

weekly **worker**



While in the US Donald Trump is the lead Republican candidate, here we have a scandal over Philip Schofield

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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TURKEY: SMALL CHOICE BETWEEN ROTTEN APPLES



LETTERS



Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed

IDpol

GG (Letters, May 18) takes exception to my representation of the Combahee River Collective when I quoted their famous saying that "The most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end someone else's oppression."

The Combahee River Collective was a group of black feminist lesbians who had parted company with the Boston chapter of the National Black Feminist Organization. The name originated with Barbara Smith, who named them after an action on the Combahee river that was organised by Harriet Tubman in June 1863, freeing more than 750 slaves. It is the only military campaign I know that was planned and led by a woman.

The statement from which this quote is taken was the expression of a group of black feminists trying to come to terms both with their own oppression and then the racism they had found in white feminist circles, plus the sexism in black nationalist groups. Barbara Smith explained that by 'identity politics', "we meant simply this: we have a right as black women in the 1970s to formulate our own political agendas".

It is true that many people are radicalised by their own experiences of oppression, but to then go on to counterpose that to ending someone else's oppression is precisely the problem with identity politics. This may not have been obvious to a black feminist group that took its inspiration from anti-imperialist struggles abroad and anti-racist struggles at home. However, in the hands of the Zionist feminists, who, in *Spare Rib* in the early 1980s, countered support for the Palestinians with their own 'oppression', it was starkly obvious.

Likewise the 'anti-Semitism' campaign that was used to attack the left in the Labour Party. What was this if not an example of identity politics, whereby Jews (or some Jews) had the right to define anti-Semitism in such a way as to negate the oppression of the Palestinians? That is precisely the problem with 'IDpol'. The rich and reactionary also have an identity - something the fascists also took up with their appeals to white working class identity, as did Generation ID.

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor admitted this, when she said that "Any concept, once it is released into the world, can take on new meanings when confronted with new problems. Identity politics has become so untethered from its original usage that it has lost much of its original explanatory power."

I would argue that, although the intentions were fine, identity politics were flawed from the beginning. How do you differentiate between different forms of identity if all identities are equally valid? Without class being the central means of understanding oppression you are lost in a sea of subjectivity - complete conceptual chaos.

Not only did the Combahee River statement help give birth to identity politics: it also helped seed the birth of intersectionality, whereby different identities were held to make up the totality of someone's experience. The problem with this is that class became just one more identity.

GG says: "The genius of the women's movement of the 60s and 70s in the US, despite its pitfalls, was its distinctive concepts: ie, 'The personal is political'." I'm not sure that "genius" is the right word. The

problem is that the personal isn't always political and indeed usually runs counter to the political.

We make choices in our personal life that not only have no general political applicability, but which, in many respects, run counter to our wider political beliefs. We favour our own children within the confines of the nuclear family, yet it is difficult to reconcile this with a more generalised solidarity. A woman choosing an abortion goes to a private clinic to obtain it, yet we are opposed to private healthcare (likewise someone paying for a life-saving operation).

So, when GG says that "personal identity struggles within a socialist movement can only strengthen that movement", this is simply not true. Many of the things we do in the struggle to live and survive run counter to the solidarity that is needed for the overthrow of capitalism.

The fight to survive all too often results in divisions among the poor and oppressed. Many homeless people that we encounter on Palestine solidarity stalls in the town centre blame not the rich and powerful or the market economy for their plight, but refugees and migrants.

In many ways, 'The personal is political' was one of the worst by-products of second-wave feminism. It prioritised personal selfishness over collective solidarity.

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

First casualty

I've just finished reading (at last!) *The first casualty: the war correspondent as hero and myth-maker from the Crimea to Kosovo* by Philip Knightly. The casualty is, of course, truth; and Knightly looks at the history of how difficult it is to get that out. Unlike in 1975, when the book was written, we now have mobile phones and the internet, of course, but there are still plenty of surviving problems.

One problem for war correspondents is the military - they want their 'truth' (and only their 'truth') to get out. They have many advantages, including access to the battlefields, protection (from both sides), supplies of food, sleeping provision, access to both senior officers and more lowly warriors and, until recently, access to communications.

The military have their interests, which usually coincide with those of establishment politicians, and they resort almost always to straight censorship. But this is not only the military and politicians; correspondents have also to deal with their editorial people and, quite often, with their readers, who in many - perhaps most - cases want 'patriotism'.

What are the military and politicians trying to hide? Quite a lot: retreats and other setbacks, incompetence, cowardice and - very strikingly - atrocities! The latter are there in every war, on all sides. They include rape, torture, murder and massacre. Knightly covers all of this and, in each war and in great detail, explains how some correspondents rose to the occasion, but most fell before it.

