverpool, Joe Anderson was returned as Mayor with 52% of the vote, and a majority of 31,000 over his Liberal Democrat rival. He stood on Labour's track record of delivery. Not one library, leisure centre, children's centre or youth centre has closed despite a 58% cut in Government funding.

South Yorkshire's Police and Crime (P&C) Commissioner Alan Billings was returned with 52% of the vote, a slight increase. He had earlier suspended Chief

Constable David Crompton following the inquest verdict of unlawful killing at Hillsborough. He was a reputable Deputy Labour Leader in Sheffield during the 1980s, and may be the one to tackle the police over Orgreave and child abuse in Rotherham.

Labour gained two more P&C Commissioners, both on second preference counts. In Humberside Keith Hunter defeated the Conservative incumbent, as did David Keane in Cheshire. This leaves the Tories with only two northern Commissioners, for Cumbria and North Yorkshire; all others are now Labour.

There was no election in Greater

Manchester; police powers are being transferred to a directly elected mayor in 2017.

At the Sheffield by-election Gill Furniss won Brightside and Hillsborough with a 6% increase in Labour's vote. She said people "have had enough of unfair Tory cuts which have hit communities like ours in Sheffield so much more than affluent areas." The previous MP - her husband, former miner Harry Harpham - had recently died of cancer.

In local councils little has changed. Labour held control in Carlisle, losing one seat to an independent.

In Newcastle, Labour had 45% of the vote compared with 46% in 2015.

They gained two new seats making 55, with the Liberal Democrats the next largest party with 20 seats. The Conservatives have no seats.

Labour gained one seat in Sunderland, one in Gateshead, two in North Tyneside and won every seat in South Tyneside, including the only one held by the Conservatives.

In Hartlepool, Labour held the council but lost a seat to UKIP, who gained three seats and now have 5 seats on the Council. They are runners-up to Labour who have 21.

In Manchester, the Liberal Democrats won Didsbury West from Labour forming a one-man opposition; all the other 95 councillors are Labour.

The Conservatives held their three contested seats in the north: Trafford in Greater Manchester with 34 seats to Labour's 26; Harrogate, 15 Conservatives to one Liberal Democrat; and Craven in Yorkshire where Labour took two new seats giving them three in all.

The Liberal Democrats held South Lakeland with 33 seats to the Conservatives' 15; Labour had only 3 seats.

Bradford Council leader, Labour's David Green, celebrated a new working majority of 8, up from one before the election, winning back two wards formerly held by Respect. He put this down to regeneration successes such as City Park, the Broadway Centre, and in the outlying areas of the borough, to better teamwork and helping 6,000 people into employment.

Labour held Leeds, where the number of women councillors overtook men for the first time. In Calderdale, Labour won the seat of the Liberal Democrat group leader, making them the largest group with 23 seats, winning 5,000 more votes than the Conservatives.

In South Yorkshire, Labour held Doncaster and Barnsley. Unison activist Mick Stowe romped home in Hoyland Milton with 1,382 votes to nearest rival UKIP's 594. He campaigned on schools, protecting local services, littering and helping local organisations through Area Councils.

UKIP exploited Labour's child abuse troubles in Rotherham by winning 14 seats, far behind Labour's 46. Labour's candidates have taken on public concerns and intend working to end this criminality.

Labour lost two seats to the Liberal Democrats in Sheffield. They now have 57 seats to the Liberal Democrats 19, UKIP 4 and Green 4.

The northern picture is of a solid Labour performance, with a hint of stronger left unity. Groups like Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition made little impact.

With more austerity, middle class interests could move towards those of the working class, allowing Labour to campaign in the centre ground on honest terms without too much sacrifice.



**Paul Dennett**  
Labour's new Mayor  
of Salford

English  
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# Home counties blue, cities red in south

The picture in the south is mixed, with the Tory heartland of the Home Counties remaining blue in more rural areas, while the cities were mainly held or won by Labour, including Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Crawley, Exeter, Norwich, Oxford and Southampton.

By **GINA NICHOLSON**

In Oxford Labour increased by two its majority on the city council – in the words of the *Oxfordshire Guardian*: “Oxford’s political spectrum turned a darker shade of red ... as Labour extended their stranglehold ...”

Labour in Cambridge also added two to its majority, now holding 24 of the 42 seats.

In Birmingham, where Conservatives were expected to make gains, they in fact lost two seats to Labour, who also gained one from the Lib-Dems, increasing their score to 80 councillors.

The good news for Labour was echoed in neighbouring areas, where it became the largest party in Walsall and made gains in Redditch.

And in Wolverhampton Labour increased its majority by gaining one seat from the Conservatives.

Coventry saw a very small turnout (generally in the low 20s but even less in one ward) which may have been the reason for the two Conservative gains from Labour; however Labour still has a massive majority on the city council.

Against all predictions, Labour in Crawley increased its paper-thin majority from one to three and in Norwich Labour gained four seats from the Greens, bringing the total Labour-held seats to 26, a majority of 13.

In Exeter Labour strengthened its control of the city council. It now has 30 of the 39 seats, the Tories have eight and the Lib-Dems just one. UKIP contested every ward and came third in

most cases, often beating both the Lib-Dems and the Greens.

In Plymouth the Conservatives gained one seat from Labour, meaning the parties are now tied at 27 seats each, with UKIP’s three seats holding the balance.

The Labour Party held on to a slim majority on Southampton City Council. The party still has 25 seats, ahead of the

to make an expected three gains which would have given them overall control of the city council. They are the largest party but since 2014 have had to rely on Labour or UKIP to get their policies through.

They failed to make gains in the south of the city, where the Lib Dems increased their vote and Labour gained a seat in Charles Dickens Ward. The Lib-Dems are the largest opposition party and Labour and UKIP have four councillors each.

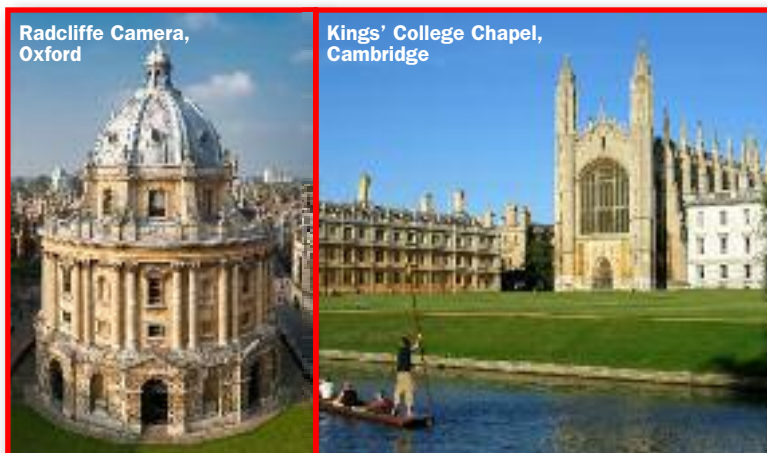
After a recently chequered history Bristol City Council now has an overall Labour majority (37 out of 70 seats). The city has four MPs, three Labour and one Conservative.

Bristol elected a Labour mayor, Marvin Rees, son of a single parent who remembers a poverty-stricken early childhood. In his election day address he said: “Today is the opportunity to change Bristol, to change the way we do politics. . . We . . . need to build homes, we need to protect people in the private rental sector, we need to solve our transport crisis, protect our children and young people, investing in their mental health and well-being.”

Mr Rees voted for Andy Burnham in the recent Labour Party leadership election.

In Thurrock the 2016 partial elections have resulted in UKIP destroying the Labour Party’s minority administration. Previously the Labour Party was the largest group in a council which had no overall control, with 18 seats compared with the Conservatives’ 17 and UKIP’s 11.

Now UKIP has increased by six seats, four at the expense of the Labour Party and two from the three Independents. Thus the Conservatives and UKIP tie with 17 each. The Labour administration will continue until removed by a special motion.



**Oxford “turned a darker shade of red” according to the *Oxford Guardian* while in Cambridge, Labour added two seats to extend its majority control.**

Conservatives’ 19.

Leader of the council Simon Letts described Southampton as “a red dot in a sea of blue” and said the result was down to the “massive hard work” of party members.

The Conservatives maintained their majorities in Gosport, Fareham, Rushmoor, Havant and Basingstoke & Dean.

The ‘sea of blue’, however, is a little muddied, as in Eastleigh, the Lib Dems held on to their 13 seats and remain in control of their only Hampshire council.

And in Portsmouth the Tories failed

Scottish  
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# SNP victory but with no overall majority

The Scottish National Party (SNP) won the Scottish election but fell short of an overall majority by 2 seats. The SNP won 59 Constituency and 4 List seats with a 46.5% share of the vote. It continues their dominance of Scottish politics.

By **SCOTT McDONALD**

However, SNP leader, Nicola Sturgeon will be disappointed that she did not win an overall majority unlike her predecessor, Alex Salmond, who did in 2011. She has now formed a minority government. (See Table 1)

The SNP had a net loss of 6 seats, losing the constituencies of Edinburgh Central to the Tory leader Ruth Davidson and Aberdeenshire West also to the Tories; Edinburgh Western and North East Fife were lost to the Liberal Democrats and Edinburgh Southern to Labour. (See Table 2 on Page 20)

The SNP won 11 constituencies from Labour but because of the Additional Member Voting System they lost seats on the Regional Lists and ended up overall with 6 less seats in the Parliament from the previous election. They lost 3 constituency seats in Edinburgh but won every seat in Glasgow.

The Tories increased their number of seats from 15 to 31 and their share of the vote by 8%. They displaced Labour as the second largest party in Parliament.

The Tories increased their vote in

what used to be Tory territory but which had gone to the SNP over recent years. There is a saying that Tory voters had “lent” their votes to the SNP in order to defeat Labour but now that Labour has been defeated these votes can come back.

Labour were reduced to 24 seats with the loss of 13 seats. This follows their disastrous General Election results in Scotland in 2015. In this Scottish election their share of the vote was slightly higher than the Tories (22.6% compared to 22% for the Tories).

The West of Scotland, once the Labour Party’s heartland, has gone virtually completely over to the SNP. Labour’s sole remaining seat in west central Scotland is Dumfries held by Jackie Baillie.

The Greens, who stood in only one constituency, which they didn’t win, won 6 List seats across the country, an increase of 4 from 2011 but one down from their high in 2003.

The Liberal Democrats won 4 constituency seats, an increase of 2, but only 1 List seat, giving them a total of 5 seats, no change from 2011. (See Table 3, page 20)

UKIP won 2% of the vote and no seats. Other parties including the former Scottish Socialist Party, now called RISE (Respect, Independence, Socialism, Environmentalism); Tommy Sheridan’s Solidarity and all the other fringe parties received less than 1% of the vote.

