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WHAT REDFLAG FIGHTS FOR

Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party has inspired hundreds of thousands of people to campaign for an alternative to the diet of austerity, racism and war force fed by previous governments.

As Marxists, we stand for a revolutionary solution to the exploitation and conflict inherent in the capitalist system. That's why we campaign for a socialist programme - a democratically owned and planned economy which meets the needs of the millions, not the millionaires.

To carry out a radical transformation of society, we need a radically different kind of party; a party led by its members, rooted in working class campaigns and communities, and committed to a revolutionary break with the British state and capitalist class.

In Britain we campaign for a grassroots democracy in the labour movement, an anticapitalist programme for the Labour Party, and international solidarity in cooperation with our sister groups in the League for the Fifth International.

Red Flag stands for the revolutionary class struggle and international socialism.

Join us today!
THE CORBYN PROJECT FOR AN ANTI-austerity Labour government is in danger. From Jeremy Corbyn himself.

The Tory party is in disarray, lagging behind Nigel Farage's Brexit party in the polls, its MPs so fractious and fratricidal that they have forced their own prime minister to resign. Yet it is not Labour that is benefiting. Recent opinion polls show that Labour's own steep decline in the European elections is continuing. A YouGov poll, carried out on 2-3 July, put Labour 4th on 18 per cent, behind the Tories, Brexit and the Lib Dems. An average of the last 10 opinion polls, gives the party a better score of 22.8 per cent, but even this would mean Labour falling 100 seats short of a majority.

So, what is the cause of this dramatic downturn? Certainly, Tom Watson and the disloyal MPs’ intervention to overturn Chris Williamson’s reinstatement has hardly helped matters. But the main cause is what Corbyn and his advisers call “constructive ambiguity” on the Brexit question. It is a strategy that has proved highly destructive.

Red Flag is not alone in thinking Corbyn’s position on Brexit is largely to blame. It is utopian in its assertion that he could get a deal which lets Britain have “the exact same benefits” without membership and reactionary in its commitment to ending free movement.

Aimed at triangulating between MPs in majority Leave voting constituencies and the 85 percent of the membership who now oppose Brexit, it has ended up pleasing no one. Instead, it has made the party a target for the populists who denounce it as part of the deceitful Westminster establishment.

With this strategy patently coming apart, at a recent shadow cabinet meeting John McDonnell warned Corbyn, “this whole situation is like a slow-moving car crash”, and urged him to back a second referendum and to campaign for Remain in that referendum.

Even his old friend Diane Abbot told Jeremy he was out of touch and could not see the damage his pro-Brexit stance was doing to his supporters.

Corbyn fobbed them both off by promising to consult the unions. However, the unions, in particular, the postal workers’ CWU and Len McCluskey’s Unite, are the main problem. One Labour frontbencher despaired, “Basically, Unite stepped in yesterday and put the brakes on”.

This is not the new “people-powered” Labour Party we were promised. Despite the abolition of the block vote, it is union barons who are still pulling the strings, with members kept in the dark, waiting for a new policy to “emerge” from the back rooms, and the Leadership's Office making all the decisions, just as it did under Neil Kinnock and Tony Blair.

**Stopping No Deal**

John McDonnell has also suggested that the incoming prime minister may call a general election this year, and he could well be right. That makes it all the more urgent for Labour Party members and rank and file trade unionists to assert their right to debate and decide between clear, opposing motions, for and against Brexit.

We need to demand that the conference agenda is cleared of less urgent business to allow a full-scale debate on Brexit. In the branches, but also in the trade unions, we need to push forward resolutions for a complete change of Brexit policy to one that will put Labour at the head of the anti-Brexit, anti-No Deal movement. At the moment, Corbyn’s position has given the initiative to the LibDems and the Greens and, within the party, to Watson and the right.

Time is running out. The new Tory leader will do everything possible to make a hard Brexit an inevitability. This is unlikely to be stopped by parliamentary manoeuvres but could be by action on the streets and in the workplaces. The TUC general council and Labour’s NEC need to take a decision that the whole labour movement will launch mass action. If there is any move to prorogue parliament so that Brexit could be forced through behind the backs of voters, the TUC should call a political mass strike to stop it.
How Britain's biggest union undermines\n\nmigrant workers' struggles

JEREMY DEWAR

OVER THE PAST SEVEN YEARS cleaners and security guards at London’s most prestigious universities have been fighting a relentless and courageous struggle for basic rights: the London Living Wage, sickness, holiday and maternity pay, workplace conditions, and end to contracting out and union recognition.

They are overwhelmingly female, migrant and people of colour. In a period when strike action is at an all-time low in the UK, they are a beacon of hope and an inspiration to millions of low paid, precarious workers. They are largely organised by independent unions, the United Voices of the World (UVW) and the Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB).

Britain’s biggest union, Unison with 1.3 million members, however, continues to obstruct them at every step of the way.

Goldsmiths

The six-month long campaign by cleaners at Goldsmiths University in south London is a case in point. Unusually the cleaners here organised themselves outside of any union but with the help of students and the Justice for Cleaners campaign, formerly a part of Unite. They had no contact with the local Unison branch, which showed no interest in organising them whatsoever.

In February the university’s security guards, who suffered similar conditions to the cleaners, as well as being mostly on zero-hours contracts, joined the fray. The IWGB had recruited most of the security officers and led their campaign.

Both campaigns were lively and member-led, in the sense that the workers themselves discussed their aims and the tactics and strategy to achieve them. Lively demos, pickets of cultural events, temporary occupations, music and dancing, petitions and even a breakfast club were employed to force the university to concede the cleaners’ demands.

But while there was support form the academic staff’s UCU union, Unison went out of its way to discredit the campaign, telling its members that “Unison did not organise or support any of these events” and warning of “the possibility of invalid strike action” even though no strike had been called. Unison branch officials called the security officers’ demand to be brought in-house “wholly unreasonable”.

Yet when the cleaners won their battle, Unison claimed the credit for a campaign “led by Unison” and failed to even mention Justice for Cleaners.

Pattern

This is not a one-off. Although in a number of universities, especially where branches are led by socialists, as at SOAS and Birkbeck, Unison has either organised outsourced and migrant workers or supported the actions of independent unions, there is a pattern of sabotage and even “yellow” or business unionism by the giant union.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the 2016-17 campaigns by cleaners at the London School of Economics (LSE) and at Senate House. After 10 months of campaigning, including seven strikes at LSE as well as walk outs at Senate House, the workers won many of their demands. The UVW and IWGB were heavily involved and recruited the bulk of the union members.

Although these workers garnered support from rank and file members of Unison and UCU, again union officials stabbed them in the back. Unison officials denounced the UVW strikers at LSE and took part in negotiations for cleaners who were members of another union, i.e. over their heads. UVW organiser Petros Elia explains:

“Unison regional swooped in and made identical demands [to the campaign] in order to have it on record that they have done so, without having spoken to the cleaners and seeking their input or consent and without a strategy to win.”

UCU Regional organizer Barry Jomes scuppered attempts by UCU and Unison activists to support the IWGB strike at Senate House, telling members that “any messages of support we put out are explicitly messages of support for Unison’s efforts to negotiate a solution for outsourced workers, and are not capable of being read as supportive of the IWGB.”

This gets to the hub of the question. Unison and UCU officials are more concerned with retaining their monopoly over negotiating rights than they are with members’ pay and conditions. Indeed if there is a conflict between these two aims, these bureaucrats will always prioritise the former.

This is exactly what happened at University College London (UCL) in January. The IWGB applied to outsourcing firm Axis for union recognition, since it organised the majority of security guards there. Six weeks later, without a word from Axis to the IWGB, the company announced that it had recognised Unison. Since under trade union legislation a company is only obliged to recognise one union and can disregard any other appeals for a recognition ballot, the IWGB was kicked out of the negotiations in a dispute that it was leading.

Democratic fighting unions

So what should socialists do? Obviously we defend the right of all workers to join unions that fight for their rights. If that is an independent union, they should join that union.

Workers in other unions – Unison, UCU, Unite, etc. – should demand full support for workers of all other unions who find themselves in a struggle against their employers. More, they should demand their unions actively seek to organise precarious, migrant and outsourced workers and campaign effectively for their rights.

Our aim is to build fighting industrial unions that organise across all grades in a sector. But they must be democratic – with autonomy for sections of workers to decide on their own campaigns where applicable – and ready to take on the employers and the state machinery, for example when immigration officers seek to deport union activists.

A campaign along these lines will necessarily start among the rank and file union membership and will meet opposition from the ingrained bureaucratism of the paid full-time officials, whose main goal is to retain their position as the sole organisers of labour, regardless of, and often in contradiction to the actual needs of the members.

Only when the trade union and wider labour movement welcomes the so-called “unorganisable” workers into its ranks and among its leaders, will we be able to build the force capable of turning the tide of neoliberalism and ending the regime of fear, racism and poverty.
To keep apologising in the face of non-proven, non-specific, non-quantified accusations is unnecessary and damaging to the party because it lends credibility to them. The real reason the press and right wing of the party protests to be offended is that they do not want to see a man who has consistently defended the rights of the Palestinians elected as prime minister. For that they should apologise.

Antisemitism loses all meaning and is dangerously devalued if it is extended from fomenting hatred of Jews as Jews to opposing the actions of Israel against the Palestinians.

Certainly, whenever “anti-Zionists” blame all Jews for Israel’s actions, this is indeed antisemitism and has to be combatted with the greatest seriousness and punished. But Williamson’s remarks do not fall into this category and he should be reinstated.

Party bureaucracy
Labour’s general secretary, Jennie Formby, has ruled that “individual disciplinary cases that are being/have been dealt with through the NEC Disputes Processes are confidential. Motions on individual cases are therefore not competent business for discussion at CLPs and will not be discussed by the NEC or any associated bodies”.

