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Why Israel is a racist state

Any colonial-settler project must involve systematic discrimination against the indigenous population. Moshé Machover calls for the deZionisation of Israel

That Israel is a racist state is a well-established fact. On July 19 2018, it enacted a quasi-constitutional nationality bill - 'Basic law: Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people'¹ - which has been widely condemned as institutionalising discrimination against Israel's non-Jewish citizens. As many have observed, this law merely codifies and formalises a reality that long predates it.² Within its pre-1967 borders, Israel is an illiberal semi-democracy. It defines itself as "Jewish and democratic", but, as its critics point out, it is "democratic for Jews, Jewish for others". In the territories ruled by it since 1967, Israel is a military tyranny, applying one system of laws and regulations to Jewish settlers and an entirely separate one to the indigenous Palestinian Arabs.

The ways in which Israel exercises racist discrimination are too numerous to list here. Adalah, the Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, lists over 65 Israeli laws that discriminate directly or indirectly against Palestinian citizens in Israel and/or Palestinian residents of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT).³ In addition to these laws there are countless unofficial bureaucratic practices and regulations, by which Israeli racist discrimination operates in everyday life.

The conclusion cannot be denied: the state of Israel is *structurally* racist, an apartheid state according to the official UN definition of this term.⁴

Shocking comparison

In Israeli public discourse, racist speech is extremely common even at the highest echelon of politics. Some of this high-level racist discourse is almost casual, such as Benjamin Netanyahu's infamous "Arabs voting in droves" video on election day, March 17 2015;⁵ or the "we are not Arab lovers" declaration of Isaac Herzog, leader of Israel's Labor Party.⁶ At the most obscene end of the range there are statements by senior politicians containing barely concealed calls for ethnic cleansing.

Some of the harshest condemnation of Israel's racism is voiced by two Israeli academics, who, as recognised experts on the history of fascism and Nazism, speak with considerable authority.

Professor Zeev Sternhell is emeritus head of the department of political science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and one of the world's leading experts on fascism.⁷ In an article published earlier this year, he referred



Khan al-Ahmar: Palestinians resist Israeli expansionism

to statements made by two senior Israeli politicians, members of the ruling coalition, Bezalel Smotrich (deputy speaker of the Knesset, Israel's parliament) and Miki Zohar (chair of one of the Knesset's most important committees). These statements, Sternhell writes, "should be widely disseminated on all media outlets in Israel and throughout the Jewish world. In both of them we see not just a growing Israeli fascism, but racism akin to Nazism in its early stages."⁸

This shocking comparison with Nazism is endorsed by Daniel Blatman, professor of history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, whose book *The death marches: the final phase of Nazi genocide* won him in 2011 the Yad Vashem International Book Prize for Holocaust Research. In an article published last year he commented: "deputy speaker Bezalel Smotrich's admiration for the biblical genocidaire, Joshua bin Nun, leads him to adopt values that resemble those of the German SS."⁹

Blatman returned to this topic in a more recent article:

Deputy Knesset speaker MK Bezalel Smotrich ... presented his phased plan, according to which the Palestinians in the occupied territories (and possibly Israeli citizens, too) would become, in the best case, subjects without rights with a status that reminds us of German Jews after the passage of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935. To the extent that they do not agree to the plan, they will simply be cleansed from here. If they refuse to leave, they will be uprooted violently, which would lead to genocide.

Another elected official from the ruling coalition, Likud's Miki Zohar, did not hesitate to state that the Arabs have a problem that has no solution - they are not Jews and therefore their fate in this land cannot be the same as that of the Jews ... Prof Zeev Sternhell wrote in this paper

earlier this month that this racism is "akin to Nazism in its early stages." I think it is Nazism in every way and fashion, even if it comes from the school of the victims of historical Nazism.

He concludes that "if a racism survey were held in western countries like the one on anti-Semitism, Israel would be near the top of the list."¹⁰

Role of racism

Exposing Israel's racism is all too easy. Mere denunciation, without explanation of its underlying context, may actually be misleading if not counterproductive; it may appear as singling Israel out for some peculiar and exceptional moral defect of its leaders or, worse, of its Jewish majority. In fact, racist structures and attitudes, wherever they occur, are part of the legal and ideological superstructure and cannot properly be understood in isolation from their material base.

In the case of Israel, that material base is the Zionist colonisation of Palestine - a process of which Israel is both product and instrument. That the Zionist project is all about the colonisation of Palestine by Jews is, once again, an indisputable fact. It is how political Zionism *described itself* right from the start. Thus, the second Zionist Congress (1898) adopted the following resolution (supplementing the Basel programme adopted at the first Congress a year earlier):

This Congress, in approval of the colonisation already inaugurated in Palestine, and being desirous of fostering further efforts in that direction, hereby declares, that:

For the proper settlement of Palestine, this Congress considers it is necessary to obtain the requisite permission from the Turkish government,

and to carry out such settlement according to the plan, and under the direction of a committee, selected by this Congress ...

This committee to be appointed to superintend and direct all matters of colonisation; it shall consist of ten members, and have its seat in London.¹¹

The Congress also resolved to establish a bank to finance the activities of the Zionist movement. The bank was duly incorporated in London in 1899; its name was the Jewish Colonial Trust.¹² Well into the 20th century, Zionists continued to describe their project unabashedly, in a perfectly matter-of-fact way, as one of colonisation. Later in the 20th century this usage became a public relations liability, and the term was replaced by various euphemisms. But the *practice* of colonisation of Palestinian land has continued unabated and is going ahead at full steam to this day.