The aftermath of the Referendum on Scottish Independence is still being played out. The political

battleground continues to be set out as “Independence versus Unionism”.

Lesley Riddoch, a political commentator and pro-Independence supporter, wrote, “the big message from the 2016 Scottish election seems to be that the constitutional issue has now replaced class as the primary fault-line in Scottish politics...the real losers... are unquestionably Scottish Labour – squeezed by a more progressive sounding SNP and a more muscular looking set of unionists in the Scottish Conservative Party.”

This replacement of class issues by the constitutional issue sets a framework for debate which suits both the SNP and the Tories.

Sir Malcolm Rifkind, former Edinburgh MP and Tory Foreign Secretary, wrote “People were increasingly saying that if 45% are voting nationalist we have to unify the unionist cause. The Conservative and Unionist Party is the natural unionist party – it is in its name.”

Ruth Davidson, the Scottish Tory leader, who having baited Labour’s leader, Kezia Dugdale, over her pro-union credentials during the televised leaders’ debates, successfully positioned herself as the person most capable of standing up to Nicola Sturgeon over independence.

Davidson’s message was simple: “elect a strong opposition to the SNP and NO to a second referendum.” The Tories campaign put Davidson at the centre and downplayed the party label including on the ballot form.

The SNP will increasingly characterise anti-independence supporters as Tory unionists as they continue their long-held strategic aim of replacing Labour as the party of working people. During the 2014 Referendum the Tories and Labour campaigned under the joint “Better Together” banner. Independence supporters often referred to Labour as the “Red Tories”.

The SNP intend to make sure that the



**Jackie Baillie MSP**

**TABLE 1. Overall break-down of Scottish Parliament’s 129 seats**

PARTY	Seats	Change
<b>SNP</b>	63	-6
<b>Conservative</b>	31	+16
<b>Labour</b>	24	-13
<b>Green</b>	6	+4
<b>LibDem</b>	5	No change
<b>Independent</b>	0	-1

“Independence versus Unionism” debate remains centre stage. A few days after the election Nicola Sturgeon announced that it was the SNP’s intention to run a summer campaign “to persuade people of the benefits of Independence”.

This decision by the SNP reflects a calculation that if the UK (but not Scotland) were to vote to leave the EU then they would be in a better position to call for a second Independence referendum and their campaign would be ready to roll.

With the SNP now having a membership of some 115,000 they also need to keep their thousands of new members wound up, who, if there is not a second referendum in the foreseeable future, may get “war-weary”.

This strategy also has the advantage of directing the people’s opposition to austerity onto the Tories and Westminster and letting the SNP Government off the hook.

The SNP Government, having abandoned their policy of a 50% top rate of tax, now share the same tax policies as the Tories. So, as on the previous occasion when the SNP’s minority government were able to get their policies - including their budget - through Parliament with the support of the Tories, the same scenario is likely to happen in this Parliament.

As long as the main issue in Scotland remains “Independence versus Unionism” and since the two main parties, SNP and the Tories, in Holyrood are happy to see it that way, Labour will have problems.

**TABLE 2. Constituency Seats and Votes**

PARTY	Seats	Change	% of vote	Change	No. of votes
<b>SNP</b>	59	+6	46.5	+1.1	1,059,897
<b>Conservative</b>	7	+4	22	+8.1	501, 844
<b>Labour</b>	3	-12	22.6	-9.2	514, 261
<b>Green</b>	0	No change	Stood in 1 seat	-	6,916
<b>LibDem</b>	4	+2	7.8	0.1	178, 238
<b>Total</b>	73				

**TABLE 3. List Seats and Votes**

PARTY	Seats	Change	% of vote	Change	No. of votes
<b>SNP</b>	4	-12	41.7	-2.3	953, 987
<b>Conservative</b>	24	+12	22.9	+10.6	524, 222
<b>Labour</b>	21	-1	19.1	-7.2	435, 919
<b>Green</b>	6	+4	6.6	+2.2	150, 426
<b>LibDem</b>	1	-2	5.2	-	119, 284
<b>UKIP</b>	0	No change	2.0	+1.1	46, 426
<b>Total</b>	56				

As Anas Sarwar, a new Labour MSP, who was formerly Deputy Leader of the Scottish Labour Party and an MP until the 2015 General election, stated, “the Labour Party is uncomfortable with Independence and uncomfortable with unionism”.

Already senior Labour Party figures including the current Deputy Leader of

the Scottish Labour Party, Alex Rowley, mentored by Gordon Brown, are publicly pushing for the Labour Party to adopt a policy of “Home Rule”.

This would continue the trajectory, which began with Tony Blair, under pressure from Gordon Brown, to promote devolution as the way to defeat the nationalists.



## Not much change in Northern Ireland

Some voters in the North of Ireland may be tiring of their representatives in Stormont. Sinn Fein’s vote was down by 2.9%, and the Unionists by 0.8%. Sinn Fein lost a seat, and the Social and Democratic Labour Party lost two seats.

The Democratic Unionist Party now has 38 seats in Stormont, Sinn Fein 28, Ulster Unionists 16, SDLP 12, Alliance 8, People Before Profit 2, Greens 2.

Turnout was 54.91%, regarded as low locally but still twice that in some parts of Britain.

Smaller parties made breakthroughs.

In Foyle constituency, the veteran Derry campaigner Eamonn McCann won a seat for the People Before Profits Alliance, an Irish anti-austerity group founded by the Socialist Workers Party. This is seen as a personal vote for him, costing the SDLP a seat.

In West Belfast, Gerry Carroll, won a West Belfast seat for the People Before Profits Alliance with 8,299 first preference votes, pushing out one of Sinn Fein’s five Assembly members in the constituency. He had already proved his competence as a local councillor.

Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader, Arlene Foster, and Sinn Fein’s Martin McGuinness have been re-appointed as First Minister and deputy First Minister respectively.

The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), which had withdrawn from the executive coalition last year will take up the recently established option of entering formal opposition. This option arises from the new law enabling parties with electoral strength to form an official opposition and to be afforded the recognition, funding and key Assembly positions.

Welsh  
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# Welsh Labour wins

How you judge the outcome of the elections to the National Assembly for Wales in May depends in part on what your expectations were beforehand.

By **BOB McCORMICK**

On polling day, YouGov forecast that Labour would see its share of the vote fall to 33% and lose three seats – Llanelli, Cardiff North and Cardiff Central.

However, the outcome was that Labour had a 35% share and won all three of the endangered seats, two of them with larger majorities than in 2011.

The party's only setback in terms of seats was its loss of the Rhondda, where Plaid Cymru's popular leader, Leanne Wood, narrowly beat Leighton Andrews, a controversial Labour minister.

The net position of 29 Assembly Members (AM) for Labour in a 60-seat Assembly left incumbent First Minister Carwyn Jones scratching around for allies and suffering the indignity of failing to be re-elected to the role at the first time of asking.

Labour then had to enter talks with Plaid, resulting in an agreement to set up three 'liaison committees' for finance, legislation and the constitution. Plaid has put itself in the happy position of having an inside line on policy while remaining free to act as an opposition and distance itself from anything unpopular.

Jeremy Corbyn's critics in the media and the party have presented the Welsh Assembly election results as not good enough and proof he needs to do better or be replaced. However, while Labour does have to ask itself some serious questions, Corbyn can scarcely be blamed for problems that pre-date his leadership.

For a start, Wales has not been immune to the rise of UKIP over the last few years. On the fertile soil of the European elections in 2014, it won 27.5% of the Welsh vote. And in last year's General Election it overtook both Plaid and the Liberal Democrats to come third with a 13.6% share.

In the Assembly elections, UKIP's forward march faltered. Its 12.5% vote was below both its General Election result and the 16% predicted by YouGov, but it gained the publicity advantage of being able to hail the result as a breakthrough because it won seats for the first time – seven UKIP AMs were elected

through a regional list system that favours the parties which have not won first-past-the-post constituency seats.

UKIP's support is spread fairly evenly across Wales, but its biggest share of the vote was in South Wales East where it came second to Labour with 17.8% of the regional list vote and was also second to Labour in four of the eight constituency ballots - Newport East, Torfaen, Islwyn and Merthyr Tydfil.

While Labour is vulnerable to UKIP in the more anglicised working class seats in Wales, it faces a serious challenge from Plaid in other traditional strongholds. Plaid was second to Labour in South Wales Central, South Wales West and Wales North as well as being top of the poll in its Wales Mid and West heartland.

On past form, Welsh Labour leaders will attempt to avoid any self-criticism for its diminished position, content to allow Corbyn to take most of the flack.

But it can't have it both ways: having distanced itself from the UK leadership prior to the election, including by Jones gratuitously declaring support for air strikes in Syria, it must accept primary responsibility for a share of the vote being two percentage points down on the 2015 General Election.

There is certainly no evidence in these results that Welsh working class voters generally reject Corbyn's central mes-

sages. Wood, for example, is firmly anti-austerity and widely perceived as being to the left of the Welsh Labour leader.

Nor do these results support Sadiq Khan's point that one of Labour's problem is that it has 'deliberately turned its back' on people who previously voted Tory. In fact, in Wales, the Tories suffered their lowest share of the vote since 2003, and Labour did well where it faced a straight fight with them, notably in Cardiff North.

A big problem for Labour in Wales is the nature of devolution itself. The party has been in government continuously since the Assembly was established in 1999, albeit for two terms needing to form coalitions. Over that period, it has implemented a number of policies that benefit working people such as a cap on tuition fees and free prescriptions.

But the reality is the Welsh government does not have much more power or financial autonomy than a large local authority and, even if it did, the Welsh economy is too weak relatively to sustain a radically different approach.

The flack Labour has taken for shortcomings in the NHS in Wales, however hypocritical they may be, illustrates the devolution conundrum the party faces and the risk that being the governing party in this situation is bound to erode its support.

That inherent difficulty has compounded the tendency for some people to vote Labour in Westminster elections and Plaid when it comes to the Assembly. In the four general elections since

Continued on page 23

UK General & National Assembly of Wales (NAW) elections since 1999							
Election	LAB	PC	Con	LibDem	UKIP	Green	Other
1999 (NAW)	37.6%	28.4%	15.8%	13.5%	-	0.1%	4.7%
2001 (GEN)	48.6%	14.3%	21.0%	13.8%	0.9%	0.3%	1.1%
2003 (NAW)	40.0%	21.2%	19.9%	14.1%	2.3%	-	2.5%
2005 (GEN)	42.7%	12.6%	21.4%	18.4%	1.5%	0.5%	2.9%
2007 (NAW)	32.2%	22.4%	22.4%	14.8%	1.8%	-	0.4%
2010 (GEN)	36.2%	11.3%	26.1%	20.1%	2.4%	0.5%	3.4%
2011 (NAW)	42.3%	19.3%	25.0%	10.6%	0.2%	-	2.6%
2015 (GEN)	36.9%	12.1%	27.2%	6.5%	13.6%	2.6%	1.1%
2016 (NAW)	34.7%	20.5%	21.1%	7.7%	12.5%	2.5%	1.0%

# Disgraceful Housing and Planning Act

The government's Housing and Planning Act was passed in Parliament and received its Royal Assent on 12 May.