Yet Labour MPs, acting like superior beings above all rules, have done more than comment; they have used the media to demand the reversal of an investigation and judgement by a properly constituted party committee, undermining the party’s credibility on this issue.

Some on the left claim that branches or CLPs cannot discuss the Williamson case because it breaches the rulebook. But to fail to do so is far more serious. To say we must support the general secretary because she is a Corbyn supporter is simply feebleminded.

Iain McNicol used the same powers against the Left when large numbers of new applicants were denied membership, often for unknown reasons. These powers to ban debate will be used against us in the future no doubt. That is why rank and file members should protest against Formby’s ruling.

Running scared
Other leftists are refusing to support Williamson’s reinstatement by retailing a series of accusations against him as supportive evidence. Certainly, some of his Facebook postings and links, while not antisemitic, have involved people who are, such as his tweet of appreciation of pro-Assad blogger Vanessa Beeley. He has recognised this and apologised.

Our political criticism of him relates to his support for a “left” Brexit, as well as for Assad and Russia’s intervention in the Syrian civil war. But none of these issues are evidence of antisemitism on his part. We should not concede to the press-induced moral panic and Labour’s right wing, pro-Israel lobby in any way.

Owen Jones, Ash Sarkar, and the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty have also joined the witch-hunt. The AWL’s characterisation of those who do not recognise the right of the state of Israel to exist as “left anti-Semites” is based on their own denial of the Palestinians’ right to return to lands from which they were driven in 1948, itself a clearly racist position.

Most notorious on the left Momentum’s caudillo Jon Lansman who replied to a tweet from Williamson:

“This tweet reveals not one iota of contrition nor any acknowledgement of wrongdoing following a further formal warning from the Labour party for behaviour grossly detrimental to the party. Such contempt for the party’s verdict! He has to go!”

In fact it is Lansman who should go. A democratic conference of local Momentum and Labour Left groups should take place as a matter of urgency, so that left activists can decide the left’s policy, not Lansman, acting as a free agent. Saying that the Labour Party has been too apologetic in defending its own record on antisemitism cannot compare to the record of those who launched and supported wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and who today say nothing about Israel’s ongoing brutalising of the Palestinians. Yet Tony Blair remains a member, despite bringing the party into disrepute with millions of voters and members.

In sharpest contrast, Corbyn has brought in hundreds of thousands of new members. To countenance the claim that Labour represents “an existential threat” to Jewish people is probably the most outrageous slander in British politics in living memory.

REINSTATE CHRIS WILLIAMSON

STATEMENT
THE LABOUR PARTY originally suspended Chris Williamson in February on allegations of antisemitism. The bases for this charge were that he had booked a room in the Palace of Westminster for Jewish Voice for Labour to show the film Witch Hunt and a speech he made to a Momentum meeting.

On 26 June, after investigation, the suspension was lifted. An immediate furore broke out. Tom Watson, Labour’s deputy leader, called for the decision to be reversed and within days the party re-suspended him.

The media reported that he had been suspended because he had said at the Momentum meeting that the “Labour Party had been too apologetic about antisemitism”. In fact, what he said was the following: “The party that’s been doing too much, too much, we’ve given too much ground, we’ve been too apologetic. We’ve done more to actually address the scourge of antisemitism than any other political party, any other political party. And yet we are being traduced.”

Clearly he was not saying that the party should not concern itself about any real examples of antisemitism, let alone that it should not expel members proven guilty of it.

Williamson’s statement that the Labour Party had not been sufficiently robust in rebutting charges that antisemitism was rife in the party, particularly on its left wing, is fair comment. Indeed, it is simply true.

To keep apologising in the face of non-proven, non-specific, non-quantified accusations is unnecessary and damaging to the party because it lends credibility to them. The real reason the press and right wing of the party protests to be offended is that they do not want to see a man who has consistently defended the rights of Jews as Jews to opposing the actions of Israel against the Palestinians.

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"Whatever our criticisms of Chris Williamson’s politics, his statement that the Labour Party had not been robust in rebutting charges that antisemitism was rife in the party, is fair comment."

SUMMER 2019 / REDFLAG / 05
Britain's next Prime Minister?

Dave Stockton

As we go to press Boris Johnson is still well ahead in the race to be Tory leader. A press that regularly labels life-long antiracist Jeremy Corbyn as an antisemite is chary of pinning labels on Johnson as racist, misogynist, homophobe and islamophobe – labels he richly deserves.

Indeed he has said “Islamophobia — fear of Islam — seems a natural reaction” given it is “the most viciously sectarian of all religions in its heartlessness towards unbelievers”. Strange given that Christianity has in its record the forcible destruction of the religions of antiquity, the crusades, the Inquisition and the witch burnings, the expulsion of the Muslims and Jews from Spain, and the waves of antisemitic pogroms from the 13th to the 20th centuries.

He has also scoffed at the idea of climate change, attacked the minimum wage, and called Labour’s repeal of the anti-LGBT+ Section 28 “appalling”. He has even described police spending on investigating child sex abuse as money “spaffed up a wall”. He has a particular thing about Africa – a “dark spot”, he has called it – whose big problem is “not that we were once in charge there but that we are not in charge any more”. It would be good if we were to sort it all out, he says, but only on the strict condition we are not made to feel guilty about our new civilising mission.

As a man who wanted to quote Kipling’s Road to Mandalay on a visit to a temple on an official visit to Myanmar, Johnson is steeped in the Boy’s Own Annual culture of the days of the British Empire, just as his view of Brexit is that somehow those days might return.

Making Britain Great Again?

Even his seemingly progressive policy of granting an amnesty to migrants who have been here 15 years without papers is given a chauvinist twist. He told a Tory audience in Darlington that migrants had “to feel British – that’s the most important thing – and to learn English”. That a regurgitated version of Norman Tebbit’s infamous “cricket test” should pass off as “socially liberal” shows just how far right the party has travelled.

His defenders point out that he regularly apologises “if his comments have given offence”. Indeed they pass-off as “wit” or even bravely defending free speech against “political correctness run mad”. And he is adored amongst the Daily Telegraph-reading 160,000 Tory membership who will choose our next prime minister.

In fact in this as in more serious political policies the parallels between Johnson and the original blond beast in the White House, who has already stated “I think he’s got what it takes. He’d make a great Prime Minister”, run deep.

So what can we expect from him in Number Ten. Well certainly the standard Tory policies: ruling for the few not many.

When it comes to social inequality Johnson’s views are standard elitism, shorn of Cameron and May’s feeble attempts to combat the label of “the nasty party”. Johnson is more direct when it comes to social questions.

“IT is surely relevant to a conversation about equality that as many as 16 per cent of our species have an IQ below 85, while about 2 per cent have an IQ above 130.” In a word if you are poor it’s because you are stupid. ” His only concern is Labour’s “social engineering” to offset natural selection. He does bemoan a supposed decline in social mobility – but this means getting to the top.

“I worry that there are too many cornflakes who aren’t being given a good enough chance to rustle and hustle their way to the top.” And he promises to give the packet another good shake, just as Margaret Thatcher did by slashing social housing and the welfare state. His contempt for the “chavs” and the “plebs” oozes out of every article this Bullingdon Club boy writes.

To encourage the bottom cornflakes downwards and the hustlers and rustlers upwards, Johnson has pledged to raise the 40p tax threshold from £50,000 to £80,000, thus giving a tax cut to earners on more than £50,000, around three million higher earners, and further depleting the state budgets for social services, health and education.

But as with the whole Brexit carnival of reaction, Johnson is eager to sound the racist dog whistle on immigration. Having got rid of the European with the end of free movement, he now talks of implementing a points-based immigration system in the style of the racist Australian system.

He has promised that it will be “do or die” for Britain to leave the EU by 31 October (rather appropriately, Halloween). To this end he has reportedly refused to rule out using the royal prerogative to prorogue parliament (prevent it from sitting) so MPs cannot block a No Deal Brexit. But any moves to do this would no doubt provoke a no confidence motion that would in turn trigger a general election.

Nevertheless all sorts of constitutional shenanigans can be expected from Johnson, who has as little respect for the ramshackle collection of laws and customs that passes for our constitution as Trump has for his.

In short, in Boris Johnson we are likely to have the most racist, bigoted and socially reactionary prime minister ever. And to fight his panoply of anti-working class, anti-women and LGBT+ people, and anti-immigrant policies we will have to fight the keystone of their arch-policy: Brexit.

Bring down Brexit and we can bring down Johnson. Bring down them both and we can open the road to a really radical Labour government.
HISTORY

STONEWALL AT 50

DAVE STOCKTON

AT 1:30 IN THE MORNING ON JUNE 28, 1969, NYPD officers, led by deputy inspector Seymour Pine burst into the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street in Manhattan's Greenwich Village shouting “Police! We're taking the place!” Glaring white lights were turned on and the jukeboxes silenced. The cops ordered customers to form lines and submit their ID for inspection. Many were verbally abused, some roughed up and arrested. Others were dragged out of the bar and cops began bundling them into cars and a waiting patrol wagon.

The bar was a popular venue for the whole spectrum of the gay scene including men, lesbians, trans people and those who now identify as queer or non-binary. Stonewall was a place where people could dance, dress as they wished, kiss, without being mocked, harassed or denied service as would happen in “straight” bars. However, like other gay venues, because of these unlawful activities, it was run under the control of the mafia whose members preyed on, as well as protected, the clientele. This, plus the fact that sex workers ‘hustled’ there, gave multiple pretexts for the police to make periodic raids but also to take their cut. The club had indeed been raided only a couple of weeks before the 28th as had several other gay bars.

