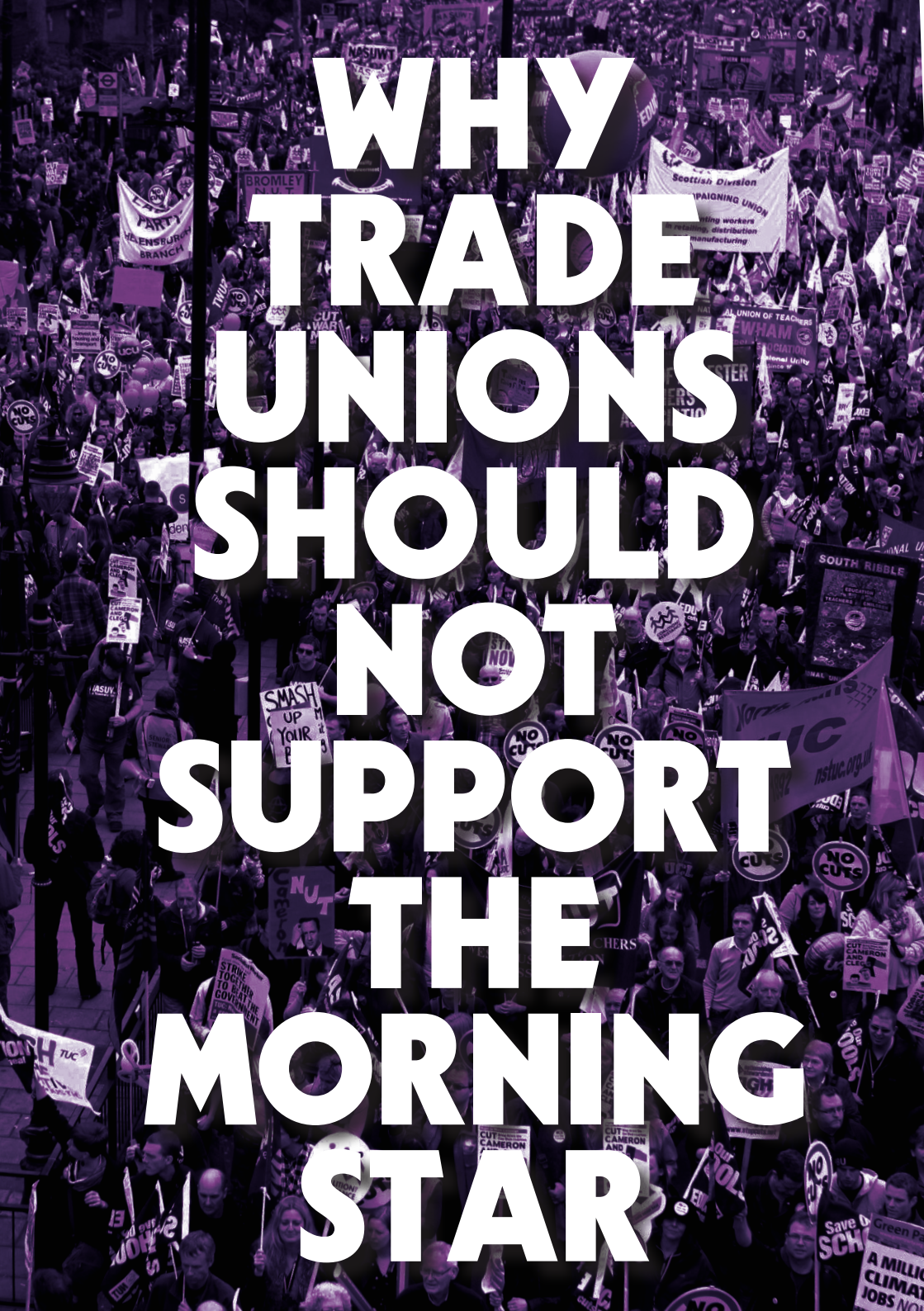




WHY
TRADE
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SHOULD
NOT
SUPPORT
THE
MORNING
STAR

The background image shows a dense crowd of protesters at a demonstration. Visible signs include:
- 'PARTY MEMBERS BRANCH'
- 'BROMLEY NUT'
- 'Scottish Division CAMPAIGNING UNION'
- 'writing workers', 'retailing, distribution', 'manufacturing'
- 'NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS'
- 'WHAM' (Education International Utility)
- 'SOUTH RIBBLE'
- 'NO CUTS'
- 'SMASH UP YOUR P...' (partially visible)
- 'STRIKE TO END GOVERNMENT...' (partially visible)
- 'CUT CAMERON AND...' (partially visible)
- 'Save the School' (partially visible)
- 'A MILLION CLIMATE JOBS NOW' (partially visible)

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Why Trade Unions Should Not Support the Morning Star

By Jim Denham

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Introduction

In August 2022 the executive of the Bakers Food and Allied Workers' Union (BFAWU) decided to take shares in the Morning Star and join the board of the Peoples' Press Printing Society (PPS), the co-op that publishes the paper.