By **PAT TURNBULL**

It has been estimated that the number of social rented homes – which includes council homes plus housing association homes (often estates transferred by councils, or knocked down and rebuilt as housing association homes) – could fall by as much as ten per cent by 2020.

That's 400,000 lost social rented homes across England, and there is a dire shortage already.

The government plays on people's fears by blaming immigrants for the shortage of housing. However, 93 per cent of all new social lets between 2007 and 2013 were to British nationals.

Three per cent of new allocations were to households from the new European Economic Area countries of Eastern Europe. 3 per cent were let to people from all other countries.

It has also been calculated that 100,000 new social rented homes per year could be built if councils were given the freedom to borrow and if obligations on developers were tightened. Unfortunately, this is not the way of this government, despite a YouGov poll which suggests 57 per cent of people would welcome more social housing.

## Right to Buy, Forced to Sell

The Act proposes that housing association tenants should be offered their homes under Right to Buy, as has been the case for council tenants, particularly since the 1980s.

This would result in the loss of yet more precious social rented homes. But worse, the government proposes to compensate the housing associations for the discount offered to the tenants by forcing councils to sell off council homes, once they become empty, if they are above a certain market value.

In some London boroughs this could include 50 per cent or more of council homes.

The method the government is using is particularly pernicious. The govern-

ment will make an estimation of how many homes come into this category and tax the councils for that amount.

If the councils, already strapped for cash by government cuts to their budgets, do not sell the homes, they must find the money from somewhere else.

Rather than form a united front against the bill, the National Housing Federation, the umbrella organization for housing associations, has struck a deal with the government to offer tenants their homes for sale on a voluntary basis. Currently there is a pilot scheme involving five housing associations. Tenants will be offered big discounts, but must have been social housing tenants for at least ten years.

Whatever the rhetoric, experience of Right to Buy when applied to council homes indicates that these homes will not be replaced one for one and like for like. In fact in London a third of former council homes purchased under Right to Buy are now being rented out at unaffordable market rents.

The government shows no sign of launching a programme to build social rented homes. In his autumn statement, the chancellor, George Osborne, announced what he called the biggest house building programme since the 1970s.

However, the money is not going to go to councils to build rented homes. It will go to developers to build homes for sale. Many people are sceptical that these homes will even be built, as developers make it quite clear that they want to keep housing scarce to keep the prices high.

## Pay to Stay

The most negative of the other proposals in the housing bill is that households earning above a certain amount should be forced to pay market rents to stay in their council or housing association home.

Currently the suggested figure is

£40,000 in London, £30,000 elsewhere. The proposed method of calculation is to take the two top household incomes into account. This would mean, for example, that two council cleaners at the top of the scale in the London borough of Hackney would not be entitled to a council house – clearly ridiculous. In Hackney the market rent is at least four times the social rent.

The government justifies this policy by referring to social rents as 'subsidised', and saying 'rich' tenants should not have subsidised rents. The rents are not subsidised. They are calculated to cover the cost of upkeep of social rented homes.

For years the government made a handsome profit out of the housing revenue account, which came from council tenants' rents. Many council and housing association tenants require housing benefit to be able to pay the rent. It is only the ridiculous price of housing in places like London that makes the rents look cheap.

This is one more blow to the right of a council tenant to a home for life. What are people to do? Give up work? Rack up rent arrears and be evicted? Move out of London? They will not be able to afford another home there because private rents and buying are far too expensive. This applies in other expensive parts of the country too.

## 'Affordable' housing?

The government is also once again changing the definition of 'affordable housing'. It already includes unaffordable housing at up to 80 per cent of market rents and part rent/part buy.

Now it is to include so-called 'starter homes' for sale. In London the current suggested figure is £450,000. It is hard enough now for councils to persuade developers to include a few 'affordable' rent homes in their developments of homes for sale.

Now developers will be able to say they are fulfilling their requirements under Section 106 by building homes for sale. The council will not have the right to say they want social rented homes built instead. We all need more social rented homes.

# Housing privatisation in eastern Europe

Since the counter-revolutions around 1990 in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, housing provision has changed.

By **PAT TURNBULL**

Generally before 1990 all these countries had large stocks of public housing, mostly built after 1945, and let out at very low rents.

After 1990, most of these homes were sold to the tenants, in some cases at very low prices: in Romania at the equivalent of one month's wages. The re-privatisation had already started in Romania

with right to buy from the 1970s but on a small scale.

In Poland in 1995 about half of the housing stock was still communal or co-operative but there is hardly any now. Banks and other investors have benefited from privatization, especially after entry to the European Union.

Mortgage loans have risen six times in

eight years. As well as selling off communal/cooperative stock, councils have stopped administering the housing stock. Maximum rent levels rose especially steeply between 2005 and 2008.

In the Czech Republic state housing was transferred to the councils, who privatized 90% of homes under right to buy. Privatization of heavy industry included privatization of flats for employees.

In Hungary most housing was privatized between 1990 and 1995, although some families could not afford to buy. 90% of housing is now owner occupied. Only about 2.5% is public housing and about 8% private rental. From 1982 people in Hungary could buy their flats but not many did before 1990.

There have been further problems for people who have taken out mortgages. In the credit boom in the early 2000s people in Hungary acquired property with mortgages.

In 2004 Hungary entered the European Union. All new mortgages were issued in Swiss francs, a huge problem after the 2007/8 crash. It is mainly in the Eastern European countries that there are foreign financed mortgages.

In Yugoslavia between 1946 and 1992 a huge amount of social housing was built. 70–80 per cent of the urban population lived in slums before the Second World War.

Now in Croatia 70% are in their own property – compared to a European Union average of 38%. Only two per cent is public social housing. In Zagreb there is only a tiny amount of social housing which does not even cater for all of the poorest people.

There has been a huge rise in evictions since 2008 in particular. In Croatia 150,000 people who were not eligible for normal mortgage loans took out so-called toxic loans. Then the interest rates were raised, so that re-payments were in many cases more than the household income.

In Serbia as a result of the war which broke up Yugoslavia there has been a huge influx of refugees and the whole arena of housing has been deregulated. Houses are even built on top of houses. In Belgrade (pictured above) the centre



Belgrade, capital of Serbia

## Welsh Labour wins

Continued from page 21

1999, the average votes of the two parties have been: Labour 41%, Plaid 12%.

However, in five Assembly elections, the averages are 37% and 22%. Until 2010, this may have been because some voters didn't want Labour to be in government in both Cardiff and Westminster, but the trend has continued under a Tory prime minister.

Allowing for the erosion of its support by UKIP in recent years, Labour can take some comfort from achieving a vote

above its 2007 low point. The party contained the UKIP threat and recovered ground from the Tories.

But there is still a lot of work to do if it is to restore its position as the dominant party in Wales, and there is no evidence from these results to suggest that it will gain anything by distancing itself from Corbyn.

Indeed, where the energy of the many young Corbyn supporters has been harnessed, such as in Cardiff, it has contributed to a resurgence of party campaigning.

of the city is being depopulated and transformed by foreign investors into luxurious apartments.

In all these countries governments and city councils are building very little public housing to replace what was sold off. In Poland in 2013, for example, 70% of new houses were developer houses, six per cent communal/social housing, and the rest private non-developer housing.

So there is now very little public housing for the next generation, and the rising prices of private housing mean many young people are living indefinitely with their parents. Rents in Bucharest, Romania, are huge compared to wages and salaries. As a result, three generations can be living in a flat meant for one family.

Upkeep is a problem. People mainly living in blocks of flats have the joint responsibility. Economies, particularly in industry, were hard hit after 1990, so that many people lost their jobs or now have low waged, insecure employment.

As a result, many homes have become run down. People are resorting to such measures as jointly collecting recyclables and selling them to pay for the upkeep of their homes.

Utilities have been privatised; heating and lighting which used to be included in the rents are now only available at high prices, so that people are running up big bills, especially for electricity. People who can't pay the bills lose their homes.

Another common problem is that people are being forced out of their lifelong rented homes. Banks and private owners are buying up buildings, especially near the centres of towns and cities.

Then they employ 'house cleansing' firms to get the tenants out by starting renovations which leave gales roaring through windows that have been removed, cutting off water and electricity, puncturing pipes causing floods, making holes in the roof, and other forms of harassment.

Even tenants with the theoretical right to remain after their homes were sold have been forced out by these methods, despite organising in tenants' associations to defend themselves.

They cannot afford the rents in the 'renovated' buildings and the most they can get is some compensation. It is often very hard for the tenants to find out who the new owners are, let alone contact them, and their rent agreements may still be with the city council.

Just as in Britain, city councils can be keen to sell off city centre buildings as they are short of money and want to attract tourists and investors. In Poznan, Poland, Srodka is a classic example of gentrification.

It is one of the oldest parts of the city, and nearly 60 per cent of the inhabitants have been forced to move out. There are cafes, banks, hotels, and a Museum of the Beginning of the Polish State which opened two years ago. This is one of the projects realized from the budgets for the 2012 European football competition.

Another problem is that former owners – some real, some fake – are appearing who say that certain buildings were their property before 1945 and they want to reclaim them.

They have often sold their rights (whether real or not) to companies who seek to take possession of places where people have lived for years.

In Romania, for example, a 1995 law, strengthened in 2001, gives total rights to former owners. This is backed up with constant pressure from the European Union.

### Warsaw destroyed by the Nazis

Perhaps the most striking example of the injustice of the situation is Warsaw. People talk of the charm of pre-war Warsaw, but 95% of the city was in private hands, and three or four people would be living in one room, mostly with no running water or central heating.

During the Second World War the city was 85% destroyed, mainly by the Nazi occupiers, so that in 1944 many families were living in the cellars of ruined buildings. The people of Warsaw rebuilt their city, including some buildings the city authorities judged to be beyond repair, and they lived in the city they had rebuilt.

Much of the labour was voluntary, and 70% of the working brigades were made up of women. Now people alleging to be former owners are appearing to claim these buildings as their own. There is no talk of paying compensation to the people who actually rebuilt them.