As customers were assaulted and insulted a fight back started, to the astonishment of the cops who had expected tears and submissiveness not a rain of coins and bricks. The crowd that had gathered in Christopher Street began to protest loudly, to taunt and then to impede the police. The trigger by most accounts was the forceful resistance of one lesbian to being shoved into a police vehicle. She escaped twice and when the police caught her they beat her with their clubs. Then the explosion came.

Soon missiles were flying and “New York's Finest” found themselves driven back and besieged inside the Stonewall Inn, with a crowd running to hundreds “rioting” outside. Disturbances continued for three successive nights, some say longer.

Not just gay men but lesbians, transgender women and cross-dressers, along with homeless young people living in Christopher Park, joined in, indeed they were in the forefront of the riots. In 1970, two transgender activists who were involved, Sylvia Rivera, who was Latina, and Marsha P. Johnson, who was black, co-founded an organisation called STAR, standing for Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, the term “transgender” was not common then.

The impact of Stonewall

Stonewall 50 years on remains iconic for all those fighting oppression on account of their sexuality and gender presentations that do not conform to the patriarchal binary. Like International Women's Day (March 8) and the May 1st workers' celebrations before it, June 28 has become a day of struggle in many countries and at many times, despite attempts to incorporate it by the state and even by the police.

So it is a good time to remind ourselves of how the “gay movement” inspired by the Stonewall rebellion, went way beyond the respectable lobbying and ‘homosexual law reform’ campaigns of preceding decades.

Sodomy in the USA

The 1950s were an especially hard time for all LGBT people. The red-baiting of McCarthyism had as part of it a witch hunt known as the Lavender Scare, when George Gabrielson, Republican National Chairman, denounced “sexual perverts who have infiltrated our Government in recent years” and were “perhaps as dangerous as the actual Communists.”

This meant that people could be fired...
from their jobs if their sexuality, or non-binary conforming gender roles, were discovered by their employers. In the schools, in the armed services, in churches, in public and political life, not to speak of the family, exposure was usually devastating. And for everyone exposed, many more were forced into "the closet", wracked with anxiety and mental distress.

Various state laws banned dancing in public with same-sex partners and enforced the wearing of a minimum of three pieces of "gender-appropriate" clothing. Police used these laws to harass and intimidate those who transgressed them, regularly raiding clubs which gays, lesbians and transgender people, or cross-dressers frequented. In consequence it was a golden age for blackmailers.

Homosexuality was still defined by the American Psychiatric Association as a psychiatric disorder until 1973. Psychiatrists saw their task as to "cure" gay people, often with the horrible aversion therapy. The churches, and the USA was and remains a land where the churches wield enormous influence, despite the constitutional separation from the state, likewise denounced sodomy as one of the most heinous of sins.

Thus, huge numbers of LGBT+ people themselves thought how they felt was indeed a shameful perversion and/or a mortal sin, and many young people were disowned by their families, or left home for a life on the streets. Many committed suicide. Brutal beatings, "queer bashing", and murders were not only frequent but not treated seriously by the police (similarly to domestic violence).

Prior to 1962, sodomy was a felony in every state, punished by a lengthy term of imprisonment and/or hard labour. Illinois was the first state to repeal its law and a number of others followed suit but the Supreme Court still upheld the constitutionality of Georgia's laws criminalising oral and anal sex in private between consenting adults, in the 1986 case, Bowers v. Hardwick.

The first Gay Pride marches were held in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Chicago, as well as in New York, on June 28, 1970. One year after that, in 1971, Berlin, London and Paris saw their first Prides and, since then, "Pride" has developed as a truly global event.

**Coming out**

Stonewall inspired a series of public actions across the USA and its story spread across the Atlantic and even further afield. It fell on fertile ground because of the mass student antiwar movement, the black power and antiracist movements and the sit-ins and teach-ins that had been held in colleges over the previous years. In these, sexual liberation for the young was a major theme. Though much of it was, as feminists pointed out, sexist and heterosexist, it opened the way for the more radical ideas of the 1970s. In the USA, Stonewall led to the foundation of the Gay Liberation Front a month or two later and the appearance of its paper Come Out.

In the USA, the GLF rapidly adopted radical positions expressing solidarity with the Black Panther Party and struggles against the Vietnam War, and the Panthers, then facing murderous repression from the US state, responded. Huey P. Newton wrote "A letter to the Revolutionary Brothers and Sisters about Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation" in which he recognised these movements as comrades in arms.

Gay liberation necessarily meant liberation from self-oppression, from life in the closet. The GLF's proposed means was for more and more gays to "come out" so that homophobia would be challenged and overcome. This strategy relied on the courage of the individual, of course helped by local groups.

Carl Wittman's A Gay Manifesto, written just before Stonewall but published in January, 1970, denounced male chauvinism and the nuclear family as creating oppression both for women and for gay males. Though he admitted it was written from a male gay perspective, the manifesto declared women fighting for their liberation "are our closest ally", and suggested the need for a lesbian caucus. On the movement's relationship to the working class it was more cautious but not hostile.

"We're not, as a group, Marxist or communist. We haven't figured out what kind of political/economic system is good for us as gays. Neither capitalist nor socialist countries have treated us as anything other than non grata so far. But we know we are radical, in that we know the system that we're under now is a direct source of oppression, and it's not a question of getting our share of the pie. The pie is rotten."

In fact, Wittman had been on the left but his caution must be understood in the context of an extended period where working class parties had taken reactionary positions on homosexuality and non-conforming gender roles.

Though the Bolsheviks repealed the anti-sodomy laws of Tsars in 1917, and the 1920s USSR constitution did likewise, in 1933, Joseph Stalin introduced Article 121 of the criminal code of the Soviet Union, which made male homosexuality a crime punishable by up to five years in prison with hard labour. Even amongst Trotskyists the view could be heard that homosexuality was a psychological disorder or even a vice of the upper class, practiced in private schools. Though the Trotskyists, unlike the Stalinists for a long period, supported homosexual rights and condemned legal restriction, it took years of arguments by lesbian and gay activists to win them to full support.

**Buggery in Britain**

Several statutes of the much admired Tudor monarchs, made anal intercourse between men (and animals) punishable by death, starting with Henry VIII’s Buggery Act of 1533. Of course, various famous literary expressions of homoerotic love were created in this period by, for example, Marlowe, Shakespeare and Rochester, and, if you were a royal homosexual, as was James I of England and VI of Scotland, things were very different. However, for the lower classes the death penalty was still occasionally being inflicted up to the 1830s.

The Tudor death penalty was still being supported in Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England (1759), a foundation stone of American as well as British law. It quoted the dictum, drawn from the laws of the Late Roman Emperors that defined male homosexuality as "that horrible crime, not to be named amongst Christians".

The updating Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, with the Labouchere Amendment, defined oral and anal sex in private between consenting adults as "gross indecency" subjecting it to the punishment of imprisonment at hard labour. This then spread to all the British colonies and is in full force today in many of the independent successor states. Contrast this with the Code Napoleon that did not punish homosexual acts and as a consequence francophone ex-colonies and their successor states do not either. This disgusting "British heritage" is rarely mentioned.

The 1885 CLA Act was responsible for the conviction and imprisonment at hard labour of the Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde and later, in the 1950s, the brilliant mathematician and computer scientist Alan Turing. Wilde's imprisonment and 'disgrace' and Turing's chemical castration contributed to the former's early death and the latter's suicide. The 1950s saw an increasing debate and unease as police ran a campaign of entrapment, and the Wolfson Committee recommended liberal reform, which the Tories refused to implement.

A breakthrough came during the 1964-70 Wilson government. A private member's bill relating to homosexual acts was introduced by the Labour MP, Leo Abse. It amended the Sexual Offences Act (1967 c. 60) that finally decriminalised homosexual acts in private between two men, over the age of 21. It took till 1994 before it was lowered to 18,
and then to 16, in 2001. Peter Tatchell has correctly warned against the complacent self-congratulation about the 1967 Act. He says that he has calculated that:

"15,000-plus gay men were convicted in the decades that followed the 1967 liberalisation. Not only was homosexuality only partly decriminalised by the 1967 act, but the remaining anti-gay laws were policed more aggressively than before by a state that opposed gay acceptance and equality. In total, from 1885 to 2013, nearly 100,000 men were arrested for same-sex acts."

Young gay adults continued to be hounded by police and school authorities for expressing their love physically. Moreover, the new law applied only to England and Wales, not to Scotland and Northern Ireland. Scotland did not legalise it until 1980 and Northern Ireland not till 1982.

In Britain, a radical Gay movement was also a response to Stonewall and, like the women’s liberation movement, was inspired by events in the USA. The UK’s Gay Liberation Front first met in the London School of Economics on October 13, 1970 and, Tatchell records, it was a collective working group that drew up a manifesto. It was very radical in its analysis:

"The oppression of gay people starts in the most basic unit of society, the family, consisting of the man in charge, a slave as his wife, and their children on whom they force themselves as the ideal models. The very form of the family works against homosexuality."

It stated:

"The starting point of our liberation must be to rid ourselves of the oppression which lies in the head of every one of us … we must root out the idea that homosexuality is bad, sick or immoral, and develop a gay pride."

And concluded:

"As we cannot carry out this revolutionary change alone, and as the abolition of gender roles is also a necessary condition of women’s liberation, we will work to form a strategic alliance with the women’s liberation movement, aiming to develop our ideas and our practice in close inter-relation. In order to build this alliance, the brothers in gay liberation will have to be prepared to sacrifice that degree of male chauvinism and male privilege that they still all possess."