The BFAWU thus became the twelfth national trade union to join the PPS, alongside Aslef, Community, CWU, FBU, GMB, NUM, POA, RMT, TSSA, Unite and Usdaw (the NUM North East Region also has a shareholding and a seat on the board). This gave the people behind the Morning Star particular pleasure because just eleven national unions are affiliated to the Labour Party.

The truth is that the PPS is little more than a facade: the paper is controlled by the Communist Party of Britain (CPB). Its masthead defines it as "incorporating the Daily Worker" and "established 1930", identifying it with the tradition of the Stalinist press all through the high-Stalinist period. Although it does carry articles by Labour Party members, independents and even, occasionally, people from very distant Trotskyist backgrounds, all this is at the discretion of the CPB. Naturally, editor Ben Chacko (like all his predecessors) is a party member.

It is, therefore, impossible to discuss the politics of the Morning Star without also discussing at least some of the politics of the CPB.

From the outset, let us be clear: the CPB is a legitimate part of the Labour movement and it has an absolute right to put forward and argue for its politics. What it does not have the right to do, is to (a) pretend

that its mouthpiece, the Morning Star is somehow an independent, "broad left" publication, (b) to misrepresent the views of those on the left who disagree with it, and (c) to obtain monies under false pretences from the trade union movement.

And despite the oft-repeated claim to be "the only paper that relies solely on its readership and solidarity donations for its income", in reality the paper depends for its very existence upon funding from unions, often channelled to it without any democratic mandate from the members.

The "good" reason why union officialdom backs the Morning Star is that they see it as the only daily paper that reliably backs strikes and anti-cuts campaigns. In fairness, it does, though usually from the standpoint of officialdom rather than rank and file activists. But:

(1) It does not provide the unions with outreach to a working-class public which they could not get with their own materials. The paper is found in union offices, and distributed for free (in union-sponsored editions) at some demonstrations and events like Durham Miners' Gala and Tolpuddle. But the public it reaches is a narrow one, almost entirely people who would already support strikes and anti-cuts campaigns.

If the unions funded *Solidarity*, *The Socialist* and *Socialist Worker*, they would get wider on-the-streets and door-to-door distribution (not that anyone would put that idea forward as a serious proposition!)

(2) Relatively little of the coverage is about strikes and anti-cuts campaigns in Britain. In fact, in return for ineffectual support for their domestic economic disputes, the unions finance coverage on broader political (especially international) issues which runs counter to basic trade-union values:

- China: giving uncritical support to the totalitarian regime and denying all evidence of forced labour and other human rights abuses against the Uyghurs and other Muslims;
- Ukraine: opposing the supply of arms to Ukraine and advocating "peace" on terms that would amount to Ukraine's surrender (and either ignoring or misrepresenting the many union conferences and executives that have passed strong motions in support of Ukraine)
- Brexit: following the CPB "line", advocating not just a "hard" Brexit, but "no-deal" and WTO terms – in direct contradiction to the policies of the vast majority of unions, and to the paper's friend Jeremy Corbyn (when he was Labour leader)!

All in all, we have to conclude that directing union members' money

to the Morning Star is not just an ineffective way of promoting union campaigns and struggles – it's an affront to working class democracy.

China

How does a newspaper claiming to stand for "Peace and Socialism" defend a regime that denies basic democratic rights and has incarcerated an estimated million Muslims in what look very much like concentration camps?