Because the priority in the countries of Eastern Europe was often to build new industries in the decades after the Second World War, and to build new homes and facilities for people round them, often upkeep of old buildings in the centres of towns and cities was seen as less important.

In recent years these rather run-down buildings had become cheap homes; in Romania, for example, they were often inhabited by Roma people, who are now being driven out of their homes by developers who see money to be made out of these city centre properties.

150 people were evicted in 2014 from a house near Bucharest city centre. 27 families lived on the street outside for more than a year as a protest, but as winter 2015 approached many found it

impossible to continue.

This property was one of those being restored to its pre-1945 owner. In another case someone received 66 houses which his grandfather was supposed to have owned, despite the suspicion of false papers. There have been many protests against these evictions; one tactic to weaken the protest is to offer the leading person a house and leave the others without their leader.

In Hungary, the Mayor wants to change the city centre of Budapest. The city had the highest proportion of remaining public housing. In 2004, many old houses were bulldozed, to be replaced by flats, offices and a shopping mall.

Many people were displaced; there were problems for people who owed rent or who did not receive enough compensation. Rents rose and forced people out as well. European Union money has been available for this 'social regeneration' project, while because of restrictions it is very difficult to use EU funds to build social housing.

Protection of tenants has also got worse. In the Czech Republic until 2012 there was reasonable protection of tenants but since then their position has been severely weakened by such things as short term contracts, easier eviction and higher advance payments.

In the 1990s rents were regulated but in the last ten years they have been gradually deregulated and since 2010 completely deregulated. There used to be housing benefits for up to 90% of rent payments, but since 2012 there have been a series of benefit cuts. In Hungary too subsidies to individual households to help pay the rent have been withdrawn.

Where do people go when they lose their homes and there is no public housing to re-house them? Poland has found the answer: 'container homes'.

There are large developments in some Polish cities. They are metal boxes, set down on bare earth in the middle of places like industrial estates, with no facilities nearby.

People who can't pay the rent are dumped here; this includes pensioners and families with children. There is no insulation; the temperature rises to 40 degrees in summer and falls below freezing in winter.

People already on very low incomes are forced to pay a fortune for electrical heating to survive the winter months.

Tenants and campaigners in all these countries are fighting to defend their homes, to inform and support tenants in trying to protect their rights, to support people who have been evicted, and to demand the right to the city for everybody.



# Bolivarian revolution under serious threat

The advance of left and socialist governments in Latin America in recent years has certainly not been smooth.

By **FRIEDA PARK**

They have had to resist external interference from the United States and reaction at home as well as dealing with the heritage of neo-colonialism. There have been setbacks such as the coup against President Zelaya of Honduras. However, progress has never looked more under threat than now.

In Argentina the right-wing candidate, Mauricio Macri narrowly won the November 2015 Presidential elections.

In February this year a proposal in a referendum, called by the Bolivian President Evo Morales, to enable him to stand for another term was defeated – again very narrowly.

Impeachment proceedings have begun against the Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff.

The US is still seeking to use the rapprochement with Cuba to roll back socialism there. In this context the victory of the right in the Venezuelan parliamentary elections is a major blow. With 56% of the vote the MUD (Unidad Democrática) coalition gained 112 seats (although the legitimacy of some of the results is contested) and the Venezuelan Socialist Party (PSUV) and its allies gained 55 seats.

Despite the astonishing successes of the Bolivarian Revolution, big problems have remained and have recently escalated.

There is continued destabilisation by the United States and the right within the country. This included the wave of violent protests in 2014 against the government which was eventually defeated, though not before there were a number of deaths and injuries with damage to government buildings and social missions.

There is also an economic war which involves currency speculation and the hoarding and smuggling of subsidised goods such as food and oil over the border into Colombia.

It has been estimated, for example, that 30% - 40% of food has disappeared

down this route. There are shortages of basic goods and inflation is very high. Many of these problems have been



**Venezuela's President, Nicolás Maduro.**



**Brazil's suspended President, Dilma Rousseff (right) with former President, Lula da Silva.**

around for some time but, to make matters worse, there was the dramatic fall in the price of oil from \$148 to \$24 per barrel. Venezuela is virtually dependent

on income from oil, so it is not hard to imagine the devastating consequences of this collapse on the government's ability to maintain its social programmes and combat economic and social problems.

Conditions have also worsened because a lengthy drought has impacted on the production of hydro-electricity. There are now four hour rolling power cuts across the country and civil servants are working only two days per week.

Discontent with the deteriorating economic situation, which causes serious difficulties for ordinary Venezuelans, was at the root of the right-wing success in the elections.

However, this does not imply that the right has built a new consensus round neo-liberalism. Polls show that Venezuelans still support the policies of the Maduro government and oppose measures such as privatisation.

So there is everything still to fight for and the government has taken up the battle to defend the Bolivarian Revolution and prevent the overthrow of President Maduro.

The right has made its intentions plain and is targeting key areas.

A major success of the government is its house building programme, which has seen the construction of over 1 million good quality houses, leased to families.

The Supreme Court has recently overruled a right-to-buy law passed by the Parliament. It would have fuelled house price inflation and taken these homes out of the public sector when millions of Venezuelans still need decent housing.

During the election the right published a draft policy plan to privatise key public services, including community controlled media. It would also seek to get rid of price controls on food.

The Labour Law and associated legislation guarantees workers' rights, including equal opportunities, the right to strike and good working conditions.

The bosses' organisation, FEDECAMARAS, backed the right financially during the election and is now seeking the repeal of the Law.

Calls have also been made for “restructuring” the social missions, which are the vehicles for delivering services such as health care, housing, provision of basic foodstuffs and education.

All this demonstrates which side the new legislators in the Assembly are on, however, nothing was more self-serving than one of the first steps they took, which was to pass an amnesty law.

This legislation was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. This law would have exonerated and freed from prison their political allies convicted of criminal offences.

The proposed amnesty was wide-ranging and covered events and activities committed in: “protests or demonstrations or meetings with a political end”.

So it is OK to commit assault, murder, arson or criminal damage as long as the declared aim was political. The amnesty could also have extended to people imprisoned for embezzlement and corruption.

No wonder that PSUV assembly member Pedro Carreño described the law as a “confession of the criminal record of the reactionary right-wing”. This law was also struck down by the Supreme Court.

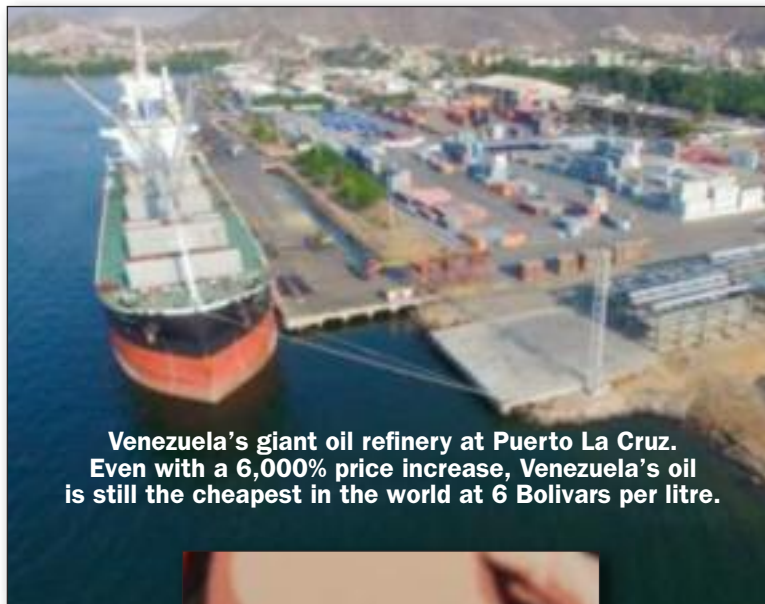
Much of what is being attempted by the right can still be blocked by the President or the courts, so ousting Maduro remains a central objective and the right has outlined its strategy for this. MUD has started trying to gain enough signatures to institute a recall referendum to remove Maduro from office.

Contrary to the predictions of the right, the Venezuelan Electoral Commission co-operated fully with this in line with the constitution.

The right seems to have passed the first hurdle. In 6 days 1.8 million signatures were collected (only 200,00 were needed). In the next stage, to actually get a referendum, 4 million signatures will be needed and then the right needs to win the referendum itself, no simple task.

They are not, therefore, putting all their eggs in one basket. They are also threatening to start impeachment proceedings against Maduro.

In the streets violent demonstrations have begun to happen and clearly the right will combine destabilisation with constitutional measures to attempt to



**Venezuela’s giant oil refinery at Puerto La Cruz. Even with a 6,000% price increase, Venezuela’s oil is still the cheapest in the world at 6 Bolivars per litre.**



unseat Maduro.

In an overt external threat President Macri of Argentina has called for the Organisation of American States to intervene in Venezuela.

The critical factor will be the role of the Venezuelan people themselves. Will they mobilise to support the Bolivarian Revolution or will the right succeed in

undermining that support?

In response to these challenges, Maduro’s government has stepped up its efforts to tackle Venezuela’s problems. Measures recently announced include reform to reduce the number of exchange rates and help stabilise the currency.

Other important economic measures have also been announced. To gain more revenue the price of petrol will increase 6000% from 0.01 Bolivars to 6 Bolivars per litre.

Even with this price hike it remains the cheapest petrol in the world.

There will also be a new initiative to tackle tax evasion based on a successful

model implemented by Ecuador. Income from these initiatives will be invested in the social missions.

In addition, Maduro announced measures to develop other sections of the economy to begin to make the country less oil-dependent and more self-sufficient.

The sectors targeted include manufacturing, extractive industries, exports and agriculture. A specific initiative is being launched to promote urban agriculture which has been very successful in Cuba.

To promote longer-term growth 190 billion Bolivars of investment will go into infrastructure projects.

Local communities will be given control over administering the state supermarket chain. As well as improving its operation this is also designed to tackle corruption – another of the government’s priorities.

To counteract the economic pressures on ordinary people, measures are being taken to increase the national minimum wage, the amount provided through food coupons and cash support to vulnerable families.

The government of Venezuela is not giving up in the face of the right-wing success - the fight is on!

## The Socialist Correspondent

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# Populism and its European context

The political fall-out from the 2007/8 financial economic crisis is settling to reveal a familiar but also a changed political landscape.

By **PAUL SUTTON**

Long-established forms of political participation stand alongside new forms of political engagement which threaten to undermine and erode the foundations of the capitalist democratic order in most late/post-industrial societies, raising the prospect of sweeping political change.