It had as its immediate demands:

• That all discrimination against gay people, male and female, by the law, by employers, and by society at large should end.
• That all people who feel attracted to a member of their own sex be taught that such feelings are perfectly valid.
• That sex education in schools stop being exclusively heterosexual.
• That psychiatrists stop treating homosexuality as though it were a problem or sickness, thereby giving gay people senseless guilt complexes.
• That gay people be legally free to contact other gay people through newspaper ads, on the streets, and by any other means they may want, as are heterosexuals, and that police harassment should cease right now.
• That employers should no longer be allowed to discriminate against anyone on account of their sexual preferences.
• That the age of consent for gay males be reduced to the same as for straights.(i.e. from 21 to 16 –ed.)
• That gay people be free to hold hands and kiss in public, as are heterosexuals.

In conclusion

The new militant movements expanded to many countries and helped win the repeal of a series of brutally repressive and discriminatory laws and the enactment of positive rights. They were radical in linking the critique of the bourgeois family to the gender norms of masculinity and femininity and consciously seeking to integrate or ally themselves with the second wave of feminism, black liberation and the anti-imperialist
It was the radical gay and women’s liberation movements of the early 1970s that helped revolutionary socialists rediscover their own socially radical past. From the early 1900s up to the late 1920s, Marxists recognised that all forms of gender and sexuality based oppression rested on a patriarchal family that heavily restricts women to childrearing and domestic labour. It is capitalism’s defence of this division of labour, which was essential to previous forms of class society as well, that requires the ideological and quite literal policing of binary gender roles and the persecution of those who transgress them.

opposition to imperialist wars.

Today, the fact that 69 percent of Americans, including majorities in all 50 states, support laws protecting LGBT people from discrimination in jobs, public accommodation, and housing, does indeed indicate the ground the movement has gained in public consciousness. But some of the veterans of the movement have taken the opportunity of the 50th anniversary to draw attention to some of the downsides.


He criticises “the movement’s recent assimilationist agenda, marriage rights and permission to serve openly in the Armed Forces” contrasting it with “the far broader agenda that had characterized the gay liberation front (GLF) at its inception in the period immediately following the Stonewall riots in the aftermath of these riots. GLF had called for a fierce full-scale assault on sexual and gender norms, on imperialistic wars and capitalist greed and on the shameful mistreatment of racial and ethnic minorities.”

The GLF was, he says, “overtly anti-religious, anti-nuclear family, anti-capitalist, and antiwar”.

In Britain, a similar point was made on Stonewall’s 40th anniversary by Peter Tatchell in Our Lost Gay Radicalism. He says;

“…since Stonewall and GLF, there has been a massive retreat from that radical vision. Most LGBT people no longer question the values, laws and institutions of society. They are content to settle for equal rights within the status quo.”

And it has meant that the grand, indeed utopian, perspectives of the GLF of 1970-73 have been abandoned for reformist and liberal objectives which centre on the demand for integration into society and its institutions, that were once denounced.

The same could of course be said of many of the radical movement of the 1960s and 1970s, black power, student power, anti-war and imperialism, feminism etc. An initial revolutionary and utopian phase eventually gave way to a process of sub-division and fragmentation ending in very reformist and bourgeois liberal goals.

Like second wave feminism, gay liberation concentrated heavily on fighting the effects of oppression for individuals, “consciousness raising”, “coming out”. Creating sub-cultures and communal ways of living, though necessary and justified, became counterposed to the broad social and class struggles of the period. In Britain, this was temporarily and inspiring overtake with the Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners movement of 1984-5. This achieved a real breakthrough as far as British unions and their members, as well as in the Labour Party, were concerned.

Marxists should look positively, as well as critically, to this early period of the gay and women’s liberation movement of the early 70’s. There was much for genuine revolutionary Marxists to agree with in its location of sex and gender oppression in the bourgeois family, even if many of the revolutionary groups and parties of that era failed to recognise this in time. Indeed, it was these movements that helped Marxists to rediscover their own socially radical past.

What they should have realised was that, in the period from the early 1900s up to the late 1920s, Marxists recognised that all forms of gender and sexuality based oppression rested on a patriarchal family that heavily restricts women to childrearing and domestic labour. It is capitalism’s defence of this division of labour, which was essential to previous forms of class society as well, that requires the ideological and quite literal policing of binary gender roles and the persecution of those who transgress them.

To uproot this system requires the uprooting of capitalist exploitation and then the transcendence of the private family unit and household. The fundamental agent necessary for such a transformation is the working class, male and female, gay and ‘straight’, plus people of all gender “identities”. Of course, those who bear the burden of oppression have a central role in fighting it, but they cannot do this alone or in isolation. They need the social force of the working class, the majority. But, in turn, the working class can only fit itself for this task if it comes forward as the champion of all who suffer these oppressions. The revolutionary vanguard forces of the working class today can learn much from the radical progressive goals and demands which first arose from the Stonewall rebellion.

Further reading
PRIDE AND PREJUDICE IN THE UK

BY DAN JONES

IT’S BEEN HALF A CENTURY since the eruption of the Stonewall riots where working-class queers fought back against police in the streets of New York City. Triggered by decades of oppression and violence at the hands of the state and wider society, these uprisings sparked the international movement for LGBTQ+ rights. Many in Western imperialist countries believe that the battle for equal rights is now won due to queer hypervisibility during the rainbow-tinged corporate logo bombardment that is Pride Month and with the ever-increasing presence of LGBTQ+ people in the public eye. Right-wing, reactionary goblins like Toby Young even claim that being “LGBT is now the height of respectability, while being a white ‘cishet’ male is morally suspect.”

British society doesn’t appear as overtly heterosexist and cissexist as it was several decades ago, but does that mean the struggle for queer liberation is over?

One might assume in a country where same-sex couples can marry and adopt children that they’ve fully assimilated into mainstream society. Surely random acts of street violence against queers must be a thing of the past? Unfortunately, this is entirely wrong. A recent viral news story broke about two queer women who were beaten bloody on a bus by a group of men for refusing to kiss each other on demand. There was also the incident of lesbian actresses in Southampton who were violently attacked on their way to a performance. Extraordinarily, a British trans woman was even granted residency in New Zealand on humanitarian grounds due to the appalling levels of verbal and physical assault she faced living in the UK.

However, in order to truly measure the scope of violent anti-queer discrimination, we have to transcend anecdotal evidence and look at the data. Homophobic hate crimes spiked significantly following the EU referendum along with racist, anti-migrant and Islamophobic attacks. LGBT+ anti-violence charity Galop reported that homophobic attacks in July, August and September 2016 were 147% higher than those same months the previous year. More recent research carried out by the charity Stonewall in 2017 found that attacks on queer people had increased by 80% over the preceding four years. When one in five queer people have faced a gender- or sexual orientation-based hate crime, it’s difficult to argue that these are isolated incidents.

The same old prejudice

Media-driven moral panics are another symptom of inherent anti-queer prejudice in the UK. In the latter decades of the previous century, bigots in the media were arguing against equalising consent laws by repeatedly launching frenzied attacks on the imaginary army of homosexual paedophiles intent on grooming and seducing young boys. Gangs of predatory gay men were apparently prowling the streets, waiting for the opportune moment to pounce on impressionable young boys and if the age of consent for gay/bi male sexual activity was brought down to 16, these predators would see it as a green light to go and “corrupt” more young people into sexual deviants… or so the story went. Lesbians obviously didn’t command as much attention or fury from the British political class as their gay counterparts during this controversy, as patriarchal societies tend to ignore women’s sexuality. There was also never any law explicitly banning lesbian sexual relations either.

The idea that gay men are ravenous, closeted paedophiles is clearly a horrendously outdated, offensive view but a mutated form of this far-fetched bigotry survives to this day except the supposed threat has changed. Reactionaries from across the transphobe spectrum argue against the need for specialist child-focused trans charities like Mermaids to exist, claiming that they are either “transgender ideology” brainwashing operations funded by George Soros or conspiracies by Big Pharma to make money by pushing hormone pills on kids. There’s even the white genocide-esque delusion espoused by some TERF and lesbian separatist groups (such as Get the L Out) that the “trans lobby” are encouraging gender atypical young people to have gender reassignment surgery in order to erase the categories of lesbian and woman altogether. Queer people were not and are not trying to recruit young people and this ‘save the children’ scaremongering falsely pits the rights of young people against the rights of trans people. Even school programmes designed to teach children that there’s nothing wrong or abnormal about being LGBTQ+ are being painted as an assault on childhood.

Discrimination

Physical attacks and witch-hunts aside, some of the more damaging symptoms of British society’s queerphobia is the violence it inflicts on LGBTQ+ people through oppressive state structures or outright lack of governmental action. In the age of austerity where government cuts have disproportionately affected women, it should come as no surprise that queer people have suffered too. Resource-starved mental health, substance misuse, housing and welfare services have contributed to the doubling of homelessness under the Tories – with almost a quarter of those individuals identifying as LGBTQ+. Not only do policies of austerity put queers and straights alike through the trauma of homelessness, but mental health problems are exacerbated immensely and people are put at further risk of targeted violence, sexual exploitation and drug abuse. Homelessness tends to sever an individual’s relationship with wage labour and being trans is another major barrier to finding employment – a survey carried out in 2018 found that one in three UK employers admitted to being less likely to employ a trans person to work for them. The British Government does not accumulate
data on trans unemployment but in Ireland it’s a staggering 50% with a large proportion of those in full-time employment still facing discriminatory treatment and harassment at their workplace. Bisexuals are far less likely to be out of the closet at work than gays and lesbians due to hegemonic stereotypes that characterise us as dishonest, promiscuous, unstable attention-seekers incapable of monogamy but very capable of spreading sexually transmitted diseases. Or at the very least, we don’t exist – making the lives of nonbinary bisexuals twice as difficult by having two apparently non-existent identities!

