Police announce “investigation closed” into desecration of Marx’s grave

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Less than a fortnight after fascists vandalised the grave of Karl Marx, New Scotland Yard has revealed that police investigations into both recent attacks are now closed.

New Scotland Yard told the *World Socialist Web Site* yesterday, “The investigation, including to establish if there were any CCTV opportunities, were [sic] completed by officers from the [Metropolitan Police] Central North Command Unit. … At this stage the investigation has been closed.”

The closure of the police investigations amounts to state protection for the fascist culprits of the worst attacks on Marx’s grave in more than four decades. In the first assault, reported to police on February 4, the grave’s marble plaque was repeatedly smashed with a hammer, damaging it beyond repair. A second attack on the night of February 15 saw the entire monument defaced by anti-communist slogans daubed in bright-red paint.

Marx’s grave at Highgate Cemetery is a Grade I listed historical monument, meaning it is regarded as a building or structure “of exceptional interest.” In England, it is the Secretary of State who grants protected status to historically important buildings. The majority—some 92 percent—are Grade II listed buildings, including Battersea Power Station, BT Tower and Abbey Road Studios. Examples of Grade I listed buildings include The Palace of Westminster, Tower Bridge, York Minster and The Cenotaph. If any of these had been defaced—let alone damaged irreparably as Marx’s grave has been—the vandals would have swiftly been apprehended, with CCTV footage and other evidence carefully analysed to secure convictions.

Had any one of the several memorials to Britain’s wartime prime minister Winston Churchill been attacked—his grave at St. Martin’s Church in Oxfordshire, or the memorial statue at Parliament Square—the media outcry would be deafening, with the BBC and tabloid muckrakers demanding that police find and apprehend the culprits. As with every aspect of Marx’s life, the state response to the attack on his grave is profoundly political. There can be little doubt that the decision to close police investigations was approved by the relevant minister—in this case, Home Secretary Sajid Javid.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted in a statement published on February 19, “The attack on Marx’s grave is…a significant warning of the growing danger to the working class across Europe and internationally from far-right forces that have been deliberately cultivated by the bourgeoisie and given succour by the mass media.” The trashing of Marx’s grave has coincided with fascist attacks on the graves of socialist leaders in Spain and on Holocaust memorials and Jewish cemeteries in France, Poland, Lithuania and Greece. In Manchester, a Jewish cemetery was targeted on February 8, with fascist hoodlums smashing gravestones, windows and wash basins.

The corporate-controlled media hasn’t drawn any connection between the attack on Marx’s grave and these assaults on Jewish cemeteries. Such comparisons are off-limits because they expose the state campaign against “left-wing anti-Semitism.” Not a single British journalist or politician has been prepared to tell the truth: that the attack on Marx’s grave shows the real source of anti-Semitism is the far-right, promoted and protected by the state.

The silence of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and his shadow chancellor, John McDonnell, over the attacks at Highgate Cemetery is politically criminal. The police would have thought twice about closing their investigations if either of these two gentlemen had raised their voices. Disgracefully, it was left to the Conservative parliamentary under-secretary of state for the arts, tourism and heritage, Michael Ellis, to make a public statement on Twitter: “This morning I visited @HighgateCemetery to see the shocking impact of vandalism on the memorial to

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Karl Marx. Whatever one's political views, acts like this on our Listed monuments are an outrage."

The Marx Grave Trust issued a statement in the Stalinist *Morning Star*, headlined, "Marx Grave Trust Wishes Public to Respect Marx's Tomb as a Place of Commemoration and Family Grave." It did not mention the word "fascist," nor that the police investigation had been closed.

The silence of the political establishment stands in stark contrast to the sentiments of workers and young people from around the world who visited Highgate Cemetery last weekend. Ian Dungavell, chief executive at Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "People have been really horrified. Obviously, there's strongest support from the socialist community as you would expect, but ordinary visitors…are horrified that anyone would do that to a monument."

Dungavell said that Highgate Cemetery had received e-mails and messages of support from individuals and organisations from many countries, and these had been passed on to the Marx Grave Trust: "We had a special free-entry day for people who live in the immediate neighbourhood on Sunday, and so many people said it's terrible what they have done and it will be great to have everything fixed up. They were also heartened by the show of support. There were flowers, and banners and expressions of what Marx has meant to them."

Restoration work had already begun, explained Dungavell, "Historic England have commissioned a special conservator to write a report on options for cleaning and repairing the monument to make sure that this is done properly and that no damage is inadvertently caused during the cleaning and restoration process."

While removing the red paint was a technical issue, damage to the marble tablet bearing the names of Marx and his wife Jenny Westphalen posed more complex problems, and these would require judgement: "Some people say 'take it out and put a facsimile in' and other people say that it's important that the monument should bear the scars of the attacks on it over the years—that we shouldn't forget, and if you erase it, then you forget the attacks that the monument has suffered."

Members of the Socialist Equality Party campaigned near Highgate Cemetery on Saturday, visiting Marx's grave and speaking with the many workers and young people from around the world who visited to show their solidarity and support for Marx and his ideas. Ivan, from Croatia, said, "I am a student of philosophy and economics at the London School of Economics and I always wanted to see this place and today I got the chance. … His work is relevant because, especially nowadays, Europe and the world is facing a rise of right-wing populism, which in my opinion is very dangerous and can have a very dangerous impact on our society."

Agustin Sanchez Cotta explained, "I am from the South of Spain, Andalucía, and this is the second time I've honoured the grave of Marx. I am a follower of his doctrine and ideology, of his criticism of capitalism that's found in *Capital* and other of his texts. I think they are meaningful still. There are a lot of 'post-Marxist' movements that believe capitalism has changed, but I think the system is the same. There is still an opposition between the owners of the means of production and workers. Even if you have poor owners and very rich workers, it is still a fundamental relation. The moment you have a job contract, you are different from the person who has the means of production and the contract, which should say something like 'you should do an equal part,' but it will never be. Because he can get another worker and carry on with his production, but you've only got your labour. I think that analysis still holds. The dynamic of capitalism has changed but the principles are the same.

"I think the far-right is trying to deal a blow to the left. It is trying in all ways: politically, economically, ideologically. The far-right is trying to mobilise their support base. And this is an international issue."

The Socialist Equality Party calls on workers to demand the reopening of the police investigation into the desecration of Marx's grave. A full accounting must be given of what measures have been taken, including what CCTV footage has been viewed. Most importantly, we urge all those workers and young people concerned at the attack on Marx's grave to attend the event being held on Sunday, March 17, at Foyles bookshop in London to launch the English language edition of *Why Are They Back? Historical falsification, political conspiracy and the return of fascism*. The event will be addressed by Socialist Equality Party (Germany) deputy-leader Christoph Vandreier and *World Socialist Web Site* international editorial board chairperson David North.

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