This 'new politics' takes a number of forms but at its most characteristic is the rise of what may best be described as an emergent 'anti-politics' along with an associated revival of populist parties and movements.

Both rest on the fact that while the economic crisis has been contained it has not been resolved and so its causes and consequences remain determinant.

Similarly, in those countries most affected, the crisis saw no changes to political regimes (defined as the combination of political ideas, processes and institutions that shape the government and state).

So well-established political parties continue to contest and win power, which is exercised through institutions which have a long history in delivering policy to maintain the power of capital intact. At the same time new political movements and parties have emerged and gained momentum.

In short, there have been no political revolutions or even fundamental political changes following the financial crisis. But at the same time there has been growing political alienation from and opposition to its political management.

In some respects politics is 'business as usual' while in others politics has reached its 'sell-by date' and is no longer seen as 'fit for purpose'.

Although this applies across the board in many countries it has become particularly acute in Europe, leading to a 'revisionist' politics on both the Left and the Right.

A particular challenge has been

mounted against Social Democrat parties which have lost power and failed to win elections in many European countries.

As such, their future is increasingly being called into question and with it the prospect of a re-alignment or renewal in politically progressive thinking and action.

## The Rise of Anti-Politics

One of the major contributing themes to anti-politics is a lack of trust in government. While this is not in any sense 'new' there is some evidence that it has become more marked in recent years.

Social surveys have shown a decline in trust in politicians and governments throughout Europe and in particular by the working class. This has led to a withdrawal from many forms of political activism pioneered and promoted by the established political parties, including participation in political campaigns and elections.

Surveys commissioned from YouGov in 2013 and 2014, which were reported on the 'policy network' website, reveal the extent of this in Britain.

Some 80% of those asked agreed with the statement that "politicians are too focused on short-term chasing of headlines" and 72% agreed that "politics is dominated by self-seeking politicians protecting the interests of the already rich and powerful in our society".

Other figures report that 48% considered that "politicians were out for themselves" and only 10% thought they wanted to do what was right for the country.

In the words of the authors of the surveys, these figures "represent a sharp drop from Gallup surveys that asked the same question in 1944 and 1972"<sup>(2)</sup>.

This disenchantment with and disengagement from politics is also reported by the Hansard Society in its annual

Audit of Political Engagement.

In 2015 it reported that 68% thought the current system of government was not working well and needed considerable improvement (up from 60% in 2004), with the highest rates of dissatisfaction among the working class (social groups C2,D,E) and those who were intending to vote Labour in the then forthcoming general election<sup>(3)</sup>.

These figures are echoed in views on Parliament and standards in public life. Only 48% of people now believe that Parliament "debates and makes decisions about issues that matter to me" with those most disenchanted likely to be in the working class (social groups D and E). Some 36% believe that standards in public life are low and 35% that they have declined compared to a few years ago.

These negative views are echoed in figures on political involvement. Just 20% think they have at least some influence over local decision-making and the number of those registered to vote or inclined to vote in elections is down.

So also are the numbers of those who are prepared to do something in order to influence decisions they feel strongly about, with now only 33% prepared to contact a local representative, 29% prepared to sign a paper petition, and 15% to boycott products.

As with the previous figures, the working class are the least likely to be involved. Indeed, the statistics in the survey show that the working class (loosely defined as social class groups C, D and E) are consistently the most alienated from and least involved with the present political system. Not surprisingly, those in social classes A and B are more supportive of it.

On this basis it is not difficult to conclude that the present political system is demonstrably failing the majority of people in Britain.

The same could be said for most of Europe and it is this that has driven the resurgence of populist parties in recent years.

## Populism Renewed

Populism is not new and can be identi-

fied as far back as the late nineteenth century in Russia and the United States.

In the 1930s it emerged in Latin America and has stayed as a constant feature of its politics in a number of states, most notably in the Peronist movement in Argentina.



**1946: President of Argentina, Juan Peron at his inauguration.**

Populism and populist currents were also present in a number of the anti-colonial movements in Africa and Asia after the Second World War as well as intermittently in the Middle East and North Africa.

The number and geographic range of movements that have been identified as 'populist' has led to problems of definition.

At its core is an appeal to 'the people' against 'the elite', both in terms of the latter's occupation of the established structures of power and its control over the dominant values and ideas in society.

'The people' are seen as 'just' and 'true' and the elite (establishment) as 'false' and 'corrupt', depriving the people of their 'rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice'.

Populism, defined in this way, does not have a specific class content. 'The people' are seen as a homogeneous community which is above class (i.e. supra-class) and is founded on presumed common racial or national/regional identities.

Populist movements thus often have a strong nationalist or sub-nationalist (regionalist) focus. They presume to know who they are and who they are against (this being 'the other', typically defined as the elite and/or immigrants, including Muslims).

'The people' are necessarily 'sovereign'. They express their common will through a political movement (or political party), which in many cases combines charismatic leadership (or at least strong leadership) with the interests and values of the 'ordinary people', which the political leaders articulate and promote.

Political movements and parties thus tend to be 'mass organisations' promoting a form of democracy in which the 'followers' stay loyal to the 'leader' and the leadership assumes special powers to set out the goals and strategy of the movement. It therefore has both democratic and anti-democratic features at the same time.

Such contradictions are not unusual in populist politics which often promote mutually conflicting policies and programmes. It also gives such movements a degree of flexibility that allows them to align themselves with any number of political ideologies including nationalism, federalism, conservatism, liberalism, socialism and fascism (but not communism).

Their use of these ideologies is largely instrumental, in the sense that they are adopted for the immediate aims of the movement and are not valued in themselves, so they can be discarded when the political leaders no longer see them as serving any purpose.

While such flexibility allows populists to manoeuvre to gain advantage from the particular moment it does not give them any permanence and most populist movements are comparatively short lived, disappearing not long after the demise of a particularly charismatic leader and/or the collapse of the coalition of conflicting classes and interests it identifies as its special 'community'.

Populist movements therefore both come and go, with their particular form at any given time reflecting the socio-economic and political circumstances in which they find themselves.

#### Populism in Europe and Britain

In Europe there has been a resurgence of populist movements in the last fifteen years.

The initial drivers were the perceived failure of 'establishment' political parties to respond to issues such as globalisa-

tion, immigration, European integration and cultural individualism (including sexual liberation) and the ideological orientation of these movements was mostly on the Right.

The economic crisis from 2008 has given a further momentum to such movements and now added a dimension on the Left in the form of Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, who have highlighted the issues of neo-liberalism and austerity.

In 2015, Cas Mudde listed twenty-one leading populist parties in twenty-one countries throughout Europe<sup>(9)</sup>.

While comprehensive it did not include all populist parties e.g. it excluded the long-established Liga Nord in Italy and the Scottish National Party (SNP) in the regions. Mudde also provided figures on their recent electoral performances in both European and national elections.

These show that the majority of populist parties are electorally successful in most European countries. In the Euro-

pean elections of 2014 the leading populist party won more than 25% of the vote in Hungary, Poland, United Kingdom, Greece, Den-

mark and France.

In the then most recent national election all populist parties together (in some countries there was more than one party) scored an average of just under 17% of the vote, with parties in Hungary, Slovakia, Italy, Greece, Poland, Austria and Switzerland all winning more than 25%.

In Greece, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia and Switzerland a populist party is the biggest party and in seven countries populist parties were then currently part of the national government – Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Switzerland. Recent political developments have further underlined this apparent strength with their electoral vote increasing and government experience consolidated.

The British experience reflects these facts and figures. They show, for example, significant gains by both the SNP and UKIP in the 2015 general election.

UKIP increased its share of the vote from 3% in the previous general election to nearly 13% while comparable figures



for the SNP show that it tripled support to gain 50% of the vote in Scotland.

Party membership also increased significantly with UKIP membership up from 15,000 in 2010 to 40,000 in 2015 and the SNP from 16,000 to 110,000 in the same time period.

This contrasts with stagnant figures for membership in the Conservative and Labour parties and massive losses for the Liberal Democrats over the same five years.

While surveys report a higher than average level of interest in politics amongst both the SNP and UKIP they also show a greater level of alienation from the British political system.

SNP and UKIP supporters are more likely than members of the long established political parties to believe the current system of government does not work well and that Parliament does not hold the government to account<sup>(4)</sup>.

Both parties therefore feed off and benefit from the rise of anti-politics. It impels their increasingly populist message of recent years and provides an increasing challenge to the other political parties.

### The Social Democrat Dimension

Although the populist challenge is to both the Right and the Left in the political spectrum it has had its greatest impact on European social democratic parties.

They have seen their votes halve from 40% or more to 20% or less. They have also seen the populist message increasing in strength and resonance, redefining issues in Europe to move political debate to the right as right-wing populist movements have seized the agenda.

The key themes here are anti-globalisation, anti-European Union and anti-immigration: the target groups are the working class and the lower middle class (social classes C, D, E).

The response by social democratic parties has been weak and as a recent study by the German Social Democrat Friedrich Ebert Foundation has noted, totally inadequate to the task<sup>(5)</sup>. The conclusion is that things can only get worse until social democratic parties take the challenge seriously.

However, that challenge now also comes from the Left in the shape of Syriza and Podemos.

Syriza began moving in an explicitly populist direction from 2010. In 2013 its leader Alexis Tsipras expressed it thus in a speech in London: 'Europe is on edge.

Two worlds collide. On one side stands the productive forces of democracy, the people fighting to create a society of justice, equality and freedom. On the other side, a neoliberal biopolitical project unfolds. Its aim is to control bodies and minds through the politics of fear. To discipline human life in its entirety. To intensify the exploitation of labour and to increase the profits of capital'<sup>(6)</sup>.

The primary polarisation is between

those terms.

But it does become feasible to aim at sovereign processes that would limit the power of finance, spur the transformation of production, ensure a wider redistribution of wealth and push for a more democratic configuration of European institutions'<sup>(7)</sup>.

This is a programme for government and in spite of major criticisms of PSOE (and the United Left, which includes the Communist Party of Spain), Podemos was prepared to work with them in coalition provided that Podemos "overtook PSOE – an essential precondition for political change in Spain" and PSOE "accepted the leadership of Podemos".

The elections of December 2015 did not deliver that result. PSOE won just over 22% of the vote, Podemos just under 21% and United Left just under 4%.

The situation therefore remains fluid, contestable and unresolved.

Much the same could be said for populism versus social democracy throughout the rest of

Europe, including Britain.

### The British Mirror and the Social Democratic Response

UKIP mirrors the populist Right. Its programme prioritises the same range of issues as right-wing populist parties in the rest of Europe and its electoral success allows it to influence the political agenda.

In the 2015 general election it won only one seat, but came second in 120. In England it did best where social and economic conditions were worst. This should have delivered votes to the Labour Party, but it did not.