An article by one Carlos Martinez (MS July 14 2020) denounced "increasingly hysterical and absurd" criticisms of China, citing "four main lines of attack being pushed on a daily basis by the US and British ruling classes":

- That the newly introduced National Security Law is an attack on the basic freedoms of the people of Hong Kong and violates China's legal obligations under the Sino-British joint declaration of 1984.
- That the Uyghur population of Xinjiang is being repressed in any number of indescribably brutal ways, including through mass incarceration in "re-education camps" and forced sterilisation.
- That China – as a result of its secrecy, incompetence, vindictiveness, or some combination thereof – didn't give the world sufficient warning of the Covid-19 outbreak and must therefore bear a large part of the responsibility for the havoc being wreaked by the pandemic.
- And that China's technology companies are providing, or seek to provide, secret information to the Chinese state, and therefore their involvement in Western economies should be actively restricted.

Readers might then have expected Martinez to proceed to expose and debunk these "hysterical and absurd" claims... but he didn't, merely stating that "it's the US government leading the charge" and that the Tories agree with them.

In a later piece in the MS of Aug 15-16 2020, Martinez revealed that his sole source of information was the Grayzone website run by conspiracy theorist and Putin apologist Max Blumenthal. An examination of Blumenthal's claims that there is "no evidence" of persecution of Uyghurs, reveals that he has no counter-evidence at all, apart from ad hominem attacks upon Adrian Zenz, the German researcher who has provided much of the recent evidence of persecution and, in particular, of the forced sterilisation of Uyghur women.

Martinez was particularly upset that Labour MPs are "enthusiastically

climbing aboard the new cold war bandwagon”, and that John McDonnell has “recorded a histrionic (and hopelessly one-sided) denunciation of the Chinese state’s alleged mistreatment of the Uyghur Muslims.” Again, no explanation is offered as to how McDonnell’s statement was “one-sided” and what, exactly the “other side” might be: presumably, the Chinese ruling class claim that what appear to be concentration camps are, in fact benign “re-education” facilities.

The overwhelming evidence (accepted by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, amongst many other reputable organisations) is that women in Xinjiang have been involuntarily fitted with intrauterine contraceptives or coerced into receiving sterilisation surgeries, even when they have had fewer than the permitted two children. Chinese government documents show that women in some rural minority communities in the region have received frequent mandatory gynaecological exams and bi-monthly pregnancy tests from local health officials. Having too many children is a major reason people are sent to detention camps, with the parents of three or more families incarcerated unless they can pay huge fines. According to an investigative report from the Associated Press, of the 484 camp detainees listed in Karakax county in Xinjiang in 2020, 149 were there for having too many children – the most common reason for holding them.

The fact that the daily paper that claims to be representative of the most progressive elements of the British labour and trade union movement, denies the overwhelming evidence of concentration camps, demographic genocide and systematic large-scale abuse and persecution of ethnic and religious minorities, is simply a disgrace. The Morning Star doesn’t even attempt to justify its stance or produce a shred of evidence beyond evidence-free propaganda from self-appointed Beijing cheer-leader Martinez and conspiracy theorists like Max Blumenthal.

The Chinese system is often described in the MS as “socialism with Chinese characteristics” but you will not read an alternative analysis: that it is “capitalism with Chinese characteristics”.

The emergence of China as a major economic force has involved the rise of powerful Chinese transnational capitalists fused with a party-state elite based upon the exploitation of hundreds of millions of Chinese workers. China is now one of the most unequal countries in the world. Strikes and independent unions are not legal (the so-

called All-China Federation of Trade Unions is a state-controlled organisation that promotes higher productivity and opposes strikes), but even so workers' struggles frequently erupt in defiance of brutal state repression. It is true that Chinese capitalist development has lifted millions out of extreme poverty and brought about rapid industrialisation and technological progress – just as the North American and Western European countries experienced these achievements during their periods of rapid capitalist development from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. Such economic development may be desirable, but without workers' control and democracy at every level of society and the economy it is not socialism.

Ukraine

In June 2022 the executive council of Unite met and passed a resolution on the war in Ukraine.

The resolution "unreservedly condemns Putin's invasion of Ukraine and stands in full solidarity with the millions of victims of the attack. Unite calls for an immediate cease-fire and a withdrawal of all Russian forces from Ukraine."

It congratulates union members "such as those at the Stanlow refinery – who refuse to unload Russian oil from any ship regardless of the nationality of the vessel that delivers it, and Unite repeats the call on the UK government to close the loophole that is still making these deliveries possible." The resolution calls for a "comprehensive programme of support for UK workers, their families and companies impacted by [sanctions against Russia] including wage protection and company support while alternate supply chains are established."