This context makes Israel's racism quite 'natural', in the sense of conforming to a general law. Every colonisation of an already inhabited territory is accompanied by racism. This is the case whether or not the colonisers arrive with *preconceived* racist ideas. Colonisation invariably meets resistance by the indigenous people. This was clearly understood, for example, by Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880-1940), the founder of the Zionist current that has been politically dominant in Israel for the last 41 years. In his seminal article 'The iron wall' (1923) he wrote:

Every native population in the world resists colonists as long as it has the slightest hope of being able to rid itself of the danger of being colonised. That is what the Arabs in Palestine are doing, and what they will persist in doing as long as there remains a solitary spark of hope that they will be able to prevent the transformation of 'Palestine' into the 'Land of Israel' ...

Colonisation can have only one aim, and Palestine Arabs cannot accept this aim. It lies in the very nature of things, and in this particular regard nature cannot be changed.

Zionist colonisation must either stop, or else proceed regardless of the native population. Which means that it can proceed and develop only under the protection of a power [ie, Britain - MM] that is independent of the native population - behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach.¹³

In their conflict with the 'natives', the settlers tend to develop a racist ideology as self-justification.

We can say more. Racism in general comes in many different variants, and colonisers' racism takes different forms, depending on the type of colonisation. In colonisation based primarily on exploiting the labour-power of the indigenous people, the latter are usually depicted by the colonisers as inferior creatures deserving no better fate than working for their conquerors.

But in colonisation based on excluding and displacing the 'natives' rather than incorporating them into the colonial economy as workers, they are usually depicted as dangerous wild and murderous people who ought to be ethnically cleansed. Zionist colonisation belongs to this category. In this respect, it is not unlike the colonisation of

what became the United States, except that the Zionist organisation insisted *explicitly and deliberately* on denying employment to non-Jews.¹⁴

In the US Declaration of Independence, the freedom-loving founding fathers - only some of whom were slave owners - complain that the king of Great Britain "has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian savages whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions."¹⁵ In today's terminology they would no doubt be described as 'terrorists'. The Palestinian Arabs are Israel's "merciless Indian savages".

When viewed against the background of the history of this type of colonisation, Israeli racist ideology and practices are par for the course. The annals of colonisation certainly have grimmer chapters, such as the total extermination of the people of Tasmania, to mention an extreme example. Zionist colonisation is, however, exceptional in being anachronistic: it continues in the 21st century the kind of thing - settler colonialism - that elsewhere ended in the 19th.

To conclude: apart from its anachronism, there is little that is exceptional about Israel's racism. It is rooted in its nature as a settler state. Uprooting colonialist racism requires a change of regime, decolonisation - which in the case of Israel means de-Zionisation.¹⁶ ●

Notes

- 1 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basic_Law:_Israel_as_the_Nation-State_of_the_Jewish_People.
- 2 Thus, for example, Bernie Sanders remarked in passing that "the recent 'nation state law' ... essentially codifies the second-class status of Israel's non-Jewish citizens". (A new authoritarian axis demands an international progressive front', *The Guardian*, 13 September 13 2018).
- 3 <https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/7771>.
- 4 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crime_of_apartheid.
- 5 "The right-wing government is in danger. Arab voters are heading to the polling stations in droves. Left-wing NGOs are bringing them in buses." <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/17/binyamin-netanyahu-israel-arab-election>.
- 6 "We are not Arab lovers - Israeli Labor's bankrupt efforts to stave off decline", *Middle East Eye*, 25 April 2016, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/when-israels-main-opposition-party-has-problem-countrys-palestinian-citizens-1878921672>.
- 7 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeev_Sternhell.
- 8 'In Israel, Growing Fascism and a Racism Akin to Early Nazism', *Ha'aretz* January 19 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-in-israel-growing-fascism-and-a-racism-akin-to-early-nazism-1.5746488?&ts=1537002401268>.
- 9 'The Israeli Lawmaker Heralding Genocide Against Palestinians', *Ha'aretz* May 23 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-the-israeli-mk-heralding-genocide-against-palestinians-1.5475561>. The biblical reference is to the book of Joshua, which contains a mythical account of the conquest and ethnic cleansing of the land of Canaan (Palestine) by the Israelites. The account is of course purely fictitious, but is taken as inspiration and virtual blueprint by the likes of Smotrich.
- 10 'International Holocaust Remembrance Day: An Israeli Hypocrisy', *Ha'aretz* January 28 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-international-holocaust-remembrance-day-an-israeli-hypocrisy-1.5768945>.
- 11 www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2612-basel-program.
- 12 www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jewish-colonial-trust.
- 13 'The iron wall' (*O Zheleznoi stene*), published November 4 1923 in the Russian-language journal *Rassuyet* (Dawn); English translation <https://tinyurl.com/m8dp3le>.
- 14 See the 1929 constitution of the Jewish Agency, <https://tinyurl.com/yecq3nqpo>.
- 15 <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/>.
- 16 See my article 'The decolonisation of Palestine', *Weekly Worker* June 23 2016, <https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1112/the-decolonisation-of-palestine/>.