In the Midlands and the North a large share of previous Labour voters went to UKIP (which led to a loss of 13 seats to the Conservatives).

UKIP will undoubtedly want to build on this promise of electoral success in the future meaning that Labour will need to re-think its policy, particularly toward the poorer White working class which UKIP has courted and won over.

The SNP mirrors in part the populist Left. Under Alec Salmond's leadership, and now that of Nicola Sturgeon, its programme has moved increasingly in a populist direction.

It promoted first an anti-United Kingdom, then an anti-Tory and now an anti-austerity agenda increasingly targeted at the Labour Party.

In the 2015 election it won 40 seats



the Greek elite and the Greek people. That theme has been further developed in the election campaigns Syriza has fought and won in the last few years.

It has put forward a programme that is anti-austerity, anti-inequality and rhetorically anti-EU, although since the referendum the latter has been somewhat compromised (see *The Socialist Correspondent* No. 23).

Podemos appears to be on a similar trajectory. Its origins, like those of Syriza, lie in a left-wing intelligentsia and mass social protest, and it sees politics in terms of a stark divide between the people and the political and economic establishment (which it refers to as 'la casta').

In an article published last year in *New Left Review* its newly elected leader, Pablo Iglesias, sets out the strategy informing its political programme.

The starting point is 'recognition of the twentieth-century left's defeat' by neo-liberalism and the politics of co-optation that have rendered the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), as the main social democratic party in Spain, morally and politically bankrupt and incapable of formulating a credible response to the 'regime crisis' unleashed by the financial crisis of 2008.

And the conclusion is that although the 'regime crisis' is severe, it is not yet terminal: 'present conditions have nothing to do with revolution, or a transition to socialism, in the historic sense of

from Labour reducing it, and the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats to one seat each in Scotland. The SNP is virtually a one party government in Scotland allowing it to dominate the political arena with all the benefits that brings.

The Labour Party in Scotland is clearly on the back-foot with little immediate prospect of making much electoral headway. It suffered a heavy defeat in the Scottish Parliament elections.

There is now the need to develop a proper left-wing alternative to the SNP's nationalist and populist programmes.

Indeed, that is the only path for all social democratic parties to follow in their battle with populism. It has several elements, in Britain and elsewhere in Europe.

The first two have been promoted by various social democrat 'think tanks'. It is to renew civic engagement in politics. It involves developing new ways and means to involve citizens in decisions that affect them and giving them a progressive content.

At its simplest this means embracing new forms of 'digital democracy', such as on-line voting and on-line electoral registration, and at a more complex level institutional development such as the random selection of citizens by lot to discuss issues or the creation of citizens' assemblies at local and regional level to advise, deliberate and on some issues make decisions that are binding<sup>(8)</sup>.

The second is to make civic engagement progressive. This means promoting an agenda that benefits the majority, beginning with the widespread discussion of issues such as inequality and redistribution, and then engaging with activists and organisations that promote community issues to embed them in public consciousness and political programmes.

While these are radical proposals they are essentially about a democratic agenda and not necessarily a socialist one. That element is missing. It can be recovered

only by a focus on class.

The argument against class politics as the foundation stone for socialist parties is that working-class communities have declined and trade union membership halved as Britain has de-industrialised.

The new politics of work, it points out, is service based and increasingly private sector oriented as the public sector shrinks and individualism is encouraged.

However, there is also the argument made earlier that populism appeals most to the working-class and what is needed is a programme that engages their interests.



Jeremy Corbyn

The election of Jeremy Corbyn to lead the Labour Party and the enthusiasm this has generated, leading to a near doubling of membership (now 388,103) since the end of 2014<sup>(9)</sup>, opens new prospects of winning back much of the populist vote.

Additionally, policies to win the 34% who did not vote in the last general election and who are predominantly from

the working-class need to be fashioned.

Populism is 'catch-all anti-politics' that masks class discontent. Strip-off the mask and all is revealed. This does not mean mimicking the populists (or nationalists) but rather the opposite.

A socialist programme emphasising traditional socialist values, aims and practices is not a bad starting place to do so: in fact, it is the essential one.

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9. Figures from *The Guardian*, 13 January 2016.

## The Socialist Correspondent

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# Russia brings about Syria peace process

**The Russia-US peace deal on Syria - following Russia's military intervention in support of the legitimate government - has become increasingly shaky, with intense fighting in and around Aleppo.**

**By SIMON KORNER**

IS and Al-Nusra (Al Qaeda) still control more than half of Syria's territory, including the major oil dumps and pipeline, and are excluded from the ceasefire agreement.

The February 27th ceasefire involves 17 countries of the International Syria Support Group, and is backed by the Syrian government. Neither IS nor Al-Nusra is covered by the ceasefire. At the peace talks in Geneva, Russia called for elections – under UN auspices – to be held in areas of Syria under government and rebel control.

The ceasefire was made possible by the major advances of the Syrian army, supported by Russian bombing. The terrorist forces of Al-Nusra, under the umbrella group Jaish al-Fatah, are slowly being pushed out of Aleppo, Syria's largest city, and the Syrian army is moving towards the Turkish border.

Over 400 towns have been retaken, mainly in western Syria. Many IS and Al-Nusra supply lines from Turkey have been cut. The Syrian army has also been gaining the upper hand in the south near the Jordanian border, and in Golan, where Israel has been supporting Al-Nusra forces.

But these government gains are facing stiff resistance – in early May, there was fierce fighting for control of the Aleppo town of Khan Touman.

In mid-March, Russia announced a partial withdrawal of its forces, leaving half of its planes in Syria, with the rest ready for deployment within a day's notice. Russia's Latakia airbase and naval base at Tartus remain in place.

John Kerry has admitted that Russia has been key to the peace initiative. "Without Russia's cooperation I'm not sure we would have been able to have achieved the agreement we have now, or at least get the humanitarian assistance in".

Lieutenant General Sir Simon May-

all, a former MoD Middle East expert, likewise acknowledged Russia's central role, noting that, "it is the Russians making the weather... That slightly worries me in a part of the world where the Americans have been the guarantors and the people who make the weather."



This unease is reflected in the American media, much of which views the ceasefire as a dangerous sign of weakness by western forces.

The *New York Times* (Feb 26) reported: "In the estimate of European and Israeli intelligence officials, but not the White House, the pause in fighting may have the unintended consequence of consolidating President Bashar al-Assad's hold on power over Syria for at least the next few years."

Similarly, the *Washington Post* (Feb 26) criticised Obama for having chosen to "sue for peace on Moscow's terms". And Voice of America (May 5) reported: "Americans [particularly the military] ... accept this 'partnership' only reluctantly and grudgingly."

The US has not abandoned its long-term goal of ousting Assad. It has contingency plans to prevent a re-unified Syria under Assad.

These involve setting up a 'safe' no-fly zone in northern Syria patrolled by US planes and backed by 15,000-30,000 US troops on the ground. This zone would allow rebel forces to re-group, protected from the Syrian airforce.

The Republicans, particularly Trump, are pressing hard for this option, as are hawks in the Obama administration and the Pentagon. The US has already spent over \$1 billion in the past year. As well as supplying weapons to the rebels, some 3,000 tons of weapons and ammunition have been delivered indirectly to Al-Nusra since December 2015, according to *Jane's Defence Weekly*.

The US is busy trying to rebrand Al-Nusra as a 'moderate' rebel group, thus including it in the ceasefire and shielding it from air attacks.

The ceasefire has infuriated regional powers, particularly Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel, who want to fan the flames of conflict. The prospect of peace threatens their expansionist plans to unseat Assad, break up Syria and annex parts of its territory between them.

Turkey has been shelling the Kurdish YPG fighters - allied to the Kurdish PKK in Turkey - inside Syrian territory, and still supports IS and Al-Nusra. There are reports of Turkish ground troops dug in inside northern Syria, as well as airstrikes.

There are also signs that Turkey has plans to stoke up fighting in northern Lebanon with an arms shipment, including chemical weapons destined for Islamist fighters, intercepted in March.

Fighting in northern Lebanon would threaten the Alawite areas of Syria around Tartus and Homs, which support Assad, as well as the main road to Damascus, cutting Hezbollah supply lines between Lebanon and Syria.

The Saudis have threatened invasion – though these plans are on hold, due in part to the tenuous peace talks and in part to the disquiet within the Saudi mil-

Continued on page 34

# Palestine: a new phase for solidarity

Looking back on the boycott campaign which helped win independence from the British raj, Mahatma Gandhi reportedly outlined the following stages in the struggle: first (he said) they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you – and then you win!

By **BRIAN DURRANS**

Both the Indian and South African freedom struggles, in the first and second halves of the last century, inform the way the Palestinians conduct their own movement for self-determination.

Today – in conditions where Israel is the settler-colonial power – it has such overwhelming military superiority that colonised Palestine, with a sadly divided leadership, depends on a varying mix of armed and civil resistance and (even more than was the case in India or South Africa, when liberation movements could count on support from the socialist countries), on international solidarity mainly from civil society and its organisations.

In this article I review the context and consequences of Palestinian resistance which hit the headlines in the last three months of 2015 and relate this to the Cameron government's and Israel supporters' current and increasingly reckless attacks on the pro-Palestinian solidarity movement.

## Facts on the ground

Successive Israeli governments refer to the metastasising illegal Settlements or colonies in the Occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem as 'facts on the ground', signalling that they cannot now be wished out of existence. Yet Palestinian resistance is also a fact on the ground and cannot be wished away, either.

The mainstream media consistently under-report how, day-by-day and night-by-night, the Israeli state kills, injures, imprisons, tortures and intimidates Palestinian men, women and children, demolishes the homes from which they are evicted, uproots their olive trees, cuts them off from their smallholdings and ethnically cleanses them from their colonised land.

As Israel's government and state institutions not only help fund and favour Settler extremists but come increasingly under their direct control, so the colonists themselves are emboldened to terrorise their Palestinian neighbours on their own, officially-tolerated or encouraged, initiative.

That Israel's systematic repression of Palestinians is getting worse is increasingly evident to fair-minded visitors to the West Bank, to the far fewer who make it these days into besieged Gaza, and to the increasing numbers who find in the weekly reports of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and from other well-researched sources, what the leading media won't say.<sup>(1)</sup> To Palestinians, however, it is all too familiar.

## The resistance will never die

Without this background knowledge, anyone might have been as surprised or appalled as were most propaganda-fed Israeli Jews themselves by the surge, from early October 2015, of actual, attempted and alleged knife attacks by individual Palestinian citizens of Israel largely on civilian Jewish Israelis within Israel itself and in occupied East Jerusalem.