So-called “conversion therapy” is the phrase used to describe a host of psychologically torturous practices that are supposed to alter the sexual orientation of the “patient”. This is still legal in the UK along with medically unnecessary operations carried out on intersex minors whose biological characteristics don’t neatly fall into the male or female categories. Rights groups like Intersex UK state that these irreversible medical interventions violate the young person’s right to bodily integrity, autonomy and self-determination. In October 2017, the UN called on the British Government to repeal all legislation allowing these practices, but the Tories have not made any changes whatsoever. Medication like PrEP significantly reduces the risk of HIV infection for gay and bisexual men but is not subsidised by the NHS at present either.

Queerphobia and capitalism

Victories were won, however, over the past fifty years and openly queerphobic attitudes were pushed into the closet (to some degree or another) thanks to the struggle started by those pioneering queer liberationists of the previous century. Although, it is regularly lamented that the initial radicalism of LGBTQ+ movements eventually waned and degenerated into rainbow capitalism – the politics of inclusion, market consumption, corporate identity and assimilation. This is despite the ongoing struggle for LGBTQ+ liberation in a capitalist society that can never fully accept or respect diversity of gender identities and sexual orientations.

Queerphobia is rooted in an institution class society has always relied upon – the heterosexual nuclear family. Capitalism needs women to perform domestic and reproductive labour for free because it cannot afford any other means of raising the next generation of workers. So rather than free creches, laundries and meals, society expects women to shoulder this burden. Sexism and gender roles provide an ideological justification. The very existence of LGBTQ+ people challenges the idea that a woman’s natural role is as homemaker. People rejecting the idea that their biological sex determines who they are attracted to and who they themselves are is threatening to a society that relies so heavily on gender roles. There is an alternative. Since the 2008 financial crash, there’s been a renewal of interest in left-wing ideas which makes it of vital importance that socialists and trade unionists seize the chance to struggle alongside LGBTQ+ activists and seize the chance to breathe class consciousness into the queer movement. A working class, socialist LGBTQ+ movement would recognise that there can be no queer liberation without abolishing the social oppression of women within the bourgeois family. Conversely, the end of women’s oppression means the beginning of a new chapter in human history - the truly free and autonomous development of individual sexuality. Therefore the struggle for LGBTQ+ liberation is closely allied with the struggle for women’s liberation and both inseparable from the struggle for socialism.

**MINERWA TAHIR**

50 years after the Stonewall riots, over a million people flooded central London for the biggest ever annual Pride celebration. The actual march, limited to just 30,000 participants by Pride organisers, was overwhelmingly a jamboree of corporate and government pink-washing.

But at the very back of the demonstration was a bloc organised by a coalition of campaigns to highlight the struggles of migrant queers and queers of colour, whose main slogan was the demand to open the borders, ending the UK’s racist and homophobic policies which have seen up to 78 per cent of LGBTQ+ asylum applications rejected.

The contingent was organised by Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants (LGSM), African Rainbow Family, Voices4, The Outside Project and MicroRainbow, in order to remind people that “pride was a protest” and reject the “rainbow capitalism” which has sanitised and commercialised the annual Pride events.

The bloc defined itself as “an act of solidarity with those who Pride in London has ensured it is not accessible for and as a protest against the current state of corporate pride”, and rightly criticised the Pride organisers for “pandering to the large corporations, who not only are the few people that are able to pay extortion rates for representation and advertising, but actually harm members of our community, whilst continuing to exclude the most marginalised members of our community”.

At the protest, the main slogans were “No Borders, No Nations, Stop Deportations”, “No Pride in Deportations”, “No Pride in Borders”, “No Pride in Detentions”, “No Pride in the Home Office” and “No Pride in the Hostile Environment”.

The speeches principally focused on the way that the asylum policies of the British State subject LGBT people of colour to racist scrutiny that would be illegal for British citizens. As one speaker from LGSM put it, “our liberation means nothing if we can’t get it for everyone.”

Another speaker from the African Rainbow Family spoke about the experience of LGBT migrants who are discriminated against in their home countries on account of their sexual orientation and then discriminated against in the UK on account of being an immigrant.

The messages of most of those in the bloc were anti-capitalist and even though this does not automatically translate into being socialist it certainly opens the way for socialists to intervene and bring the struggles of these marginalised sections of society together with the struggle of the working class, women and youth.

This is especially important in an age where self-proclaimed leftist theories such as postmodernism have encouraged activists to form little isolated groups or ‘communities’ that are focused on single-issue politics, anti-racist activists just focusing on how to combat racism and climate activists focusing their energies exclusively on organising around the issue of climate change.

But this fragmentation is not just the fault of these activists. Socialists have all too often neglected these struggles or simply adopted the postmodern theories they have generated. Instead of opportunistic adaptation to fashionable theories, revolutionary Marxists should concentrate on developing a programme and organization that enables socialists from minority groups to lead the struggles of the oppressed alongside and in unity with the wider working class.

The fact that many of the protesters at the migrant solidarity bloc on Saturday were migrants and precarious workers themselves makes it all the more possible for socialists to build a movement together with them. We already have a common struggle against Brexit and the racists like Donald Trump and Boris Johnson.

Together we can wage an ever-broader struggle for open borders, to make Britain a safe country for people of all colours, sexual orientations, religions, etc.

- Open borders to refugees and migrants
- No deportations
- Citizenship rights for all
- Solidarity with LGBT and women’s movements
HINDUTVA: THE NEW FACE OF THE INDIAN CAPITALIST CLASS

BY SHEHZAD ARSHAD

THE HINDUTVA CHAUVINIST Bharatiya Janata Party, BJP, under the leadership of Narendra Modi, has won the elections to India's lower house, Lok Sabha.

In these elections, 900 million people had the right to vote and of these, 67 percent chose to exercise it. This is the largest voter turnout in Indian history. The BJP and its allies in the National Democratic Alliance won 353 seats, 303 of these going to the BJP alone, which puts the party in a position to form the government without forming any coalition. This is only the second time in history since 1971 that a party has been able to form a second consecutive government in Delhi without having to form a coalition. The Congress party won only 52 seats while the alliance it led managed to secure 92 seats in total.

On the other hand, the election commission acted as Modi's right hand, ignoring the hate speech that he engaged in. Meanwhile, a number of opposition parties allege that the elections were rigged.

Cases against members of Lok Sabha

Nearly 50 percent of the recently elected Members of Parliament face numerous criminal cases, including accusations of rape and murder. One parliamentarian from the Congress party faces as many as 204 criminal cases, including murder and robbery. At least 232 of the 543 parliamentarians face criminal cases. Of the 52 recently elected Congress lawmakers, 29 face criminal cases. As many as 116 of the 303 BJP members have criminal cases registered against them. One BJP parliamentarian even faces a terrorism case.

Victory of the capitalist class

The Indian stock market witnessed a surge after reports of Modi's second victory started pouring in. On Thursday, when it was confirmed that Modi was about to become the prime minister of India once again, a historical increase was seen in the stock market. The joy of the capitalist class on Modi's electoral win shows they are convinced that his victory will accelerate the speed at which policies in their favour will be implemented and that further attacks will be launched against labour laws.

India is projected to leave China behind in population numbers by 2024. By then, it will have cities with the largest populations in the world and is expected to be the fifth largest economy. The trade wars and subsequent geopolitics in such times are seen by the capitalist class as an avenue for opportunities for their class interests.

Corporate elections

These elections are by far the most expensive in the history of India. A sum of $7 billion has been spent, which is more than the amount spent on the 2016 elections in the United States ($6.5 billion). A large chunk of the capital invested in this year's Indian elections was black money. As much as 92 percent of the fund given to parties by the corporate sector went to the BJP alone while 91 percent of the BJP's accumulated fund came from the corporate sector. This enabled the BJP to spend millions in advertising on social media. The Congress party, on the other hand, could not spend as much. All of this shows exactly where the Modi establishment gains its support. Instead of Congress, the BJP is now the true representative party of the bourgeoisie.

Modi's neoliberalism

The number of billionaires in India has increased drastically ever since neoliberal policies were introduced in the country in the beginning of the 1990s. Since then, the wealth of these billionaires has continued to multiply. All the policies of the Modi establishment have been aimed at pleasing this class. This has led to an accelerated sharpening of the divide between India's rich and poor; 80 per cent of the population has a daily per capita income of just $3. Modi promised to create 200 million jobs every year but unemployment is currently at its highest in the past three decades. In the past five years, the wealth of Ambani and various other big capitalists has continued to multiply as the government arranged big projects they could profit from.

Meanwhile, anti-people policies such as banknote demonetisation were also taken up to please banks and financial institutions. Every citizen was forced to open a bank account by the abrupt withdrawal of 86 percent of all currency notes. The purpose was to multiply the existing capital in banks. As a result, a number of people lost their lives by standing in queue under the scorching sun. Besides this, a new GST system was introduced, which adversely impacted the small businesses and benefited the big capitalists by maximising their profits.

Attacks on the workers' movement

Neoliberal policies accelerated during Modi's five-year tenure and trade unions faced severe attacks. The legal protection for permanent employment was ended. Even before this, a large number of people were deprived of this protection and they were working on extremely low wages. Besides this, the minimum wage was not increased in line with the rising rate of inflation and the eight-hour day was also abolished. In response to all these attacks launched by the Modi regime against the workers, protests took place on a large scale across the country. At the beginning of this year, the Indian working class staged the world's largest protest with 200 million workers going on strike. Similarly,
towards the end of last year, the peasant organisation Mukti Morcha, which is politically close to the Communist Party, marched in Delhi and received support from a large number of youth, women’s and workers’ organisations.