The resolution went on to demand support for "all refugees from Ukraine and elsewhere", to express solidarity with the Russian peace movement and to note "the numerous reports of links between Vladimir Putin and Far Right parties across Europe, the presence of Russian oligarchs in the UK and huge amounts of Russian money flowing through the city of London, as well as the allegations of Russian financial support for some political parties in the UK."

Perhaps most importantly, "Unite acknowledges the right of Ukraine to defend its citizens and territory within internationally recognised borders."

The resolution was immediately released as a statement and can be read in full on the Unite website.

One publication that might have been expected to give prominent coverage to the statement would be the MS. After all, it receives substantial financial support from Unite and has long given uncritical support to successive leaders of the union.

But the paper never even mentioned the Unite statement. This despite the fact that a few days later the MS carried an editorial headed “The link between the labour and peace movements is crucial” and praised two unions, the FBU and the National Education Union, whose leaderships had put out much less clear-cut statements that could have been interpreted as calling for Ukraine to capitulate.

The only possible conclusion to be drawn from the MS’s failure to even mention the Unite statement is that it was an embarrassment that ran against the de facto “line” of the paper – that Ukraine should be persuaded (actually, forced) to sue for peace on terms favourable to Russia.

In July 2023, Unite’s policy conference passed another pro-Ukraine resolution in the form of a statement: the MS did report this, but crucially omitted the fact that the statement supports “the right of Ukraine to defend its citizens and territory within internationally recognised borders” and the only speaker quoted in the report was a delegate who was clearly hostile to Ukraine and sought to blame only Nato (not Putin) for the war.

The paper has had nothing to say about other unions (PCS, Aslef, NUM, CWU, TSSA, the Bakers’ Union) that have passed resolutions and/or issued statements in support of Ukraine, but when it comes to the GMB, it misrepresents the union’s outspoken support for Ukraine as backing the Tory government and as simply calling for increased arms spending – a deliberate misrepresentation. MS columnist and CPB member Andrew Murray, for instance, used his column (9 August 2023) to attack the GMB for calling for “the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops from all Ukrainian territories since 2014” (Murray presumably favours the permanent annexation of Crimea by Russia) and for calling for “increased military aid to Ukraine” (without mentioning that his and the MS’s position is that no military aid at all should be sent to Ukraine – thus ensuring its defeat). As a matter of fact, a fair criticism of GMB policy could be made: it combines support for Ukraine with a call for increased defence spending by the UK government. In fact, the UK could simultaneously increase arms supplies to Ukraine while cutting defence spending (e.g. non-renewal of Trident). But Murray and the MS

don't make that point: they simply attack the GMB for (in the words of Murray) "shamefully ... campaigning for increased military spending at a time of wholesale attack on public services".

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine (which the MS repeatedly denied would happen) they have carried dozens of articles blaming Nato and the "West" (but usually not Putin), arguing against sending arms to Ukraine so it can defend itself, and (in some cases) using evasive language to advocate a victory for Russia. Just one – and only one – substantial article has put the case for Ukraine's right to obtain weapons to defend itself: a piece by GMB General Secretary Gary Smith in October 2022.

Johnson and Brexit

In June 2023, as a humiliated Boris Johnson resigned as an MP, pathetically claiming "there is a witch hunt underway, to take revenge for Brexit and ultimately to reverse the 2016 referendum result" he received support from what may seem an unlikely quarter: the Morning Star.

Despite a front page headline on 16 June 2023 (quoting the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice) "Liar Johnson Unfit To Hold Office Again", that day's editorial lined up behind Johnson's claims of an "establishment" conspiracy, by both Sunak and Starmer, to get rid of him.

Here's some of what it said:

"Tory high command see Johnson as a maverick who served his purpose in defeating Jeremy Corbyn but is too egotistical and unreliable to tolerate long-term.

"Johnson's claim that his 'political assassination' is about reversing Brexit is true in that respect. Brexit too was an insurgency, a vote against the advice of the Conservative government of 2016 as well as every party in Parliament, mixed in motivation but generally angry and anti-Establishment.

"Sunak is as keen to be rid of that kind of politics as Starmer is."

Despite the growing danger posed by "a new right-wing populist movement", the editorial insisted: "Currently our bigger headache comes from those lining up to denounce [Johnson] – a Tory-Labour consensus on lowering wages, privatising services and restricting our political and civil rights."

But this was far from the first time that the MS has suggested that

Johnson's brand of populism is somehow, sort-of... progressive.