Here at least was 'news', featuring mainly young, mainly male 'terrorists' from whom the security forces were embarrassingly unable to defend ordinary (apartheid) law-abiding Jewish citizens.

Not only were the perpetrators, or aspiring or alleged perpetrators, routinely killed rather than arrested and put on trial (shooting to kill when there is no 'security' justification for it has become standard practice towards the resistance movement), but two new policies were

applied to dehumanise Palestinians and their communities: in yet another breach of the Geneva Conventions, the bodies of slain Palestinians were withheld from their relatives and in addition to losing his life a combatant's family's home would be destroyed.

The real story here was that whether or not it escalated into a full-scale intifada (uprising), the increasing violence towards Israeli targets showed beyond doubt both that the spirit of Palestinian resistance cannot be quenched, and that this was as true for where the attacks were now taking place, within 1948 Israel and in east Jerusalem, as in the West Bank and Gaza, in which and from which attacks are more routine.

In the vanguard of this latest resistance are young Palestinians with most to gain from freedom and justice.

The message to Israeli Jews who have voted consistently for increasingly right-wing and virulently racist governments in Tel Aviv, is that if this is no way to bring security or justice to Palestinians (which evidently does not concern them), neither can it bring security to themselves.

The UK and Western media version of the 'knife attacks' almost completely ignored the repression to which they were an inadequate response and was thus able to portray Israel as the innocent victim.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu lost no time in claiming Palestinians are a terrorist problem for Israel as pro-ISIS attacks in Paris were for France.

The liberation movement is not yet strong enough to make Israeli apartheid untenable in practice. But this 'tipping point' is getting closer.

Despite a disunited leadership, the Palestinians themselves remain resilient: there is no evidence that the acts of resistance in the last quarter of 2015 were planned or co-ordinated by any particular faction but a comprehensive opinion poll of Palestinians has shown that two-thirds of those asked were in favour of the attacks by Palestinian militants and of intensifying them.<sup>(2)</sup>

Israel would prefer the world to over-



look and forget about the occupation, settlements, detentions, ethnic cleansing and the other everyday realities of the apartheid system which defy official excuses and deflections the more people are confronted with them.

Acknowledging that the Palestinian struggle is conducted on the world stage, Israel is obliged not only to attack those who resist its oppression on the ground, where the stakes and risks are highest, but also to attack those everywhere else who support the Palestinians citizens of Israel, in the Occupied Territories, and in the far-flung diaspora.

To do this, Israel needs (and has a ready supply of) allies, primarily the US but also Britain. Even so, as the Reut Institute (an influential Israeli think tank) claimed a few years ago, people in Britain have come to play a leading role in the global solidarity movement for Palestine.

#### Partners in crime

On Valentine's Day 2016, Downing Street showered the apartheid state with rose petals by announcing its intention of prohibiting UK public bodies from using procurement and investment policies to express a point of view of the behaviour of corporations or states.

In a visit to the country in mid-February, Conservative Cabinet minister Matthew Hancock personally assured the Israeli Prime Minister that the measures the UK Government is taking ('secondary legislation', that is, not requiring a parliamentary vote) to curtail the democratic rights and freedoms of British citizens are intended to help its foreign ally.

The Government also asserts the right to overrule ethically-guided decisions by representatives of local authorities as to how their staff pension funds are invested.

The Government's argument is dangerously disingenuous. It asserts that, as a matter relevant only to foreign policy, a boycott or sanctions directly or indirectly against a foreign government or state can be imposed by central government alone.

Public bodies like local councils, and possibly students' unions and church pension funds as well, are threatened with punitive fines if in their procurement of goods and services they apply ethical principles to uphold international and humanitarian law – and seek to express the views of those who elect them – by disqualifying or refusing contracts to companies which are complicit with breaches in those laws.

Yet it had missed the point that it is not a company's nationality but its conduct under international law which may disqualify it from tenders under existing

procurement legislation; and at present it remains unclear whether the new legislation will alter this.

The issue here goes well beyond Palestinian rights to cover a range of other concerns, such as (and which the Government explicitly says it wants to protect), the UK arms trade and the tobacco industry.

It also involves a restriction of democratic rights. In early March 2016, shortly after the Government's 'secondary legislation' proposals were announced, Foreign Office Secretary Philip Hammond confirmed that the FCO still

**BDS has made great strides worldwide since its launch in 2005.**

“... by singling out pro-Palestine activism by public bodies as a threat to ‘community cohesion’, the Tory Government is colluding with the racist equation of Jewishness to Zionism, and thus to the abhorrent assertion that any criticism of Israel is anti-Semitic.”

advises UK companies not to get involved in Israeli-occupied Palestine because of the legal risks of doing so.

The Government's new bullying guidelines on public bodies' procurement are intended to intimidate local authorities without taking the time and trouble to overhaul the legislation and thus running the risk of being defeated in a proper vote.

Yet by singling out pro-Palestine activism by public bodies as a threat to 'community cohesion', the Government is colluding with the racist equation of Jewishness to Zionism, and thus to the abhorrent assertion that any criticism of Israel is anti-Semitic.

Taking his cue from the Netanyahu government itself, Cameron's immediate target here is the spearhead of the solidarity movement, the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) campaign. BDS has made great strides worldwide since its launch in 2005.

Only a few months ago, after persistent and principled lobbying of public bodies all across the world, the French-owned waste-disposal, water and transport multinational Veolia was forced to withdraw completely from the illegal Occupation of the West Bank.

In the first week of March 2016,

Anglo-Danish security giant G4S, which helps Israel run its prisons and checkpoints, announced its intention of ending its business with Israel following similar pressure from BDS campaigners.

Add to this that the new leader of the Labour Party - Jeremy Corbyn - has long been a patron of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, and that in January this year Human Rights Watch – hitherto not the best friend to Palestine – has called for an end to all business links with the illegal settlements, and you can almost hear the alarm bells ringing for Israel and its apologists.

Along with the UK government's muddled attempt to intimidate public bodies from showing solidarity with the Palestinian people, it is also co-ordinating with the pro-Israel lobby to smear the Labour leader and the party's left-wing with unsubstantiated allegations of anti-Semitism.

#### Building alliances

As the original BDS call made clear, people across the world have a responsibility to uphold international law even, or especially, when their own governments fail to do so.

Building alliances would also be an essential part of developing the struggle, and, as Gandhi might have predicted, the more this can be done, the more irresistible the movement can become.

Unable to admit that the BDS movement is gaining strength, the Conservative government finds itself ill-advisedly threatening democracy itself.

There are four main reasons why this attempt to demonise and roll back Palestine solidarity is unlikely to work and betrays the desperation of its authors:

- First, it creates natural allies out of all the causes it attacks, not just that of Palestine: such as concerning health, the environment, the arms trade and local democracy.

- Second, the measures announced are glaringly at odds with the Foreign Office's recently-confirmed warning to UK companies not to trade with illegal Israeli settlements.

- Third, trying to intimidate local bodies from taking ethical decisions in investment and procurement retrospectively questions this form of support given in the 1980s to the struggle for freedom in South Africa, earlier in Vietnam, and well before that in Republican Spain.

So a UK establishment which still pretends, against the overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that it supported Nelson Mandela is now prepared to outlaw the very kind of solidarity which helped bring South

African apartheid to an end.

Mandela himself, whom Mrs Thatcher and the younger David Cameron called a “terrorist”, is on record as proclaiming that South Africa’s freedom is incomplete without that of Palestine’s.

Fourth, if building alliances to develop the work of the solidarity movement is one of the thoughtful recommendations of the original Palestinian call for BDS in 2005, another is to publicise the case for freedom and justice. The furor which the government’s proposals have aroused, well beyond Palestine activism, is helping do just that.

By taking pro-Israel advice, the government will score not just one but four own goals, provided this attack on how public bodies conduct their business and represent those who elect them is countered by united action. Behind the government’s ill-considered measures is a sense that Israel and its friends are desperate to halt the advance of BDS but unsure how to do so. They are losing the initiative.

Hugh Lanning, Chair of Palestine Solidarity Campaign, remarks: “As if it is not enough that the UK Government has failed to act when the Israeli Government has bombed and killed thousands of Palestinian civilians and stolen their homes and land, the Government are now trying to impose their inaction on all other democratic and public bod-

ies.”

Sara Apps, interim Director of Palestine Solidarity adds: “People around the world have been asked by the Palestinian people to support boycott, divestment and sanctions because it is a peaceful and effective way to challenge and pressure the Israeli Government to end their violations.”<sup>(3)</sup>

An exceptional resource for further action is the debate on this issue which took place in Westminster around a motion proposed by Labour MP Richard Burden on Tuesday 15 April 2016.<sup>(4)</sup>

#### **Class politics, home and away**

While it is important to recognise that to be attacked in these ways by the world’s leading pariah state and its apologists is a badge of honour, the stakes are high and so are the risks. Late last year, the Co-operative Bank closed the accounts of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and of a number of its constituent branches, which might be connected to the recent extraordinary revelation that the PSC appears on a covert blacklist of ‘terrorist’ organisations supplied to appropriate clients by Thomson-Reuters.<sup>(5)</sup>

The target this time may not be Communists but the method is plainly McCarthyite. The solidarity movement is not about to be intimidated, however.

And because of how the Conservative government in Westminster is trying to

help its Israeli ally, campaigning for BDS teaches those involved not only about the struggle in Palestine but also about the British ruling class.

#### **FOOTNOTES**

1. See, for example, [http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/press\\_release\\_170\\_palestinians\\_and\\_26\\_israelis\\_killed\\_in\\_2015\\_english.pdf](http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/press_release_170_palestinians_and_26_israelis_killed_in_2015_english.pdf), accessed 3 March 2016.

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3. <http://www.palestinecampaign.org/attack-on-democracy/>, accessed 2 March 2016.

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The debate can be seen on Hansard video at:

<http://parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/713a75dd-f279-42c3-9847-e2d2bd401fa5>; all accessed 17 March 2016.

5. <http://www.palestinecampaign.org/psc-worldcheck-statement/>, accessed 3 March 2016.

## Russia brings about Syria peace process

Continued from page 31

itary over their Yemen campaign, which is going badly for them. Other Saudi plans, also on hold, include giving rebel groups anti-aircraft missiles “to change the balance of power on the ground.”

Meanwhile, Israel is continuing to support Al-Nusra as part of its strategy to annex the Golan Heights permanently. UN forces (UNDOF), supposed to oversee peace in the Golan, have withdrawn, giving Israel a free hand and Al-Nusra access to the Bekaa valley in Lebanon, as Syrians are displaced from the Golan borderland.