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Against referendums

Jack Conrad puts the Marxist case for rejecting referendums as a matter of principle



A well staffed, well coordinated, well financed campaign is busy manoeuvring the Labour Party into supporting the demand for a second referendum. The Liverpool conference is going to be pivotal. There are dozens of Constituency Labour Party contemporary motions on Brexit and the EU, many of them following the template provided by Labour for a People's Vote.

This 'grassroots' organisation is fronted by Mike Buckley, a former aid worker. But, of course, Labour for a People's Vote is one of the many heads of People's Vote. Launched in April 2018 by MPs Chuka Umunna (Labour), Anna Soubry (Tory), Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat) and Caroline Lucas (Green), People's Vote calls for a referendum on Theresa May's final Brexit terms.

On June 23 2018 - the second anniversary of David Cameron's unexpected referendum defeat - People's Vote took 100,000 people down the 880 yards - an exceedingly short march - from London's Trafalgar Square to Parliament Square. Speakers included Tony Robinson, Gina Miller, Vince Cable, David Lammy, Caroline Lucas and Anna Soubry.

Every People's Vote move is meticulously prepared, planned and plotted. Just a few days before the opening of the TUC's Manchester congress, YouGov issued its "bombshell" poll finding.¹ No surprise: members of Unite, Unison and the GMB favour a second referendum by a margin of 2:1. Ask a few thousand people a loaded question and you generally get the answer you want. Though the TUC resolution was a classic fudge (if, if, if...), it will be notched up by People's Vote as yet another success.

With big business safely on board and the Lib Dems loyally serving as the - largely unrewarded - organisational core, the next strategic goal is breaking Jeremy Corbyn's policy of 'studied ambiguity' at Labour's conference. Hence, right on cue, along with a flurry of convenient opinion polls, Sadiq Khan is rolled out: "After careful consideration", he wrote in his *Observer*

article, "I've decided that the people ought to have the final say."²

Flagship

People's Vote is, of course, the flagship of a veritable organisational armada: European Movement, Labour for a People's Vote, Best for Britain Best for Europe, Healthier IN the EU, Open Britain, Our Future Our Choice, Scientists for EU and Wales for Europe. All work closely together under the overall direction of the Grassroots Coordinating Group - which also includes the All-Party Parliamentary Group on European Relations. Chuka Umunna is the chair. Tongue in cheek, this network of 'grassroots' organisations has been dubbed 'project GCHQ' by its leading staff.

However, the campaign boasts offices not in Cheltenham, but on the first floor of Millbank Tower - just a few minutes' walk from parliament and the TV studios at 4 Millbank. There are said to be 150 affiliated local groups and 500,000 supporters. Together *The Guardian* and *The Independent* act as their collective organisers, agitators and propagandists. George Soros's Open Society Foundation has donated more than £800,000 to anti-Brexit causes (including £400,000 to Best for Britain, £182,000 to European Movement UK and £35,000 to Scientists for EU).³ Topping that though, Julian Dunkerton, co-founder of the fashion label Superdry, handed People's Vote a cool £1 million in August 2018: he wants a polling blitz.⁴

Clearly no-one on the principled left should have anything to do with People's Vote. Marching alongside the Lib Dems, the Labour hard right, Tory rebels and Green naives on June 23 2018 was to march in the interests of big capital. Ditto, promoting subsidiary organisations - eg, Labour for a People's Vote - is to constitute oneself a junior partner. But, pathetically, that is exactly what the social imperialists of the Alliance for Workers'

People's Vote march on June 23 2018 was dominated by Lib Dems, Labour right and Greens. But the whole well-financed operation is in the interests of big capital.

Boris Johnson would win Tory leadership contest by a mile ... if he could make it to the final. He is hugely popular with the 'fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists' who make up the Tory rank and file.



Liberty have done. So have Dave Prentis of Unison, Dave Roache of the GMB and Manuel Cortes of TSSA with their call for a second referendum at the TUC.

It is still highly unlikely that there will be a second referendum. Theresa May will not go for it ... though she would be exceedingly glad if Jeremy Corbyn fell into that particular elephant trap. Yet imagine, for one moment, that People's Vote succeeds. What would the result be? Labour, presumably, is hammered in any subsequent general election: seven in every 10 of Labour's constituencies voted 'leave' in June 2016. Meanwhile, though opinion polls show clear majorities wanting a "say" on any final Brexit deal, the actual result, if there was a second referendum, is far from certain. The last two Survation polls (September 1 and September 7) could hardly be narrower: 47% 'remain' and 47% 'leave'; then 47% 'remain' and 46% 'leave'.⁵

Both Tony Blair and Justine Greening have, therefore, proposed a three-option referendum (obviously in order to guarantee their wanted result). Option one: agree with the government's final Brexit terms, as negotiated with Michel Barnier and the EU 27; option two: leave the EU without an agreement; option three: remain in the EU. In other words, soft Brexit, hard Brexit and no Brexit.

Through perpetuating such a blatantly dishonest trick, argues David Jeffrey, a lecturer in politics at Liverpool university, it is theoretically possible for just 34% of voters to decide the "winning option".⁶ Such a referendum would see two bitterly opposed 'leave' camps and a comparatively aloof 'remain' campaign. The prediction being that on the Brexit side issues of principle will clash and end up in a hopeless muddle.