During the Tory leadership contest of 2019, the MS came close to backing Johnson against Jeremy Hunt, as (wait for it)... the candidate "who has ... the right ... to call himself a proletarian" (editorial, 2 July 2019). And if any reader at the time thought that was a joke, the same editorial seemed to praise Johnson's proposed "pledge of a wedge to protect small businesses, farmers, fishermen (and presumably fisherwomen)."

Following Johnson's victory, a MS editorial (23 August 2019) suggested: "Where his coronation both poses a risk and presents an opportunity to the left is in his greater distance from the Establishment 'mainstream' and the already evident breach between him and parts of the permanent state".

When Johnson prorogued parliament, and the paper clearly sympathised: "By adding an extra few days to the habitual parliamentary break over the party conference season, he is hoping to avoid defeat in the Commons by MPs who clearly want to delay Brexit day yet again" (editorial, 2 September 2019).

The paper went on to support Johnson's withdrawal bill, stating (editorial, 21 October 2019): "this government... has, against the expectations and manifest hopes of all those parliamentary renegades who have repeatedly found ways to subvert the popular will, reached agreement with the European Union. This is the actually existing Brexit. There is no going back."

The paper also printed the CPB's statement: "The Communist Party of Britain urges MPs to support the swift passage of the new EU Withdrawal Bill which is due to have its Second Reading vote later today (October 22)."

If anyone thinks all this was simply an aberration resulting from the MS's and CPB's obsessive pro-Brexit stance, then they should note the following, from the editorial of 19 July 2022 commenting on Johnson's "levelling up" slogan and (supposed) "plan" for an "activist state":

"... it was a reflection at Westminster of the widespread desire for change in society. Its passing, like the ferocious Establishment response to Corbyn, suggests the 'Mother of Parliaments' can no longer even hear, let alone heed, the wishes of the people it rules..."

But the paper's most bizarre moment of almost Nadine Dorries-level infatuation with Johnson came in September 2020, when it seemed to believe, in all seriousness, that Johnson might bring in... a planned

economy (!). We are not joking.

The paper (falsely) portrayed Johnson's clashes with the EU as about state aid rules. The editorial of 9 September 2020 claimed Johnson's stance opened up the prospect of: "Massive state aid to support industrial development", adding a chirpy: "What's not to like?"

By now totally carried away, the same editorial went on to suggest Johnson might usher in something like ... the old USSR's planned economy (!): "It evokes the rousing verse in Red Fly the Banners Oh, sung at many a union conference: 'Five for the years of the Five Year Plan, and four for the four years taken'."

With that level of self-delusion, it's hardly surprising that the people who run the MS (ie the CPB) felt some sympathy for the poor, persecuted, anti-establishment "maverick" Johnson.

All over the place on the Labour Party

The MS has a longstanding relationship with Jeremy Corbyn, who wrote a weekly column for the paper between 2005 and 2015.

In its 10-11 June 2023 edition, the MS devoted eight pages to a "celebration" of Corbyn's 40 years as an MP. There was a friendly interview with editor Ben Chacko, Lindsey German (of the Stop the War Coalition) praised Corbyn for "calling for peace in Ukraine" (i.e. for Ukraine to capitulate), Islington Friends of Jeremy Corbyn hailed him as "a man of the people" and one Chelley Ryan described how she and her friends "grew to respect, trust and even love him as a leader."

If all this sounds like uncritical adulation, that's because it was. Just one piece attempted to analyse why "Corbynism" eventually failed. That was by Andrew Murray, who formally "resigned" from the CPB in order to become a key member of Corbyn's team between 2018 and 2019.

In his article, Murray repeats the argument he's made in his book (*Is Socialism Possible in Britain?: Reflections on the Corbyn Years*) and innumerable articles, blaming "Remain" supporters for Corbyn's failure: "the movement and its leadership impaled itself on the Brexit issue and ended up abandoning the successful 2017 policy of accepting the referendum decision to leave the EU in favour of giving the Remain side another crack at winning a majority before the first decision had even been implemented."

Murray has to admit that: "Undoubtedly that is what many Corbyn supporters wanted" but he's made it clear in previous MS articles and his book that he thinks Corbyn should have overruled the wishes of the

membership: in his 10-11 June MS piece he argued that “most Corbyn supporters were surely much more invested in getting their leader into Downing Street to implement his agenda than in staying in the EU.”