The Syrian Kurds – led by the Democratic Union Party (PYD), whose armed wing is the YPG – announced plans on March 17 to establish a federal region in northern Syria, though not to secede from Syria. The new federal region would be called Rojava.

The Kurds were excluded from the peace talks by Turkey – which regards the PYD as terrorists, linked to the PKK.

A Syrian Kurd spokesman said that, as a result of this exclusion from deciding the future of Syria, “we see only one solution which is to declare the creation of [Kurdish] federation.”

The Syrian government stated in response that: “Drawing any lines between Syrians would be a great mistake,” stressing that the Syrian Kurds were an important part of the Syrian people.

The US is not currently supporting Rojavan federation – though it has been working with the Kurdish fighters. This is in contrast to its support for the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq, a pro-imperialist state-let whose leaders disapprove of the leftist Syrian Kurdish PYD/YPG.

Overall, Russia’s intervention in Syria has changed the course of the war – and boosted Russia’s status in the region. If the ceasefire holds, it will further enhance Russian influence. But the temporary peace remains extremely fragile.

Meanwhile, the Syrian economy lies in ruins, with 50% unemployment, and

85% of Syrians living in poverty. Life expectancy has decreased from 70.5 years to 55.4 years between 2011 and 2015. Around 250,000 people have been killed in the war so far.

Britain’s contribution to this destruction has been its participation in the allied bombing campaign and the widespread use of drones – a weapon the British are investing in hugely, along with the French.

Britain and France are fighting for a share of the spoils in a post-Assad Syria. Having a place at the top table means you get to decide the nature of the new colonial dispensation and borders.

Britain is also playing a central role in organising disinformation against Assad. It has spent £2.4million on co-ordinating the rebels’ PR campaign, producing press reports and fake video ‘evidence’ of government atrocities – such as the ‘airstrike’ on a refugee camp in early May in an area where no Russian sorties were recorded – which are then fed to the complicit western media.

# Pro-Israel lobby attacks Corbyn

The row over anti-Semitism in the Labour Party has deep implications.

By **QUESTOR**

It represents the latest in a series of attacks designed to unseat Jeremy Corbyn from the leadership of the Labour Party and a determined counter-attack by the pro-Israel lobby to thwart the growing popularity and success of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement.

The anti-Semitism charge against the Labour Party reached a peak on the eve of the recent elections in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The timing was immaculate.

Well-orchestrated, the campaign was designed to do the maximum damage to Labour in the elections to provide a new and better platform for a coup against Corbyn.

However, much as the pro-Israeli lobby and right-wing Labourites with their strong mainstream media connections dominated the air waves and the print media, the virulent campaign did not have as much impact on the elections as was hoped.

The campaign had been some months in the making.

Arguably it broke surface publicly in February with the resignation of one of the co-chairs of the Oxford University Labour Club, making the charge that many members of the club were anti-Semitic. Citing as part of his evidence of anti-Semitism the club's decision to support the 'Israeli Apartheid Week of Action' in support of Palestinian rights, Alex Chalmers resigned from his post as co-chair.

This received wide coverage in the national media and led to a National Union of Students investigation. What wasn't widely reported was that Chalmers had worked as an intern for the Britain Israel Communications and Research Media Centre (BICOM), the leading pro-Israel media lobbyist organisation.

## BICOM

BICOM was founded in 2002 by the billionaire Poja Zabłudowicz (pictured below) and has as its mission 'advancing a more supportive environment for Israel in Britain'. Zabłudowicz, who inherited his money from his father's Israeli arms company, also donates to the Conservative Party and Conservative Friends of Israel.

BICOM's Chief Executive is James Sorene. He took up the position of CEO of BICOM after leaving his post as the

In April 2016, a 2014 Facebook post of Naz Shah MP was exposed by the media. In the Facebook post Shah shared a graphic of Israel's outline superimposed on a map of the US under the headline, "Solution for Israel-Palestine Conflict – Relocate Israel into the United States."

Amidst a storm of media protest she apologised for any offence, saying she had done it in a heated moment, apologised again and again and made a formal apology in Parliament. She was suspended by the Labour Party on Wednesday 27 April.

Ken Livingstone in a radio interview stated that Shah's postings were "completely over the top" and "rude". He also stated that Hitler "was supporting Zionism before he went mad and ended up killing six million Jews."

This remark was seized upon by the pro-Israel lobby who now smelt serious blood. Calls, led by Labour Friends of Israel MPs in Parliament, were made for Livingstone to be suspended and Corbyn was under open and fierce attack.

The Labour Party then suspended Livingstone on 28 April.

Jeremy Corbyn established an investigation into "anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination including Islamophobia" to be chaired by Shami Chakrabarti.

Corbyn said, "Labour is an anti-racist party to its core and has a long and proud history of

standing against racism, including anti-Semitism. I have campaigned against racism all my life and the Jewish community has been at the heart of the Labour Party and progressive politics in Britain for more than 100 years." <sup>(1)</sup>



Flashback to 2009: BICOM's annual fundraising dinner.

Left to right: Hadas Prozor and her husband, Ron Prozor, former Israeli ambassador; Anita Zabłudowicz; Martin Indyk; and BICOM founder and billionaire, Poju Zabłudowicz



James Sorene, BICOM CEO and former official spokesman for Nick Clegg when he was Deputy PM (2010-15).

### Prime Minister's Questions

At Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) in the House of Commons on Wednesday 4 May, the day before the elections, David Cameron, against this background of Labour being accused of anti-Semitism, repeatedly asked Jeremy Corbyn to withdraw and apologise for his remarks about Hamas and Hezbollah being friends.

Andrew Neil on the BBC TV's *Daily Politics* immediately following PMQs, commented on the fact that the Prime Minister was asking the leader of the Opposition the questions rather than vice-versa and described this as "historic". He also pointed out that it was hitherto the longest-lasting PMQs (41 minutes) rather than the customary tight 30 minutes.

Meanwhile the media was awash with stories, news reports and feature articles, condemning anti-Semitism on the left and in the Labour Party.

*The Telegraph* published an article, "The Left Has Toxic Attitudes Towards Israel" by Sir Mick Davis, Chair of the Jewish Leadership Council, in which he wrote, "As anti-Semitism rises, demands to boycott, sanction and isolate Israel grow, and revelations of anti-Zionist rhetoric dominate British media, many question whether anti-Zionist and anti-Israel statements and actions have become the new anti-Semitism?"

He concluded his article with the following statement, "The wholesale condemnation of Israel and the revived fashion of demonising Zionism and Zionists are offensive and harmful to Jews. They are done with that intent in mind and we must be bold in calling out those who use a façade of anti-Zionism for what they mostly are: bigots and anti-Semites. They must be defeated and the time is now..." (2)

Another article was a piece by Denis Maceoin, entitled "Scottish Labour and the Left must cut out the poison of anti-semitism".

He wrote, "Commonly, left-wingers, including members of the Labour Party exclaim 'we are not anti-Semitic because we are not racists' and they get away with that every time. They say their angry hatred for the Jewish State of Israel is merely ordinary politics. But this argument, voiced repeatedly recently, is just worn and threadbare doublespeak ... so

many left-wingers are so ignorant about and so deeply biased against Israel that their naiveté exposes them to ridicule. Like that man of peace and brotherly love, Jeremy Corbyn, who has called terror organisations Hamas and Hezbollah his friends and appeared on many platforms calling for a 'Free Palestine'" (3)

### Gatestone Institute

Dr Denis Maceoin was described as a "Distinguished Senior Fellow" at the Gatestone Institute. The Gatestone Institute's President and Founder, American heiress, Nina Rosenwald (pictured below), is described as "an ardent Zionist all her life" by the American Friends of the Open University of Israel. (4)

The Chairman of the Gatestone Institute is Ambassador John R. Bolton, who



**Nina Rosenwald - founder of the Gatestone Institute.**



**Colonel (retired), Richard Kemp - Fellow of the Gatestone Institute**

served in the Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush Administrations. He was the US Permanent Representative to the UN (2005-2006).

Another "Distinguished Senior Fellow" of the Gatestone Institute is Colonel (retired) Richard Kemp. Colonel Kemp spent most of his 30 year career in the British Army, commanding in Iraq, the Balkans, South Asia and Northern Ireland. In 2002-2006 he was in the British Prime Minister's Office heading the international terrorism team at the Joint Intelligence Committee.

In an article published jointly with Jasper Reid on 2 May 2016 he wrote, "Anti-Semitism is not a fashionable thing, and it is an illegal activity in many places. But anti-Zionism is not illegal. And it becomes a proxy for anti-Semitism." (5)

In 2015 Colonel Kemp was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Bar-Ilan University in Israel for "Courageously defending Israel's security policies and the morality of

the IDF (Israeli Defence Force) before the UN Human Rights Council, he has helped strengthen the standing of Israel throughout the world." (6)

Colonel Kemp was one of the leading speakers at the "We Believe in Israel" conference organised by BICOM in London in 2011. It was attended by some 1100 people and supported by 26 community organisations to discuss how to defend Israel and oppose the boycott.

### Campaign against Corbyn

The campaign to remove Corbyn is part of a wider political operation being mounted by the supporters of Israel to paint the Labour Party with the anti-Semitism brush and to re-define anti-Semitism.

Anti-Semitism exists and must be exposed and fought against but anti-Semitism is not the same as anti-Zionism.

Zionism is a political ideology which has always been contested, not least among Jews, since it emerged in 1897. Not all Jews are Zionists and not all Zionists are Jews.

It is entirely legitimate for non-Jews as well as Jews to express opinions about Zionism. Criticism of Israeli government policy and Israeli state actions against Palestinians is not anti-Semitism.

The aim of this latest campaign, by the pro-Israel lobby and their right-wing supporters in the

Labour Party, was not just to lay the basis for the removal of Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party and his replacement by a pliant leader but also to re-work the definition of anti-Semitism.

This wider aim is to make opposition to Zionism and Israel's actions against the Palestinians synonymous with anti-Semitism.

### FOOTNOTES

1. The Guardian, 29 April 2016
2. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/01/the-left-has-toxic-attitudes-to-israel/>
3. Maceoin, D., "Scottish Labour and the Left must cut out the poison of anti-Semitism", The Herald, 3 May 2016.
4. [Afoui.org/nina-rosenwald/](http://www.afoui.org/nina-rosenwald/)
5. <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/7963/britain-anti-semitism>
6. [www.bfbiu.org/general/bar-ilan-university-bestows-honorary-doctorate-colonel-ret-richard-kemp](http://www.bfbiu.org/general/bar-ilan-university-bestows-honorary-doctorate-colonel-ret-richard-kemp)

# Pro-Israel lobby attacks Corbyn