While I was reading this recently, not surprisingly the war in Ukraine came to mind. The mainstream media has a lot of coverage of the war, of course. We see pictures of bombed buildings and towns, destroyed tanks, world leaders hugging Zelensky - well, there is a war on.

No atrocities committed by Ukrainian forces? If there are any, then correspondents would face these same obstacles, including (especially?) from their own editorial team, and probably readers too - such is the unremitting, pro-Ukraine, anti-Russia bombardment.

But "the main enemy is at home" - as is often reiterated in the *Weekly Worker* - and to get a taste of that you need to look at some of the left online sources. One of the first and most obvious was the banning of 11 opposition parties in Ukraine. Further, there have been many anti-union laws passed - opening the way to longer hours and many fewer rights.

'The main enemy is at home' gives us the question of just why and for whom Ukrainians are fighting and dying. The same applies obviously to Russian victims as well. It is a proxy war on behalf of the US and offers nothing for the future of Ukrainians. It's obviously no surprise, however, that they want to drive the Russians out.

Jim Nelson
email

Central issues

Anton Johanssen tosses in everything but the kitchen sink in his 2,000-plus-word letter slamming me for my coverage of the Jordan Neely/Daniel Penny case (May 25). Vigilantism, the National Rifle Association, a rightwing feminist named Rebecca Latimer Felton, the martyred civil-rights workers Michael Schwerner, James Chaney and Andrew Goodman - all make an appearance. But the result of this informational overload is to confuse an incident that is difficult enough to begin with. So let's clear away the dross and concentrate on the problem at hand.

A host of issues are involved: self-defence, due process, race, deteriorating conditions on the New York City subways and, above all, class. I was very careful in my article to avoid drawing firm conclusions concerning Penny's guilt or innocence: "It will be up to a jury to determine if Penny went too far," I wrote ('Blame the system', May 11). But I added that "so far the evidence is on his side" - a statement that still holds true. Based on what we know so far, Penny's intention was not to kill Neely, but to hold him until help arrived. (Neely was alive and moving about when Penny let him go after several minutes, even though the police were not yet on hand.) Two passengers, one of them black, helped him subdue Neely, an indication that the act was not racially motivated and that he was not alone in perceiving Neely as a threat. We know from passenger accounts that Neely appeared to be highly agitated when he entered the subway train, yelling that he was hungry and thirsty, and screaming, "I don't mind going to jail and getting life in prison. I'm ready to die" - words that at least some took as a threat.

We know how other passengers reacted. One recalled how Neely took off his jacket, "bundled it up and just threw it on the floor, very violently" and said that "people who were sitting around him stood up and moved away". Another said in an interview: "... the other people who were there, who had already grasped what was going on, were like, 'This guy [Penny] is protecting us' ... there was consensus that this was the right thing to do."

Finally, we know something about Neely himself: ie, that a social worker wrote a few weeks earlier that he "could be a harm to others or himself if left untreated" and that he had been charged in relation to at least four violent incidents - including one in November 2021, in which he punched a 67-year-old woman in the face, as she was exiting a subway station on Manhattan's Lower East Side, breaking her nose and an orbital bone.

So where does that leave us? Simply with an abundance of evidence that Neely was dangerous, that Penny's intervention was appropriate in the

view of at least some bystanders, that his intent was not to kill, but to restrain, and that there is no indication of racial animus. Of course, prosecutors may know something that the rest of us don't. But based on the available evidence so far, it appears that fault does not lie with Penny or the other two riders who held Neely down, but with the city agencies responsible for such horrendous conditions in the first place. By all appearances, all three were ordinary people thrust into a dangerous situation, who felt compelled to act.

In response, Anton Johanssen lets loose with a tirade to the effect that Penny must be a racist because he's white and Neely is black and that he must be an imperialist because he served in the Marines. Both are ridiculous. As any true anti-racist knows, false accusations benefit the real racists among us by making a mockery of the very idea of an anti-racist movement. A false accusation based solely on the racial identity of the accused is worse, since it's racist in itself. An integrated workers' movement is the only force capable of combating racism, yet the upside-down racism of pseudo-leftists like Johanssen helps undermine it before it can get off the ground.

Slandering an ex-serviceman as an imperialist is similarly despicable. Marxists distinguish officers and the ranks in the same way that we distinguish between bosses and the working class. This is why the Bolsheviks helped organise workers', soldiers' and peasants' soviets: because they saw soldiers as workers in uniform and hence as class allies. This doesn't mean that Penny is necessarily progressive in terms of his personal views. But saddling him with the crimes of the ruling class before the facts are in is as unMarxist as you can get.