Enmity with Pakistan
In the current situation, Modi has based his campaign on Hindu nationalism and enmity with Pakistan. By doing so, he has presented a picture of himself as the guardian of India in the face of the threat of the enemy. During the election campaign, a number of BJP leaders, including Modi, the BJP party president Amit Shah and various former ministers, were seen taking credit for the air attacks in Pakistan’s northern Balakot region. Full advantage was taken of the suicide attack on paramilitary forces in Kashmir’s Pulwama region. War hysteria was stoked up by Modi’s post-Pulwama statement that “We will enter their homes and kill them”. Modi gave the Indian public the message that the country’s sovereignty is in safe hands in his party’s government. After the attack in Balakot, Modi’s popularity ratings rose at an unprecedented rate.

Hindutva
Narendra Modi is a hard-core Hindu nationalist leader and he unabashedly promotes the ideology of Hindutva. He also took a dip in the sacred waters of the Ganges at Sangam on the occasion of the Kumbh Mela, which is something that perhaps no prime minister has done before. In the last week, he also meditated in a holy cave. Meanwhile, Pragya Singh Thakur, who won Bhopal on BJP’s ticket, said that Nathuram Godse, the Hindu nationalist who assassinated Gandhi in 1948, was a patriot. Godse has always had an important status in Hindutva ideology and a number of BJP leaders have previously hailed him. Pragya Singh’s statement about Godse received applause from Anant Kumar Hegde, a senior minister in the government, and LOK Sabha member Nalin Kumar Kateel.

Similarly, Modi’s role in the Gujarat riots is no secret. During his regime, attacks against Muslims and other minorities rose and they find themselves unsafe in the rapidly changing times. It is clear that Modi does not shy away from expressing his extremist Hindutva ideology, that is, Hindu chauvinism as opposed to Hinduism as a religion, and that he has made hatred the foundation stone of his politics. Hindutva ideology pins the blame for poverty and unemployment, which are in reality caused by economic crises, exploitation and corruption, on Muslims and Dalits so that, instead of fighting against the capitalist system, the people are divided along religious lines and extremism can rise. This situation has led to the demise of Indian secularism and fascist tendencies are gaining currency. If the economic crisis worsens, the possibility of a fascist regime in India cannot be ruled out. The BJP already has semi-fascist characteristics, which pose a major danger to Indian society.

Media support
Another major reason for Modi’s victory is the fact that almost all the big media houses backed him. Where the BJP faced any kind of difficulties, the government used all manner of undemocratic methods to remove media freedoms. Some of the renowned journalists, who would criticise the regime, were killed. In this way, an atmosphere of fear was created in which, instead of raising questions about the government’s performance, Modi was hailed by the media as the only one who can protect India and make it a superpower.

Dynastic politics
The Congress, under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi, suffered a massive defeat in this year’s elections. While its electoral support has risen as compared to the previous few years, its performance in the election shows that the Indian public has rejected the idea of dynastic politics. Since Independence from the British Raj, the Congress governed for the longest period with a brief exception where some alliances came into power. Yet it was unable to give the masses the good living standard which was promised under Nehruvian socialism. Instead, its rule turned into a large-scale improvement in the increased dominance of just one family. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the foundation for neoliberal policies was laid by the Congress in the 1990s. It is those policies that Modi has today implemented with further force. The Indian people are, therefore, aware of the fact that the Congress cannot ameliorate their living standards. At the same time, the party has lost its status as the traditional representative of the bourgeois class.

Failure of the Left Front
In this scenario, the Left Front, the CPI-led alliance that ruled West Bengal for decades, failed to offer an alternative political and economic programme. Instead, it became the sidekick of the Congress party. Their stance is that Indian secularism is under threat due to the rising popularity of the BJP. However, they ignore the fact that the Congress’ record with secularism has also not been stellar. In fact, it has worsened and, on top of that, it is the Congress that introduced neoliberalism in India.

The Left Front’s stance did not dent the BJP’s support base in any way. On the contrary, the BJP popularity scores kept rising.

The Indian left, which was the third most popular force in the 2005 elections, today stands limited to five seats in total. Of these, at least three seats were won through the alliance made with the Dravida Progressive Conference, DMK, in Tamil Nadu. Bengal, where the communists remained in power for a long time, has now shifted towards the BJP. This is due to the communists’ support for capitalist ventures, attempts to seize peasants’ lands, and corruption. In fact, one of the BJP’s successful candidates is a former state MP of the Left Front.

In the last elections, the Left Front won 29.9 percent of the votes. This year, it has managed to secure only 7.1 percent. On the other hand, the BJP, with only 17 percent last time, secured 40.3 percent this time. The main reason for this is that the communist parties failed to defend their social base against the attacks of the Trinamool Congress party in the past five years. As a result, the BJP was able to present itself as the alternative. Similarly, in Kerala, the communists lost despite the CPIM being in power.

A working class party
The defeat of the radical student leader, Kanhaiya Kumar, and other comparatively radical figures shows that change cannot come about through reformist parties and programmes. The young leaders who stand against the BJP’s neoliberal and fascist tendencies will have to break away from reformism and agitate on revolutionary grounds. They need to organise in the workers’ movement on the basis of a revolutionary programme while, at the same time, proposing united fronts on specific issues with forces such as the Left Front, the trades unions and various social movements to maximise the impact of workers’ struggles. Such a movement must be completely independent of the Congress or any other bourgeois parties.

Revolutionary forces should also take up the defence of the interests of the peasants and the rural poor. In this way, the struggle against the Modi regime can be turned into a struggle against the capitalist system.
500,000 JOIN SWISS WOMEN’S STRIKE

BY SUZANNE KUHN

ON JUNE 14, AROUND HALF a million people took part in the women’s strike. In all major cities, but also in parts of the country that are not well organised politically or in trades unions, women, especially those who work in the care sector or education, were on strike. In many places, strikes and actions began in the morning and spread throughout the day. According to the Swiss Confederation of Trade Unions, some 100,000 people took part in the strike on the morning of 14 June.

At 3:24 pm, one of the central moments of the action, hundreds of thousands of women throughout the country left their jobs or stopped their “private” care work. There were demonstrations in all the main cities but also many smaller ones.

The women’s strike is a historic event, if only because of its size. The Swiss population counts around 8.5 million people, so some 17 percent took part in the action.

For what and by whom?
The movement in Switzerland consciously identified with the International Women’s Strikes, in which millions also participated in 2019. The fact that the Swiss march did not take place on March 8 but on June 14 is explained by the history of the struggle for equality. In 1991, a first women’s strike, also of around half a million, took place, organised and led by the Swiss Confederation of Trade Unions to demand the consistent implementation of the Equal Treatment Act that had been adopted in 1981.

Many of the goals set then for equal treatment, equal income, wages and working conditions, against sexist harassment and sexual violence have not yet been met and once again figured in the manifestos, appeals and demands for the Women’s Strike, 2019. Particularly affected are migrant women who have been repeatedly oppressed and deprived of their rights and who, like sexually oppressed people, are a preferred target of Swiss right-wing populism from the “Swiss People’s Party” (SVP). The day of action was therefore not only marked by solidarity with the new global women’s movement, but also with migrant women, whose unlimited right of residence and full legal and social equality were demanded.

The main reason for the historical success of the women’s strike is that it was mobilised and organised by working class women. The “women’s question” emerged, though not fully consciously, as a class question and as one inseparably linked to the struggle against imperialism and capitalism.

As in 1991, and unlike the last women’s strikes in Germany, the unions, especially in the public service and health sectors, played a key role in the mobilisation.

Self-organisation
Unlike in 1991, however, the strike was less “top-down”. This year, base organisations had been forming for months in numerous companies and offices, and it was these that led and organised the struggle. These were led by women, but also included men or, for example in childcare centres, parents, as supporters.

The important role of company and trade union structures, however, did not mean that the focus was on purely economic issues. The demands for social facilities and financing of care for children and the elderly, for example, which are otherwise passed on to women, gave the movement a wider focus that went beyond purely workplace issues.

A third was the demand for protection from, and a fight against, sexism, violence against women and LGBTI+ people and for sexual self-determination. Finally, anti-racist and internationalist slogans constituted a fourth main point of the goals of the women’s strike. An overview of the movement’s demands, manifestos and arguments can be found on the website www.14juni.ch.

Working women were undoubtedly the main force in the strike, raising anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal and anti-racist slogans on the demonstrations.

"In many places the strike was associated with broader struggles: the fight against racism, right wing populism, international solidarity and the capitalist system in general were common themes. This points to how a new women's movement can play a role in the renewal of the workers' movement."

Like the international mobilisations on March 8 in recent years, the historical women’s strike confirms the emergence of a new working class women’s movement, even if it is as yet still dominated by petty-bourgeois feminist ideologies, forms of identity politics or the reformist apparatuses of the trade union bureaucracy.

Even before the strike, it was clear to the hundreds of thousands who took part on the day, and even more to the many activists who organised it, that this was not the end but only the first highpoint of the movement. In the coming weeks and months, evaluation forums and meetings are planned to discuss and determine the perspectives, tasks and next steps of the movement.

This can lay the foundation not only for a strong women’s movement in Switzerland, but also provide a powerful impulse far beyond the country. Women in other countries can learn a lot from the Swiss activists and comrades, especially with regard to rooting the movement in the workplaces and trade unions.

Connections
In many places the strike was associated with other issues; the fight against racism, right-wing populism, international solidarity as well as the question of the whole system were also raised. This points to the potential not only of the women’s strike, but also to the role that a new women’s movement can play in the renewal of the workers’ movement. Many activists also belong to groups on the radical left or in the left wing of the unions and many are also active in anti-racist struggles or in movements like Fridays for Future.