If a preferential vote is added into the formula, then the least popular option would be eliminated and there would be a count-off between the last two questions ... and, so 'remain' would, so goes the calculation, emerge the winner with over 50% of the vote.

Even barring such transparent forms of cheating, say 'remain' narrowly won in a straightforward two-option referendum, what do we expect the 49% (or whatever) - ie, those who vote 'leave' - to do?

There are those on the left - many of them good people - who believe that Brexit represents an existential threat. Brexit, they say, points squarely in the direction of a low-tax, low-regulation, low-rights economy. The working class can only but suffer. Already Brexit has made Britain poorer, reduced investment and squeezed the tax revenues vital for public services. Migrants and minorities get the blame. So, runs the argument, it is vital to fall in behind Chuka Umunna, Gina Miller and Vince Cable, in order to defeat Brexit.

But will the forces of chauvinism and xenophobia easily surrender? *The Daily Telegraph*, the *Daily Mail*, *The Sun*, the Tory right, Ukip, Ulster Unionists, Britain First, the Football Lads Alliance will surely bang the "grand betrayal" drum as loudly as they can.⁷ Barry Gardiner, Labour's shadow foreign trade minister, has already warned that a second referendum would boost the far right and could lead to "civil disobedience".⁸ In a similar vein, Andrew Duff, a former Lib Dem MEP, claims that another referendum might "even pitch the country into a revolutionary situation".⁹ Such fears are not entirely groundless. The far right will passionately argue that the 'leave' campaign won the June 2016 referendum fair and square. That the votes of 17.4 million people have been betrayed, ignored, treated with contempt. That Britain remains shackled to Europe because of a dastardly conspiracy hatched by Brussels bureaucrats, George Soros, Whitehall mandarins, the self-serving political elite, the City, big business, trade union bosses ... and their leftwing allies.

Sinclair Lewis chose the ironic title *It can't happen here* for his 1935 bestselling novel. The plotline has a charismatic and crazy ambitious American politician, Berzelius 'Buzz' Windrip, promoting traditional Christian values, winning the trust of the wealthy, denouncing Jews, fuelling hatred for Mexicans and promising impoverished

electors instant prosperity. In short, America will be made great again. Buzz easily defeats Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the presidential race and goes on to establish a horribly autocratic regime: Congress and the Supreme Court are emasculated. “Irresponsible and seditious elements” are physically crushed by the Minute Men, a ruthless paramilitary force, acting under the direct command of the president. Many thousands are interned and many more flee north to Canada.

Could it happen here? Following the script carefully crafted by the master of the dark political arts, the election ‘guru’, Sir Lynton Crosby, Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson - otherwise known by the mononym ‘Boris’ - has skilfully blown the anti-Muslim dog whistle: “letter box” and “bank robbers” in the context of the burka; “suicide vest” in the context of Brexit negotiations.

This year or next, Johnson is expected to launch his leadership bid against Theresa May. His narrative? Muslims as ‘other’, Brexit betrayal and the economic magic of free trade. If he can secure enough Tory MPs to get into the final two-horse run-off - a big ask - Johnson would win by a mile. He is hugely popular amongst the “fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists” who make up the Tory rank and file ... and, given a contest, it is they who make the final decision. Johnson will get their votes. Not Sajid Javid. Not Andrea Leadsom.

Johnson would then be driven to Buckingham Palace, where he would seek permission from the queen to form a government. The monarch, of course, retains the constitutional right to choose the prime minister.

Meanwhile, a Labour Party led by Jeremy Corbyn - a Labour Party that has been manoeuvred, albeit against his better judgement, into a commitment to hold a second referendum - would surely find itself badly positioned and vulnerable. Prime minister Johnson would, doubtless, call a snap general election in the name of establishing a Global Britain.

Undemocratic

Not that our objection to a second EU referendum is based on getting Jeremy Corbyn into number 10 or appeasing Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage, Ukip, etc. True, the popular support base enjoyed by the Brexiters has to be won over. It is surely stupid to dismiss the 51% who voted ‘leave’ in June 2016 as a single reactionary bloc. The same goes for the 49% who voted ‘remain’. They do not constitute a single progressive bloc.

Referendums, by their very nature, are undemocratic. They bypass representative institutions and serve, in general, to fool enough of the people, enough of the time. And yet referendums have the great virtue of appearing to be the epitome of democracy. That explains why Harold Wilson, Tony Blair and David Cameron have used them. Complex issues are simplified, drained of nuance, reduced to a crude choice that cuts across class loyalties. Hence, today, one half of the working class is found in the ‘leave’ camp. The other half is in the ‘remain’ camp.

Our objections to referendums are principled and long-standing. Marxists opposed the operation in relation to the ‘Vote for the crook, not for the fascist’ presidential election in France in 2002. Before that Marxists urged an active boycott of Tony Blair’s 1997 referendum in Scotland. Then the 1998 Good Friday referendum in Ireland

and the Scottish independence referendum of 2014. All offered a bogus choice. In June 2016 Marxists called for an active boycott. Admittedly our results were very modest - 25,000 spoilt ballot papers. Nonetheless, David Cameron’s objective was, of course, not to give power to the people. On the contrary, he calculated on outflanking Ukip, wrong-footing Labour, satisfying his Europhobes ... and hanging on as prime minister. No reason, therefore, to give him any support whatsoever.