Even if Murray is right about that, he ignores a fundamental point: in survey after survey, the reason given by voters for not backing Labour in 2019 was not Brexit alone... but Jeremy Corbyn himself. This may well have been, in part, the result of a vicious media campaign, but all the polling evidence is that voters went off Corbyn in a big way between 2017 and 2019. That can't be put down just to right-wing media (as right-wing in 2017 as in 2019).

It is worth noting that while Corbyn was Labour leader the MS managed to maintain its image as a pretty much uncritical pro-Corbyn publication whilst opposing Corbyn's one and only clear policy on Europe – to avoid a no-deal Brexit at all costs.

Perhaps the paper got away with it because its advocacy of no-deal on WTO terms was tucked away in editorials, often posed as a just a suggestion and then spelt out in statements from the CPB published in the MS but not officially the paper's “line”.

But in 2019 they went further and broke with the Labour party's most sacred shibboleth: to vote Labour in every election. The proposition first appeared, almost as an aside, at the bottom of an editorial (24 April 2019):

“There is already a strong case for Britain's voters boycotting the EU elections. Participating in them lends a spurious legitimacy to an exercise that would not be happening but for the parliamentary sabotage of Brexit.”

This was followed up, two days later, with a rambling editorial (“Should we boycott the Euro Elections?” – Note that disingenuous question mark), which worked its way round to suggesting “There is a strong case – rooted in a respect for the people's democratic instincts – for an active boycott of this unnecessary, irrelevant vanity parade.”

Meanwhile, the paper's political masters, the CPB, had put out a statement (25 April): “Communists call for ‘People's Boycott’ of EU polls”.

“‘The European elections scheduled for May 23 are illegitimate in Britain’, John Foster told the Communist Party's political committee, according to a report in the Morning Star.

"He insisted that the 'people's vote' in the biggest poll in British history in June 2016 was to leave the European Union and that this should be reinforced by a 'People's Boycott' of the EU elections if they go ahead..."

"In particular, he warned against Labour presenting itself as an anti-Brexit party, as some of its leaders and European candidates are intent upon doing."

There is good reason to believe that the CPB and its MS mouthpiece have put out their call to boycott the Euro elections because if they didn't, quite a few of their supporters and even members, would support Farage's Brexit Party.

If you think that's far-fetched, consider this: in the run-up to the 2016 EU referendum, the (then) prominent CPBer and Foreign Editor of the MS, Brian Denny (also coordinator of the No2EU campaign) was working closely with pro-Leave Tories, Ukip and Farage's close associate Arron Banks. Denny eventually left the CPB and ceased working for the MS, though to what extent this was a genuine parting of the ways, as opposed to a mutually agreed arrangement to avoid embarrassment, is debatable (and the MS continued to carry occasional articles and reviews by Denny).

The call for a "People's Boycott" was, therefore, likely to have been a rouse to avoid the embarrassment of people in and around the MS and CPB coming out for the Brexit Party. But whatever the motives behind the "People's Boycott" it was a bizarre and shameful little manoeuvre.

After all, what they were actually saying was "Don't vote Labour" – even under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership!

Since the 2019 general election, the MS and CPB have been all over the place on the Labour Party.

In the run-up to the local elections of May 2020, the paper failed to call even for a critical Labour vote (except, unaccountably, in Wales), carried an uncritical interview with the Northern Independence Party's Thelma Walker, and noticeably failed to address what it described in an editorial (13 April 2020) as the "widespread belief that a non-Labour vote only helps the Tories in England and Wales, and the SNP in Scotland".

A report in the MS of 26 July 2023 announced "Starmer's benefits stance prompts bid for new party". It was a news item, but it read more like a plug for the new initiative: "Figures from the labour movement

have called for the creation of a new party 'Transform', warning that Sir Keir Starmer is 'planning to follow the same brutal policies as the Tories.'" The report informed us that the initiative includes the Breakthrough Party, Left Unity and the People's Alliance of the Left, "with more groups reportedly set to join in the coming weeks."

Wikipedia informs us that the Breakthrough Party was founded in 2021 "in response to the 2020 Labour Party leadership election" and in January 2022 announced a "memorandum of understanding" with the Northern Independence Party, the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and Left Unity "under the name People's Alliance of The Left". Somewhere along the line, TUSC jumped ship, but essentially it seems that the three component parts of Transform are, in fact, the same people under different names.

According to the MS report, "other supporters include former Labour women's committee and Momentum NCG member Solma Ahmed and writer and former Green Party speaker Derek Wall".

