

## For militant democracy now!

**LIKE MANY LEFT INTELLECTUALS** Tariq Ali, the author and activist, has long promoted a spirit of distrust and opposition to the verities of democracy as it is performed in the West. He quite rightly identifies the character of *bourgeois democracy* in its commitments to the rule of law and the defence of private property, in a society in which substantial wealth is concentrated amongst the employing class: - the capitalists. In this opinion Tariq Ali, and many of the left, are in lockstep with the Bolshevik tyrant Vladimir Lenin, who once described Parliament as “merely” the “cloak of bourgeois dictatorship”.



**The function of bourgeois democracy is to secure the consent of the masses to their own exploitation and oppression**

Lenin, with the help of Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin, overthrew the revolutionary Constituent Assembly that gathered in Petrograd because the Bolsheviks has failed to win a majority. In January 1918 heavily armed soldiers were called to the Tauride Palace and the elected members of the assembly were simply shepherded out of the hall, never to meet again. Many of the Assembly's members were imprisoned and/or murdered in subsequent months and years by the Cheka, the political police founded the previous month by Lenin's novel *proletarian democracy*.

This peculiar situation came about in order to inaugurate the Bolshevik rule of the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat' – of the workers and landless peasants. Their dictatorship was 'objectively' democratic because it always represented the 'real interests' of the mass of working people; it was dictatorial in order to prevent the old monied classes from ever again taking control of the economy, the government and the state.

Strange as it may seem many people on the left continue to this day to flirt with ideas of this sort. They quite rightly argue that *bourgeois democracy* and the inclusion of the mass of the working people into full citizenship only came about gradually, concession by concession, in the years between 1867 and 1928, in order to help maintain social peace for the capitalist class.

This state of affairs has presented us with a problem. Because people have gained a great deal from *bourgeois democracy* millions of working people have fought tooth and nail to defend it from fascists and other enemies. Many on the left have a proud tradition of defending *bourgeois democracy* at home and abroad, and have been prepared to risk death and injury in the process. The rule of law and basic democratic rights in Britain despite promotion amongst the monied classes, have been at the core of the left and the labour movement's attempt to advance the interests of the great majority of our people.

This presents us with a tradition embrewed in the midst of contradictions. We know, as Tariq Ali does, that democracy in Britain is largely a compromised creation of perfidious forces committed, despite appearances to the contrary, to the forthright defence of the right of employers to make profits, and for private commercial interests to prosper against all comers. We know also that the democratic state defends the broad interests of the general public in ensuring that we can most of the time in most places in the country enjoy life free from the arbitrary actions

of the rich, and the lawless violence of criminals and gangsters.

*Bourgeois democracy*, because of its origins and the nature of its development in the incorporation of the mass of the people as citizens, has developed a mixed character and a radically contradictory form in which the oppressed and exploited are duty bound, *in their own interests*, to defend it until something better comes along. That something better might well be the democratic control of the workplace and the economy by working people organised for that purpose – it might be something literally unimaginable today – and made possible by, as yet, unknown circumstances.

However, until that “revolutionary day dawns” we are duty bound to defend *bourgeois democracy* because it is only this form of government and state which, has the potential to serve the interests and freedom of the overwhelming majority of our people.

The Islamist who recently assassinated the Tory MP, David Amess, no doubt believes that the state should be guided and governed by those skilled in knowing what Allah wants. The fact that Amess was a firm believer in God, submissive to the Pope in Rome, a staunch opponent of abortion, homosexuality, and equal marriage, did not save him from the knife of the Islamist convinced that it is his duty to kill apostates and all those who fail to submit to the verities of the *Quran* and the *Hadith*.

Many on the left appear to ‘understand’, if not support, Ali Harbi Ali’s, reasons for stabbing the sixty-nine-year-old MP to death. After all, it must be said that David Amess was a Roman Catholic reactionary. This is perhaps the most troubling aspect of what I have been calling the “ersatz left” for some years. Their apparent inability to understand the difference between their campaigning commitments and their social and cultural prejudices, on the one hand, and matters of fundamental principle on the other, unerringly delivers them, bound hand-and-foot, to the enemies of freedom.

I first noticed this phenomena 32 years ago, when to my astonishment many prominent figures on the so-called left found reasons not to defend or support the novelist Salman Rushdie. Rushdie's action in publishing his novel *The Satanic Verses*, resulted in Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini calling on all Muslims to kill the author – it was open season on Salman. Many thought, “Well, perhaps Rushdie had been insensitive” or “provocative”; other weasel words, were employed to justify their failure to defend the freedom of artists, freedom of thought and speech, and incidentally, freedom of religion.

And, so it has gone on, from the murder of filmmakers to cartoonists and journalists – it is *de rigor* in many ersatz leftist circles to find reasons for refusing to fight for freedom.

Surrender to the fear of freedom seems, too often, to be the response of many people on the left when confronted by Islamism and the Islamists' desire to dictate the terms of debate and discussion in society whether on sex education, writing novels, lampooning religious figures or traducing sacred dogma.

This authoritarian mood has now emerged forcefully in discussion of gender and sexuality – many involved in discussion of transsexuality appear to be using a diluted version of the Islamist playbook, by denouncing all critics as transphobic enemies, who should be sacked, expelled, and silenced. Sections of the Labour Party and of some trade unions have now been captured by the authoritarian mood. They simply wish to silence those with whom they disagree.

The murderous logic of Islamism is also echoed in the thought of dictators everywhere who are united only in demanding complete submission to their truths and obedience to their rule. Whether the tyrant is in Beijing, Havana, or Minsk, or in the elective dictatorships of Russia, Turkey, or Iran, it's the same story: Obey or else!

In the face of this fear of freedom, in the face of this hatred of democracy, the left must rally to the militant defence of *bourgeois democracy*. Of course, we'd like

democracy in hands of working people in the workplace, in the broader community, in economic planning, and much else, but while fighting to realise a fuller and perhaps more meaningful form of democracy it is essential that we give considerable thought to how to defend bourgeois democratic norms.

Let's be clear it is absolutely unacceptable to stab to death people that we disagree with, regardless of their odious political opinions, or cultural commitments. It is absolutely unacceptable to campaign for the dismissal or removal of lecturers because we disagree with them or think that their opinions and ideas might upset some of their students under cover of the prohibition of hate speech. It is not that hate speech does not exist, of course it does, but its definition is highly dependent upon one's political and philosophical outlook. As a result, it must be dealt with by persistent and rigorous argument. Consequently, it is absolutely unacceptable to seek to ban novels, cartoons, or articles, or to murder their authors.

"Militant democracy", like all political labels is a contested term. However, fighting for militant democracy today (rather than in any earlier articulation) means being prepared, as a matter of principle, to stand with all those who regardless of party believe that freedom of thought, speech, religion, action, and organisation, should be sacrosanct – short only of the explicit advocacy of offensive violence.

It is imperative that we defend the freedoms won in bourgeois, or wealthy commercial societies. We must be bold, even brazen online, in meetings, at work, at demonstrations, and in the press. On every available opportunity the ersatz left and their hatred of free thought and discussion must be robustly challenged.

It is in this spirit that we should unequivocally denounce the murder of David Amess, and always, as a matter of principle, rally to the defence *bourgeois democracy*.