For them, the question also arises of how and on what programmatic basis a political force, a new revolutionary workers’ party, can be built in Switzerland and internationally. The new movement for women’s liberation can thus also become a powerful impulse for revolutionising the whole workers’ movement, linking the struggle against every form of oppression with that for socialist revolution.
US ESCALATES WAR THREAT AGAIN

ON JUNE 13, TWO TANKERS, the Japanese-owned Kokuka Courageous and the Norwegian-owned Front Altair, were struck by explosions while sailing through the Gulf of Oman, close to the coast of Iran. The incident comes after attacks in May on two Saudi tankers, an Emirati vessel and a Norwegian tanker.

The United States has issued a grainy monochrome video, taken at night from a US helicopter, plus some colour photographs. They appear to show black clad figures from a boat pulling alongside the Japanese ship and removing an object from its side that could be a mine. On this basis, Trump and the Saudi Crown Prince have threatened Iran with retaliation and the US has drafted another 1,000 troops to the Gulf Region.

All sides have hastened to say they do not want war and, indeed, that would have incalculable consequences for the fragile world economy, not to mention relations between the 'great powers'. The two gulfs, the Persian and Omani, are joined by the 21 nautical miles of the Straits of Hormuz, through which 50 percent of the world's proven oil passes. In addition, the countries around the Gulf still contain over 50 percent of the world's proven oil reserves.

In 2010, Iran was the second largest exporter in OPEC but has been subjected to a US embargo on its exports since Trump unilaterally ripped up the internationally agreed Iran Nuclear Deal. At the end of April, the White House announced that the exemptions on trade with Iran “granted” to China, India, Japan, South Korea and Turkey would expire in May, after which they would themselves become the target of US sanctions.

As a result, thousands of Iranian workers in both private and public sectors have gone on strike against delays and non-payment of wages and rampant inflation which devalues their wages. The Iranian clerical regime replied by arresting hundreds of teachers, bus and truck drivers and factory workers. Worker militants have been sentenced to prison terms including for organising peaceful protests. Clearly, the American blockade is having a destabilising effect internally and it is no wonder Iran has threatened to close the Straits if this continues.

To ward off this threat, the US has recently deployed a aircraft carrier battle group, a B-52 bomber strike force, Phineas assault ships, Patriot missile batteries and additional ground troops to the region. There can be no doubt that an attack on Iran is a real possibility. Although US military authorities appear to have warned against such action, over the last year or so, Trump has removed the clutch of generals from his team who liberal journalists fondly imagined would keep him under control.

Who did it?
So, was Iran responsible for the attack? If it was, would that justify US (and likely UK) military action against Iran?

When there is an "attack" that might lead to the outbreak of war, it is wise to remember the Latin legal principle, cui prodest, essentially meaning "who benefits from the crime, did it?"

It is certainly hard to imagine Iran as the front line beneficiary and it should not be forgotten that the US has a history of starting wars on the basis of false claims of attacks on its naval vessels. The Spanish-American War was triggered by the alleged sinking of the USS Maine in Havana harbour while US escalation of the Vietnam War was triggered by the equally false Gulf of Tonkin incident. "We have been attacked" is thus a time-honoured way of winning popular support for a war for plunder and domination.

In this case, however, the US does not have to dirty its own hands. There are other regional powers, close US allies, that have consistently urged the US to punish Iran militarily. Both Saudi Arabia, under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and the Kingdom's Emirati clients, have plenty of reasons.

The Crown Prince, expensively armed by the USA and Britain, is embroiled in a barbaric, albeit unwinnable, "civil war" in Yemen and is presently encouraging a vicious counterrevolution against the democratic uprising of the Sudanese people. He has been relentlessly stoking up the tensions with Iran to encourage the US to deploy more and more naval and air power to the region.

Then there is Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu who has frequently urged, and even threatened, attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities. Last, but not least, non-state actors are perfectly capable of such acts as with the al-Qaeda attack on USS Cole in 2000.

All these are perfectly capable of carrying out false flag attacks.

Another reason for scepticism is that, in the days just before the latest attacks, Iran's President Rouhani and supreme leader Khamenei were meeting with the Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe, in Iran on a mission to ease the country's growing tensions with the USA. Japan has maintained reasonably good relations with the country from which it receives a substantial amount of its oil. Why should Iran seek to sabotage Abe's mission?

Apart from Trump himself, the campaign was instantly taken up by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, followed by the notorious neocon warmonger National Security Adviser John Bolton, both of whom have repeatedly called for regime change in Iran. A few years back, Pompeo called for airstrikes to take out Iran's nuclear facilities.

He now claimed the attacks were part of "40 years of unprovoked aggression against freedom loving nations" and declared that Iran is "fashing out because the regime wants our successful maximum pressure campaign lifted" adding that "no economic sanctions entitle the Islamic Republic to attack innocent civilians, disrupt global oil markets and engage in nuclear blackmail".

In other words, the US can wreck and ruin another country's economy, simply by using its huge control over the world's trade and finance, even coercing unwilling European allies to support it, but the victims must not resort to armed force to combat this. If they do, Washington will rain hellfire down on them.

In fact, "40 years of unprovoked aggression" accurately sums up the policy of the US and its allies against Iran, pursued ever since the humiliation of President Carter by the 1979 revolution against Washington's stooge, the autocratic Shah. The US then encouraged Iraq's Saddam Hussein to attack Iran, starting a war that lasted until 1988 and caused ruin and huge loss of life in both countries. In that year, the US battle cruiser Vincennes, in the Persian Gulf, fired missiles that brought down an Iranian passenger jet, killing its 290 passengers and crew.

An equally cynical invention is Trump's statement that "the Iranians are taking over Iraq". The truth is that, under Republican President George W Bush and his Democrat
successor, the US helped install and support an Iranian-backed, Shia party-dominated government in Iraq in order to crush the uprising by Sunni forces, ex-Saddam army elements and then ISIS. The US could hardly have stayed in Iraq as long as it did without scarcely covert Iranian support.

**Britain**
Enter Britain’s little shield bearer for the American Goliath, Jeremy Hunt. Even before seeing the video, the UK foreign secretary rushed to give full backing to Trump’s and Pompeo’s claims:

“We have no reason not to believe the American assessment and our instinct is to believe it, because they are our closest ally.”

Read this as “because we are totally militarily dependent on the US (and with Brexit would become so economically) we believe whatever they say, full stop.”

For Hunt and his like, anything else would be unpatriotic, if not downright treasonous. Thus, when Jeremy Corbyn dared to criticise his defence secretary’s rhetoric will only increase the threat of war”, Hunt immediately shot back, “... why can he never bring himself to back British interests, British intelligence or British allies?  

Despite all this bluster, however, it is difficult to imagine the House of Commons backing British involvement in an attack on Iran, any more than it backed David Cameron’s attempt to join in the bombing of Syria. Britain’s support is likely to remain verbal, whilst continuing to sell arms to the Saudis.

Meanwhile, the European Union has taken a line very similar to Corbyn’s. Its foreign policy representative, Federica Mogherini, urged countries not to jump to conclusions: “The maximum restraint and wisdom should be applied”, she said. Germany’s Foreign Minister, Heiko Maas, said his country hadn’t yet made up its mind about who was behind the alleged attacks in the Gulf.

He added that US and British intelligence needed to be compared to material from other allies, noting the evidence provided so far “comes from one side in particular”. Plainly the Europeans are deeply unhappy with, and opposed to, Trump’s Iranian policy. Indeed, they have tried to keep the Nuclear Deal alive by finding ways to evade the US oil embargo, which conflicts with their major oil corporations’ interests.

Although the demand for independent evidence (independent of the Trump Administration and the Saudi Crown Prince, that is) is perfectly rational, to concentrate on that risks avoiding the real issue: should a US-Saudi attack on Iran be opposed or not.

In the final analysis, whether Iran was responsible for the most recent attacks is not the crucial issue. The tightening US stranglehold, like its 50 year blockade of Cuba and its recent one aimed at achieving regime change in Venezuela, would entirely justify a victim taking military action against it or its allies. Of course, what is justified is not always what is expedient.

To provoke a military attack from what is still the world’s only military hyper-power would be, to put it mildly, a risk. Even if the Iraqi occupation, like the Vietnam war, led to an economic and military debacle for the USA, the destruction visited on the peoples of those countries means that such a risk should not be courted.

Of course, it is possible that the repressive regime of the Iranian Ayatollahs, whose popularity has been further eroded by the sanctions and their anti-worker repression, might decide that the risk of a “terrible end” would be preferable to an “endless terror”. Conflict with the US might rally the patriotism of their country behind them once again. Iran has few real allies beyond the Syrian dictator Bashir al Assad, who owes his survival to Iran, and the Lebanese Hezbollah and neither they, nor Russia nor China, are likely to go beyond formal condemnation of the US actions.

Nevertheless, any sort of war in the Gulf would lead to an oil crisis and could tip the world economy into recession, the first signs of which are already on the horizon. Last, but not least, it would cement Russia and China’s alliance and convince Beijing that it might be the Straits of Hormuz today but it could be the Straits of Malacca tomorrow. That is a vital interest to Beijing because 80 percent of its energy supplies and a large part of its manufactured export pass through those Straits. There, too, the US is asserting its maritime supremacy.

It becomes ever clearer that “Making America Great Again” means making the other imperialist countries, and the more independently minded regional powers, smaller and weaker. The win-win scenario of the Obama rhetoric has given way to the win-lose Trump twitter storm. For now, this is being pursued by means of US control of economic institutions, the capital and commodity markets and the globalised economy but, if resisted, it can, speedily if need be, resort to brute force.

Even though the warnings by Russia and China to the United States not to intervene militarily against Iran are unlikely to lead to any actions, once again we have an international incident which threatens the vital interests of nuclear-armed imperialist powers. This confirms what the League for the Fifth International has been saying for some time; that we have entered a period of renewed inter-imperialist conflict, which threatens regional wars, interventions and, ultimately, a world war which could destroy humanity.