This appeared to be a welcome for Transform, though an article by Andrew Murray in the same edition of the paper was much less enthusiastic about new parties of the left and suggested waiting for a Labour government and let Starmer do the heavy lifting:

"It may be that the experience of Starmer in power, a continuation of neoliberal authoritarianism, allied to growing working-class militancy and still-fresh memories of insurgent Corbynism will generate the required momentum (no pun) to make a new effort at socialist organisation sustainable."

This incoherence about the Labour Party is accompanied by increasingly shrill (though often justified) denunciations of Starmer, hero-worship of Jeremy Corbyn, support for the conspiratorial and border-line antisemitic film *Oh Jeremy Corbyn: The Big Lie*, and enthusiasm for North of Tyne Labour mayor, Jamie Driscoll (debarred by the Labour leadership) running as an independent for the position of North East mayor. It has to be said, though, that the repeated denunciations of Starmer's "authoritarianism" ring a little hollow, coming as they do from a paper that uncritically eulogises Xi Jinping's leadership of the Communist Party of China. The equally uncritical adulation of Welsh Labour First Minister Mark Drakeford remains a mystery.

Jamie Driscoll, a Momentum member, has been shabbily treated.

He was allegedly prevented from standing because he hosted an event about his films for the well-known director, Ken Loach. Loach, a supporter of former leader Jeremy Corbyn, is an expelled Party member. Driscoll declared he would run for North East mayor if he was able to quickly raise £25,000. He got that amount within a few hours and has raised more than £120,000 in eight days. More than 5,000 people have made mostly small donations of five and ten pounds to support his campaign.

Driscoll may win. It is also possible he will split the left vote and let the Tories win the mayor post. In his resignation letter Driscoll slated Starmer: "You've U-turned on so many promises: £28 billion to tackle the climate emergency, free school meals, ending university tuition fees, reversing NHS privatisation... to say Britain is broken, and then claim things are now so difficult we will abandon any plan to fix it [is wrong]."

In this Driscoll is absolutely right. However, Driscoll went on to say he had no alternative but to resign and stand against Labour, and the MS clearly agrees. In an editorial (18 July 2023) they argue:

"Demonstrating that Labour's non-offer [to trade unionists] has an electoral cost would help raise this pressure. Affiliated unions cannot endorse a non-Labour candidate without expulsion: but they may indicate their anger by declining to campaign for London Labour's appointee in north-east England, as no doubt will many Labour members in the region.

"Driscoll's candidacy has the potential to upset Starmer's calculations on a national basis. Many trade unionists will surely see that as an opportunity".

But there is another left wing point of view on this: that Driscoll should have stayed in the Labour Party and organised the left to fight Starmer. That is a difficult, unglamorous job. It promises no immediate headlines. The forces around Driscoll will dissipate. Driscoll seems likely to run a limited, parochial campaign. And the Labour Party will trawl through lists of those who are backing him, expelling those who do so. Driscoll's backers will also, therefore, exclude themselves from important future battles against the Labour right. It makes no sense to step out of that fight on the (probable) eve of a Labour government when there is currently little prospect of organising a substantial, rational, socialist organisation to the left of Labour.

Although the MS has given its backing to calls for democracy

within the Labour Party (most recently the “Let the members decide” statement), it does not put forward a coherent set of left wing demands for Labour activists to organise around. Nor does it encourage left wingers to stay in the party to fight for socialist demands.

We need to organise to force Labour to abolish the anti-union laws, tax the rich to rebuild the NHS, and nationalise the privatised public utilities. And that can’t be done by expelled people isolated in a single region.

You will not read that argument in the pages of the Morning Star.

Debating platform?

In a rare example of a union using its democratic structure to support the Morning Star, delegates at Aslef’s 2023 annual conference voted to donate £1,000 to the paper.

Simon Weller, assistant general secretary told the conference:

“It’s always been said that the people in power should read two newspapers: the Financial Times, to know what business thinks, and the Morning Star, to know what the workers think.

“Although we have issues with some of its coverage, especially of trans issues and the war in Ukraine, we believe we should help a newspaper which, every day, reports accurately and honestly, about the labour movement and our battles in this country.”

MS editor Ben Chacko, welcoming the donation, said the newspaper is:

“Proud to stand with Aslef members on the picket lines and in the fight for our railway’s future.