Antonio Gramsci, writing in June 1921, can usefully be cited here:

The communists are ... on principle opposed to the referendum, since they place the most advanced and active workers, who make the greatest sacrifices, on the same plane as the most lazy, ignorant and idle workers. If one wants direct, individual consultations, then this must take place in assemblies, after an organised debate, and a vote must presuppose knowledge of what is at stake and a sense of responsibility.¹⁰

However, it ought to be emphasised, this general principle does not translate into automatically refusing to call for a referendum vote under all circumstances. Nor does it translate into a general principle of always responding to a referendum organised by our enemies with a corresponding call for an active boycott. To vote this way or that way, to establish an active boycott campaign, etc. is always a tactical decision.

Eg, Marxists urged a ‘yes’ vote in Ireland’s May 2015 referendum on gay marriage; the same with Ireland’s May 2018 referendum on abortion. And, in the UK, while being critical of the Liberal Democrat proposal for reforming the parliamentary voting system, Marxists called for a ‘yes’ vote in the May 5 2011 referendum. Despite the glaring inadequacies, our judgment was that, on balance, getting rid of the ‘wasted vote’ syndrome would be a “small gain” and provide better conditions for the left to develop than the first-past-the-post system. Needless to say, we are programmatically committed to a thoroughgoing proportional representation system, party lists and the right of the party to recall MPs, MEPs, councillors, etc.

The Lib Dems wanted an alternative vote system. Voters would be asked not to opt for a single candidate, but tick candidates off in an order of preference - 1, 2, 3, etc. Faced with an election held under such a system, we would advise voting along strict class lines: no vote for petty bourgeois or bourgeois parties. True, calling for a ‘yes’ vote lined Marxists up with the Lib Dems, the Greens, Ukip, Sinn Féin and Plaid Cymru. Labour adopted no official position, while Respect, the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party in England and Wales and the *Morning Star’s* Communist Party of Britain supported the Tory ‘no’ campaign.

However, our principled opposition to referendums stands. They are not a higher form of democracy than the election of well-tested working class representatives, Marxist politics and extensive public debate. Referendums, on the contrary, tend to divide the working class, weaken its party spirit and produce the strangest of bedfellows.

In terms of our tradition, things unmistakably date back to Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. The Marx-Engels team knew all about the undemocratic nature of referendums, given the bitter experience of Louis Bonaparte and his ‘self-coup d’état’ in 1851, and then his self-elevation to emperor in 1852 (each autocratic power-grab being legitimised by a referendum). Bonaparte went on to impose press censorship, restrict demonstrations and public meetings, savagely repress political opponents (mainly red republicans) and force thousands into exile - amongst them the celebrated writer, Victor Hugo. Initially a supporter, Hugo furiously denounced Bonaparte’s referendums as a means to “smother men’s minds”.¹¹ In the same defiant spirit, George Sand (Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin), damned them as “an infamous snare”.¹²

Marx and Engels, along with their co-thinkers, Jules Guesde and Paul Lafargue, presented their alternative to the post-1871

third republic - in essence a reformed version of Bonapartism - in the ‘minimum’ section of the *Programme of the Parti Ouvrier*. Here it is explained that the creation of a workers’ party “must be pursued by all the means the proletariat has at its disposal, including universal suffrage, which will thus be transformed from the instrument of deception that it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation”. The party will fight for the confiscation of church wealth; remove restrictions on the press, meetings, organisations, etc; and abolish the standing army and replace it with the “general arming of the people”.¹³

The Marx-Engels position opposing referendums became the common sense of the Second International, including both its far left and its far right. Arturo Labriola, the Italian syndicalist, wrote his *Contro il referendum* in 1897. He castigated referendums as a cruel trick. In 1911 Ramsay MacDonald, Labour leader and future prime minister, came out in similar terms: referendums are “a clumsy and ineffective weapon, which the reaction can always use more effectively than democracy, because it, being the power to say ‘no’, is far more useful to the few than the many”.¹⁴

Note that the - still widely venerated - constitutional theorist, AV Dicey, promoted an-all UK referendum in the 1890s as a means to scupper Irish home rule - Ulster Unionists ran with his referendum proposal and demanded that it be integrated into the constitution; in 1910 Stanley Baldwin included the promise of a referendum over tariff reform in the Tory manifesto, and challenged the Liberals to do the same with Irish home rule; in 1911 Lord Balfour tabled his ‘people bill’ in the House of Lords, allowing 200 MPs to petition the crown for a referendum and thereby potentially block unwelcome government legislation; in 1913 Lord Curzon floated a referendum as a democratic way to prevent the extension of the franchise to women; and, as the reform bill giving women over 30 the vote was passing through parliament in 1918, 53 peers wrote to *The Times* urging a referendum.¹⁵

However, there were those useful idiots on the left who were attracted by the idea of referendums and the right of the people to initiate them. Karl Kautsky, the celebrated pope of Marxism, chose Moritz Rittinghausen, a German social democrat, as his main polemical target over the issue.¹⁶

Kautsky’s *Parliamentarism, direct legislation by the people and social democracy* (1893) was designed to shoot down referenda nostrums and uphold the strategic perspective he outlined in his hugely influential commentary on the Erfurt programme, known in English as *The class struggle*. Even if referendums could replace existing representative institutions, as extreme ‘against elections’ advocates still want, this would represent not a step forward for democracy, but a step backward.