Today, the first priority is to mobilise the working class movements of the USA and its allies to stop any attack on Iran, to halt all arms supplies to Saudi Arabia, to oppose Trump’s ‘Deal of the Century’, which he is planning to impose on the Palestinians, and to support the beleaguered Sudanese revolution.

The condemnations of Trump’s warmongering by figures like Jeremy Corbyn or Bernie Sanders are all well and good but their focus on “who really did it” contains the dangerous implication that, if it proves to be Iran, then action would be justified. Their constant calls for the UN to intervene are likewise useless. The UN is a thieves’ kitchen for the major imperialist powers, with the others there to pick up a few crumbs and to give the illusion that it is a world parliament.

We must oppose the actions of the US, the UK and their Gulf allies but without sowing the illusion that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”, in this case that either the Iranian regime or its imperialist backers, Russia and China, could be our allies. Whilst resisting US aggression against Iran, whether economic or military, we must support the country’s workers and the secular-minded democratic youth who want to rid their country of its misogynistic, homophobic and dictatorial rulers. In the end, it is only the revolutionary struggle of the workers and youth, like that ongoing in Sudan, and in the Arab world, aided by the workers of the whole world, that can impede and prevent all imperialist wars, economic melt-down, and climate catastrophe, too.
Free Captain Rackete!

Martin Suchanek

The arrest of the captain of the Sea Watch 3 triggered a storm of indignation throughout Europe. On Lampedusa, it was not only the thugs of the racist Interior Minister and Lega leader Salvini who met the 31-year-old Carola Rackete, who took her ship into the port on the night of 28-29 June. Many demonstrators also loudly expressed their solidarity with the courageous woman.

For two weeks, the Italian government had refused to allow the ship to moor and let the fugitives land. The captain finally ended the standoff by entering the port “on her own responsibility”. Italy’s Interior Minister and “strong man”, Salvini, is outraged by this allegedly “criminal” act and the “attack” on a boat belonging to the Italian financial police, which was trapped for a few minutes between the quay wall and Sea Watch. The head of Lega was outraged that Rackete and the crew of the rescue ship had “almost killed people” and thus provided further proof of his own cynicism.

While he exaggerates a comparatively harmless situation in the port, he considers mass murder in the Mediterranean, the acceptance by European governments of Libyan torture chambers and the starvation of people who have made it as far as a boat like the Sea Watch, to be suitable ways to “deter” refugees.

Public outrage and cynicism

The public outrage in many European countries undoubtedly shows that millions of people still do not want to accept the shift to the right and the merciless closure of the EU’s external borders.

The racist, murderous policies of a Salvini and his helpers, Seehofer, Orbán and Kurz, of national conservatism, right-wing populism and neo-fascism rightly arouse disgust. Their aggressive, pseudo-radical, “people-oriented” right-wing populism articulates the mood of a growing part of the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie and also of parts of the working class that fear being crushed under the wheels of global competition. They are trying to combine them into a political force.

Unlike the still dominant parties and organisations of the “Centre”, whether mainstream conservatives, liberals, Greens or even social democrats, they no longer try to justify the sealing of the EU’s external borders and its racist laws in a “humanitarian way”. They not only demand national and “European” isolation, they also implement it gleefully. Thousands of dead in the Mediterranean Sea have become proof of the superiority of “our” “western”, “Christian” or otherwise “higher” culture. The fact that “decent people” accuse them of a breach of human rights, a lack of humanity or even contempt for humanity is seen by the European right only as confirmation of their loyalty to their convictions.

Above all, however, the accusations directed at Salvini by the bourgeois establishment, the European governments and the EU prove to be toothless and hypocritical. The fact that the Italian government is sealing off the ports, pursuing a rigorous policy of isolation, fighting and criminalising refugees and refugee helpers, is part of the “securing of the EU’s external borders”, as decided by the EU Commission, the German and French governments, albeit a part that has been swept under the carpet. It was not Orbán or Salvini that concluded the agreements with Turkey and Sudan, it was the EU under the leadership of German and French “humanists” such as Merkel and Macron.

“The real scandal is ‘normality’. The policy of Fortress Europe must be overturned, and the right of refugees and migrants to full citizenship rights recognised and realised immediately.”

Solidarity and movement

Humanity, courage and determination, however, have been shown in abundance by people like Rackete and her crew. They knew that when they entered the port they would face not only racist agitation but arrest and even imprisonment for up to 10 years. Of course, the helpers of refugees do not only run the risk when they are deployed on the high seas or entering ports. Even in Germany their offices are exposed to racist attacks, so that Sea Watch’s Berlin office has had to be moved several times.

The fight to support the helpers and against their criminalisation must therefore go hand in hand with the fight not only against racist agitation, whether it is from right-wing or “established” bourgeois media, parties, but also physical attacks.

From the left and social democratic parties, from the trade unions, which rightly condemned the arrest of Rackete and demanded her release, we certainly have to demand more than fine words scandalising racism. The real scandal is “normality”. The systematic sealing of the EU’s external borders must stop. The borders must be opened to all refugees! They must no longer be housed in inhumane camps, but their right to stay, their full citizenship rights, especially freedom of movement, education, work, housing and medical care, must be recognised and realised immediately.

This is not a utopia. But it does require a break with neoliberalism, austerity politics and redistribution in favour of the owners of capital and property. Through such a Europe-wide struggle, the division between “domestic” and migrant people imposed by the state, capital and the right wing could be overcome at the same time.

Let us therefore combine solidarity with Captain Rackete and her crew with the construction of a Europe-wide movement against racism, isolation, fortress Europe and the attacks of capital!
HONG KONG: LEARNING THE LESSONS

PETER MAIN

THE TRASHING OF THE Legislative Council, Legco, building in Hong Kong on July 1 certainly drew the world’s attention to the ongoing opposition to the proposed Extradition Law that would allow people detained in Hong Kong to be tried in mainland Chinese courts.

It also drew attention away from the half million strong demonstration demanding much more than just the postponement of the hated law. Taking place on the anniversary of the handover of the territory to Chinese rule from the British, that march forcefully expressed the widespread opposition to the erosion of civil rights and the creeping imposition of Beijing’s rule.

Nobody who watched the TV footage of demonstrators using steel railings as battering rams to eventually break through the security glass of the Legco’s doors can have failed to notice that there were hundreds of riot-equipped police standing by, watching them. Nor will they have missed the pictures of the old colonial flag being draped over the speaker’s lectern, at one point the British Union Jack itself was unfurled in the chamber. Those same pictures were then widely cited by Beijing and its tame, Hong Kong-based, acolytes as evidence that the whole incident was orchestrated by “foreign powers”.

Did the mostly young activists walk into a trap? Probably. Riot police are a disciplined force, they follow orders and their orders at the time clearly were not to stop the protesters from breaking in. That, however, is not the point, what really matters is why hundreds, many hundreds, of young Hong Kongers thought that it made sense to break into the Legco and spray portraits of those they regard as their leaders.

As several protesters explained, to anyone who would listen, they had concluded that Carrie Lam, Hong Kong’s Chief Executive and, for that matter, Beijing, only responded to violent confrontations. This was because, even after the 2 million strong demonstration on June 17, the Hong Kong government had done nothing to respond to the very obvious feelings of the population. However, several days later, after there had been a violent clash between the police and protesters, Lam had announced that the Extradition Law would be withdrawn from the present session of Legco. For the activists, the lesson seemed clear.

The reality is much more likely to be that, even in the face of such massive opposition, it took Beijing and Hong Kong several days to agree the need for a climbdown; nonetheless, it was the millions on the streets, not the hundreds fighting the cops, that forced that decision.

Raising the colonial flag points to a much more serious political miscalculation. “You drove us to this!” expresses not only frustrated desperation but also, more worrying, a serious political miscalculation.

The slogans themselves go a long way to answering the question. “There are no rioters, only police brutality!” summed up the widespread outrage that the mass demonstrations were characterised as riots to justify the way the police broke them up. Most telling of all, however, “You drove us to this!” expresses not only frustrated desperation but also, more worrying, a serious political miscalculation.

Perhaps they will take heart from the British Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt’s, apparently robust defence of Hong Kong’s “autonomy” within China. If so, they are deeply mistaken. His words were aimed at the members of the Conservative party, whose votes he wants in the party’s current leadership election - not a few of whom probably know Hong Kong from having served there in a military or administrative capacity.

The truth is that Britain neither wants, nor is able, to put any serious pressure on the Chinese government. On the contrary, it is London that seeks help and favours from Beijing in the twenty first century, and all the more so if any form of Brexit is achieved.

The “pro-independence” or “nativist”, activists in the Hong Kong Democracy Movement are, however, a minority; the flags were quickly removed by others and they stayed down, implying the majority of the activists, even those in the Legco chamber, understood immediately how such symbols would be used on the mainland. They know that the leadership of the one-party dictatorship fears nothing more than the spread of the Democracy Movement to the hundreds of millions of workers just across the border.

The strategic implications of that need to be thought through. The best, in fact, the only, way that Hong Kong can preserve any of its current relative freedoms is precisely by winning support on the mainland. The uncomfortable truth is that building a movement against the dictatorship where it really matters can only be done clandestinely, by a disciplined and politically united organisation, in other words, a party.

Revolutionaries in Hong Kong have to find ways to link up with the “underground” networks of activists who solidarise with the growing militancy in the heartlands of the Chinese working class, literally, only a few miles away. At the same time, in Hong Kong itself, the Democracy Movement needs the same working class orientation because the strategy of the existing leadership, basically liberals and academics, has already shown its bankruptcy. That is the activism that can ultimately topple Xi Jinping and company, not futile appeals to a declining former colonial master.