“As a debating platform for the movement we know not everyone agrees with everything we publish, but we thank Aslef members for their support and the union knows there is always room in the Morning Star for its own perspectives too.”

Simon Weller’s argument in favour of supporting the Morning Star is probably typical of the attitude taken by many honest left wingers about differences they have with the paper’s coverage. As well as Ukraine, Weller mentioned “trans issues”. But, as on Ukraine, there too the paper is far from an even-handed debating platform.

The paper, in line with CPB policy, almost only ever carries the “gender critical” side of the debate. In 2020 the Morning Star had to apologise

for printing a transphobic cartoon (Tuesday 18 February 2020). The cartoon depicting a slathering, slithering crocodile ogling terrified and defenceless newts and invading their “safe space” with the excuse that the crocodile is “transitioning to a newt”. The cartoon depicted trans people as a predatory threat.

The cartoon was removed from the online version of the paper with an apology claiming it “had not been authorised for publication and its appearance in the print edition represents a failure to follow... procedures for approving submissions.”

Official TUC briefings say:

“Trans people face massive discrimination in the workplace. In March 2016 a study... showed that 60% of trans workers have experienced some form of discrimination in the workplace and 53% have felt the need to hide their trans status from their colleagues”.

They stress unions’ responsibility for “changing workplaces to make sure they are supportive of both current and potential workers who identify as trans.”

“Workplace representatives can play an important role in supporting trans members before, during and after any transitioning, but you can also try to ensure that all workplaces offer a supportive environment for trans people. The individual themselves is in the best position to decide how they want to identify, the pronouns (she/her/him/[he/they/them]) they wish to be used and what they want to be called. By adopting positive policies to support trans people in the workplace you will make it a better place for all those who have issues with their gender identity, regardless of whether they identify as trans or not.

“Dress codes should be flexible and gender neutral where possible to accommodate trans employees. If there is any form of uniform, the employer should provide clothing appropriate to the gender identity of the employee at that time.

“Toilet and changing facilities are also something that has to be considered. Trans people should be able to choose the toilet or changing rooms appropriate to the gender they identify with. There should always be the option of changing and toilet facilities as unisex...”

Yet the 2020 retreat has not been followed by the Morning Star giving space to those views, let alone actively supporting the rights of trans people against the torrent of vitriol, discrimination, and government attacks that they currently experience.

Conclusion

But, says Weller, the Morning Star does at least cover trade union matters and support “our battles in this country.” As we have argued, the readership the Morning Star reaches is almost entirely people who would already support strikes, anti-cuts campaigns and the like. And the political cost of backing the MS is immense: in effect, presenting a vision of “socialism” in which the totalitarian police state of China is held up as desirable, military coups (as in Niger) are hailed as legitimate means of achieving progressive change, and nationalist illusions of “socialism in one country” are promoted as the way forward for Britain.

And it’s not even true that the paper allows genuine debate on issues where there are differences on the left: to take just two examples, its coverage of the EU before and after the 2016 referendum has been almost exclusively pro-Leave (ie pro-Brexit) and on Ukraine it has carried innumerable articles arguing against Ukraine’s right to defend itself and denouncing Zelenskyy and his government, while criticism of Putin and Russia has been sparse, tokenistic and muted. Since the invasion, it has carried just one article (by Gary Smith, referred to earlier) and an open letter from Smith, John McDonnell and other labour movement figures, backing Ukraine and supporting the provision of arms – and even that was denounced as “a recipe for all-out war” in the same edition in which it was published.

A genuine independent “broad left” newspaper, supporting workers in struggle and promoting left-wing campaigns, would be highly desirable, but unfortunately at the moment there is no prospect of such a publication coming into existence.

Trade unions should not “sub-contract” the job of publicising their struggles and campaigns out to the Morning Star but use their money to improve their own print and electronic publications, many of which – to be brutally honest – are presently not very good or very widely distributed.

As we have already stated, the CPB has an absolute right to publicise and promote their policies and positions – but not to use the pretence of a supposedly “broad left” publication, largely funded by trade unions, to do so.



The Morning Star is not an effective way for unions to gain support for their disputes and campaign. And the political cost of backing the Morning Star is immense: in effect, presenting a vision of "socialism" in which the totalitarian police state of China is held up as desirable, military coups (as in Niger) are hailed as legitimate means of achieving progressive change, and nationalist illusions of "socialism in one country" are promoted as the way forward for Britain. And it's not even true that the paper allows genuine debate on issues where there are differences on the left.

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