Kautsky fields three main arguments. Firstly, he stresses that there are very few situations where there is a simple binary choice in politics. Eg, even assuming that there is a straightforwardly ‘right thing to do’, it is rarely obvious what the right thing to do is. Very frequently, there is not a choice to be made between option 1 or 2, but options 1 to 7 and within these options, 1 (a) (i), 1 (a) (ii), 1 (b) ... and so on and so forth. To reach a decision, then, it is necessary to reduce the range of options. That is, of course, why Kautsky advocates extending representative democracy and the process of debate, motions, detailed votes and binding legislation.

Secondly - and this is no less important - Kautsky wanted to strengthen the system of party politics. In the transition period between capitalism and communism, it is, he said, vital for the broad mass of the population to think about, to organise around and to vote for competing party outlooks. That has the advantage of bringing to the fore class divisions. Referendums, on the other hand, have the disadvantage of blurring, overriding, deflecting the fundamental conflict in society between class and class, and the respective conflict between party and party: precisely the *opposite* of what Marxists want to see.

Thirdly, Kautsky stresses the point that Marxists strive - particularly through their

emphasis on a working class party - to bring about a situation in which the state is as weak and the people are as strong and organised as possible. He draws a vital distinction between, on the one hand, ‘the people’ as an unorganised mass who do not think about national or global issues in a coherent fashion, and ‘the people’ organised into, or by, a workers’ party. One is to be perpetual victim of lies, fraud and humbug. The other readies itself as the future ruling class.

Memory loss

The reason why the left has largely forgotten the history of opposing referendums in the name of *extending representative democracy* surely stems from a number of factors. Above all, though, it must be the general decline in our political culture. A working knowledge of Marxist theory, socialist literature and the history of the revolutionary movement can no longer be taken for granted. There is certainly no common understanding of the necessity of a minimum programme and emphasising the battle to win democracy.

Once there were mass Marxist parties: now we have leftwing confessional sects. They produce little or nothing worthwhile in terms of ideas. True, Labour has well over 550,000 members, but, while it has always had plenty of socialists in its ranks, the Labour Party itself has never been a real socialist party. Disgracefully, we are still lumbered with the managerial guff Tony Blair substituted for the old clause four in 1995. However, the old clause four, agreed in 1918, was socialist in name only. What the Fabian socialist, Sidney Webb, produced was a recipe for a British empire version of state capitalism: colonial peoples would remain nationally oppressed, workers would remain wage-slaves.

An unacknowledged Fabian socialism survives in the form of Momentum, the Labour Representation Committee, *Labour Briefing* (original), Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, etc. Take the all too frequent claim that a Labour government can deliver full employment, an equal society and an economy that works for all. Impossible, of course, without abolishing the capitalist system. And, as can be seen with The World Transformed event, there are good intentions, the fostering of illusions, activist training ... and turning a blind eye to what is going on. Hence, no place for debating the ongoing witch-hunt, the ‘anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism’ lies, the silencing of pro-Palestine activists, the backtracking on Trident, let alone mapping out a vision of transforming the Labour Party.

We in LPM are absolutely clear. Our goal is a Labour Party that, in the words of Keir Hardie, can “organise the working class into a great, independent political power to fight for the coming of socialism”.¹⁷

Towards that end it is worth taking up the slogan of a much less notable Labour leader. The slogan is ‘Education, education, education’ ●

Notes

- The Guardian* September 8 2018.
- The Observer* September 16 2018.
- The Guardian* February 11 2018.
- The Guardian* August 18 2018.
- <https://whatukthinks.org/eu/questions/should-the-united-kingdom-remain-a-member-of-the-european-union-or-leave-the-european-union-after-the-referendum>.
- www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-44847404.
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- BBC Radio 4 Today August 21 2018.
- www.libdemvoice.org/the-dangerous-nonsense-of-the-peoples-vote-58261.html.
- A Gramsci *Selections from political writings 1921-1926* London 1978, p50.
- V Hugo *Napoleon the little* London 1852, p144.
- G Sand *The letters of George Sand* Vol 3, New York NY 2009, p192.
- www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm.
- See L Morel and M Qvortrup (eds) *The Routledge handbook to referendums and direct democracy* Abingdon 2018.
- See V Bogdanor *The people and the party system: the referendum and electoral reform in British politics* Cambridge 1981, pp9-94.
- See B Lewis, ‘Referenda and direct democracy’ *Weekly Worker* September 18 2014; K Kautsky, ‘Direct legislation by the people and the class struggle’ *Weekly Worker* March 31 2016.
- Independent Labour Party *Report of the 18th annual conference* London 1910, p59.

AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

- The central aim of Labour Party Marxists is to transform the Labour Party into an instrument for working class advance and international socialism. Towards that end we will join with others and seek the closest unity of the left inside and outside the party.
- Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, waste and production for its own sake. Attempts to rescue the system through Keynesian remedies are diversionary and doomed to fail. The democratic and social gains of the working class must be tenaciously defended, but capitalism must be superseded by socialism.
- The only viable alternative is organising the working class into powerful and thoroughly democratic trade unions, co-ops, and other schools for socialism, and crucially into a political party which aims to replace the rule of the capitalist class with the rule of the working class.
- The fight for trade union freedom, anti-fascism, women’s rights, sexual freedom, republican democracy and opposition to all imperialist wars are inextricably linked to working class political independence and the fight for socialism.
- Ideas of reclaiming the Labour Party and the return of the old clause four are totally misplaced. From the beginning the party has been dominated by the labour bureaucracy and the ideas of reformism. The party must be refounded on the basis of a genuinely socialist programme as opposed to social democratic gradualism or bureaucratic statism.
- The aim of the party should not be a Labour government for its own sake. History shows that Labour governments committed to managing the capitalist system and loyal to the existing constitutional order create disillusionment in the working class.
- Labour should only consider forming a government when it has the active support of a clear majority of the population and has a realistic prospect of implementing a full socialist programme. This cannot be achieved in Britain in isolation from Europe and the rest of the world.
- Socialism is the rule of the working class over the global economy created by capitalism and as such is antithetical to all forms of British nationalism. Demands for a British road to socialism and a withdrawal from the European Union are therefore to be opposed.
- Political principles and organisational forms go hand-in-hand. The Labour Party must become the umbrella organisation for all trade unions, socialist groups and pro-working class partisans. Hence all the undemocratic bans and proscriptions must be done away with.
- The fight to democratise the Labour Party cannot be separated from the fight to democratise the trade unions. Trade union votes at Labour Party conferences should be cast not by general secretaries but proportionately according to the political balance in each delegation.
- All trade unions should be encouraged to affiliate, all members of the trade unions encouraged to pay the political levy and join the Labour Party as individual members.
- The party must be reorganised from top to bottom. Bring the Parliamentary Labour Party under democratic control. The position of Labour leader should be abolished along with the national policy forum. The NEC should be unambiguously responsible for drafting Labour Party manifestos.
- The NEC should be elected and accountable to the annual conference, which must be the supreme body in the party. Instead of a tame rally there must be democratic debate and binding votes.
- Our elected representatives must be recallable by the constituency or other body that selected them. That includes MPs, MEPs, MSPs, AMs, councillors, etc. Without exception elected representatives should take only the average wage of a skilled worker, the balance being donated to furthering the interests of the labour movement ●

Labour Against the Witchhunt

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Individual membership: £10 per annum, £5 (unwaged).
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Transform the Labour Party

The democracy commission's recommendations fall far short of what is needed. **James Marshall** presents LPM's 12-point alternative

1 Mandatory reselection is crucial, though it terrifies the right. We read that this, "even more than nuclear disarmament and membership of the European Community, became the main catalyst for the launch of the breakaway Social Democratic Party" in March 1981.¹ In that same treacherous spirit as the founders of the SDP, Progress - current board members include Peter Mandelson, Gloria De Piero, Alison McGovern and Phil Wilson - furiously denounces mandatory reselection as "a weapon of fear and intimidation".² Yes, it is viewed as an affront by every rightwing wrecker, every hireling, every parliamentary careerist.

It is worth looking at the background. Interestingly, and with good foundation, we read on the Progress website that mandatory reselection carries "echoes of the Paris Commune, and of the Russian soviets, where delegates were subject to recall if they displeased their local citizenry. It rests on the idea that leaders will always be tempted to sell you out, once they get power."³ Well, surely, that is what history actually shows.

For decades, sitting Labour MPs - certainly those with safe seats - enjoyed a job for life (or as long as no better offer came along). They might deign to visit their constituency once or twice a year, deliver a speech to the AGM and write an occasional letter to the local newspaper. Meanwhile they lived a pampered, middle class life, frequented various London gentlemen's clubs and spent their weekends in the home counties with Lord this and Lady that. Despite such evident moral corruption, they were automatically the candidate for the next election. Unless found guilty of an act of gross indecency or having had the party whip withdrawn, they could do as they pleased.

With the rise of Bennism, that totally unacceptable situation was called into question. The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, founded in 1973, committed itself to a range of rule changes - the mandatory reselection of MPs was finally agreed by the 1980 conference. What this saw, however, was not a Labour Party equivalent of the Paris Commune or the Russian soviets. There was no right to instantly recall. Nevertheless, once in each parliament, our MPs had to secure the endorsement of their local general management committee. Note: GMCs were made up of delegates elected by local party and trade union branches; they were sizable bodies too, typically consisting of 80, 90, 100 or even more delegates.

At the prompting of the bourgeois media, Neil Kinnock, desperately seeking acceptability, sought to extract trade unions from the voting process altogether. He failed, but accepted a compromise. A local electoral college for the selection and reselection of candidates was introduced. Ordinary members were given a direct vote for the first time, leaving GMCs with the right to



We desperately need our own media

nominate and shortlist only. This electoral college system gave unions and affiliated organisations up to 40% of the vote, with ordinary members having some 60% (the actual balance was different in each seat, depending on party and union membership).

Trigger ballots were a product of the 1990s. Formally honouring conference's "desire to maintain reselection", they made it significantly "easier for MPs to defend their positions".⁴ They allowed for a sitting MP to be subject to a full-scale ballot of the membership. But only if they lost a trigger ballot.

We say, all elected Labour representatives must, by rule, be subject to one-member, one-vote mandatory reselection. All must be brought under democratic control - from above, by the national executive committee; from below, by branches and Constituency Labour Parties.

2. We urgently need a sovereign conference once again. The cumbersome, undemocratic and oppressive structures, especially those put in place under the Blair supremacy, must be abolished. The joint policy committee, the national policy forums, etc, have to go.

3. We are against the idea of electing the general secretary through an all-member ballot. The NEC should elect all national officers. Therefore the post of Labour leader should be replaced by the post of NEC chair. We favour annual elections with the right to recall at any time. As a matter of basic principle, Marxists oppose all forms of Bonapartism.

4. In Scotland and Wales, Labour's executive committees should likewise elect their own officers, including their representatives on the all-UK NEC. We are against a single individual in Scotland and Wales having the right to appoint themselves, or a trusted clone.

5. Scrap the hated compliance unit "and get back to the situation where people are automatically accepted for membership, unless there is a significant issue that comes up" (John McDonnell).⁵

There must be an amnesty for all those

barred or expelled for having supported leftwing organisations and publications. The compliance unit operates in the murky shadows, routinely leaks to the capitalist media and makes rulings in a completely biased manner. We want to welcome into our ranks those excluded by the compliance unit. Many of them are good socialists with a proven record.

6. Those expelled from membership ought to have the right to reapply - not after five years, but in just one year. All disciplinary procedures should be completed within three months, at which point suspensions must be automatically rescinded. Endless delay violates natural justice.

7. We need a rule that commits the NEC to securing the affiliation of *all* trade unions to the Labour Party. The FBU has already reaffiliated. Excellent. But what about the RMT? Let us win RMT militants to finally drop their support for the thoroughly misconceived Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition project. Instead reaffiliate to the Labour Party. And what about the National Education Union? Then there is the PCS. Thankfully, Mark Serwotka, its leftwing general secretary, has come round to the idea of affiliation. Yes, that would run up against the Trades Disputes and Trade Union Act (1927), introduced by a vengeful Tory government in the aftermath of the General Strike. Civil service unions were barred from affiliating to the Labour Party and the TUC. The Civil and Public Services Association - predecessor of the PCS - reaffiliated to the TUC in 1946. Now, however, it surely is time for the PCS to reaffiliate to the Labour Party. Force another change in the law.

8. There has to be a shift in the party, away from the HQ, regional officers, the leader's office, the Parliamentary Labour Party, etc. CLPs must be empowered. Towards that end there has to be proper financing. CLPs should be allocated 50% of the individual membership dues. That will help with producing publicity material, hiring rooms, paying for full-time officers, providing transport, setting up websites,

etc. That way, our CLPs can be made into vibrant centres of socialist organisation, education and action.

9. We need rule changes to once again allow left, communist and revolutionary groups and parties to affiliate - as long as they do not stand against us in elections, this can only but strengthen Labour as a federal party.

10. Being an MP ought to be an honour, not a career ladder - not a way for university graduates to secure a lucrative living. A particularly potent weapon here would be a rule requiring all our elected representatives and officials to take only the average wage of a skilled worker - a principle that was indeed upheld by the Paris Commune and the Bolshevik revolution. Our MPs are on a basic £77,379 annual salary. On top of that they are paid an allowance to employ staff and expenses to travel and, if necessary, secure accommodation for themselves in London. On average this takes them to well over £80,000 annually (yet at present Labour MPs are only obliged to pay the £82 parliamentarian's subscription rate). Moreover, as leader of the official opposition, Jeremy Corbyn not only gets his MP's salary: he is entitled to an additional £73,617.⁶

Let them keep the average skilled worker's wage - say £40,000 (plus legitimate expenses). Then, however, they should hand the balance over to the party. Even without a rule change Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and Diane Abbott ought to take the lead here.

11. Relying on the favours of the capitalist press, radio and TV is a fool's game. Yes, it worked splendidly for Tony Blair and Alistair Campbell. But, as Neil Kinnock, Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband found to their cost, to live by the mainstream media is to die by the mainstream media.

The NEC should, by rule, establish and maintain our own press, radio and TV. To state the obvious, Facebook and Twitter have severe limits. They are brilliant mediums for transmitting simple, short and sharp messages to the already converted, but when it comes

to complex ideas, debating history and charting out political strategies, they are worse than useless. We should provide time and space for controversy and the whole range of different opinions within the party. Without that our media will be dull, lifeless, pointless. We should also take full advantage of parliamentary immunity to circumvent the oppressive libel laws. Then we can say the unsayable. That would prove to be electric in terms of shaping and mobilising public opinion. **12.** We should adopt a new clause four. Not a return to the old 1918 version, but a commitment to working class rule and the aim of a stateless, classless, moneyless society, which embodies the principle, 'From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs' ●

Notes

- 1 thirdavenue.org.uk/a-beginners-guide-to-the-labour-party-rulebook-part-2-reselection-of-mps.
- 2 www.progressonline.org.uk/2015/09/28/the-price-of-a-seat-in-parliament.
- 3 www.progressonline.org.uk/2015/09/28/the-price-of-a-seat-in-parliament.
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- 5 labourlist.org/2016/02/mcdonnell-and-woodcock-clash-over-plan-to-scrap-member-checks.
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LONDON COMMUNIST FORUM

Sundays, 5pm: Weekly political meeting and study group organised jointly by Labour Party Marxists and CPGB. Details in *Weekly Worker*.

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