Finally, Johanssen makes an utter hash of the issue of vigilantism and self-defence - both of which he opposes or at least views as highly suspect. But Marxists view both through a class lens. We support a worker's right of self-defence - but not that of a capitalist, since defending his class interests means slashing wages and throwing people out of work. As for vigilantism, we certainly don't approve of the Ku Klux Klan racist lynch mobs or Latin American death squads. But we support a workers' militia, anti-fascist defence units, and roving picket squads - all of which are tagged as 'vigilantism' from time to time, because they lack the official sanction of the bourgeois state.

Needless to say, Marxists do not rely on bourgeois legality to tell what's justified and what's not.

Daniel Lazare
New York

UK modernity?

Dan Lazare writes that "Delaware is a rotten borough straight out of the 18th century. Where Britain set about eliminating such relics beginning in 1832, America's supposedly more modern system has allowed them to fester and grow" ('14th amendment threat', May 25)

But, of course, the US Senate is not the equivalent of the British House of Commons, but of the House of Lords. This is composed of 778 members: 25 senior Church of England bishops; 92 hereditary peers, elected in 1999 by and from among the roughly 750 hereditary peers who were entitled to sit in the Lords before the reform of 1999, in proportion to the 1999 party affiliations of the hereditary peers: two Labour, three Liberal Democrat, 28 'crossbench' (independent), 42 Conservative, 15 willing to serve as officers of the House; and the remaining 661 life peers appointed by

the monarch on the recommendation of the government of the day, or (a cause of recent scandals) that of the retiring prime minister.

This hardly makes the UK look like a model of modernity relative to the US ...

Mike Macnair
Oxford

More wokism?

I considered not bothering responding to Steve Cousins' letter (May 25) attacking my response to Michael Roberts on inflation (Letters, May 18), because, to be honest, it was such an ill-educated rant that it doesn't deserve a response. But let me say *why* it doesn't.

Firstly, Cousins says that instead of analysing current data, events and history, I instead refer to "a 19th century economist" - I presume by that he means Marx, who, he claims, I distort completely. The first claim is palpably false, because on my blog I have analysed the current data, events and history at length, on numerous occasions. In my letter, I pointed out that I had predicted, on the basis of that, that US inflation would be, between June 2021 and June 2022, 9.6% - not the 3% predicted by Roberts. Secondly, to simply examine the current data, etc without a theoretical framework, such as that provided by Marx, is to work without a compass - something that Cousins seems to do all the time. Thirdly, Cousins as has been his wont on previous occasions, does not say in what way I am supposed to have distorted Marx "completely", or provide any examples. If he would care to do so, we might be able to rationally discuss that claim.

Moreover, my letter was not a dissertation on inflation - anyone who wants to see my view on that can read my numerous blog posts on the question. Rather it was a response specifically to the points made by Michael Roberts in his *Weekly Worker* article ('Rates up, economy down', May 11).

Cousins says that Marx did not have a completed theory of inflation for all time, but, if he understood Marx's explanation of inflation as a monetary phenomenon arising from an excess of liquidity, he would know that is not true. Cousins confuses Marx's explanation of that inflation with his analysis of value, and of rising costs of production, for which an examination of the boycott of Russian energy and food supplies, the increase in global trade friction, etc would be relevant - and which, again, I have examined in detail on my blog. I won't be distracted by considering his apologism for the Beijing Stalinists and their stewardship of the Chinese capitalist state.

Cousins' claim that the asset price inflation of the last 40 years is all down to "financialisation" is also left as just an assertion. It ignores Marx's and Engels' explanation of asset prices derived from capitalisation; it fails to ask why the financialisation occurred at that time, and what drove, therefore, people to take the £100 from their bank account to put into overpriced bonds and shares, or houses; it fails to ask where this £100 of revenue in bank accounts was coming from each year, if potential capital, let alone actual existing capital, was being used for that purpose, rather than real capital accumulation, or even consumption; it ignores the fact that from 1987 onwards, central banks, led by the US Federal Reserve, pumped additional liquidity into circulation, whenever financial markets sneezed, and even directly channelled that liquidity, via quantitative easing, etc, into the purchase of financial assets, so as to inflate their prices!

But no doubt Cousins can simply claim that pointing out his irrationalism is just another example of wokism!

Arthur Bough
email

Democracy

The renaming of Allende Avenue in Harlow at the behest of local Conservatives dishonours the memory of the thousands of people forced into exile, the thousands of people tortured, and the thousands of people murdered by the military dictatorship that replaced Salvador Allende's government in Chile in 1973.

If the aim was simply to honour Volodymyr Zelensky and the people of Ukraine, then Harlow Conservatives could have chosen to rename Second Avenue, Third Avenue or Fourth Avenue. However, they wanted an excuse to remove the name, 'Salvador Allende' - a democratically elected president overthrown in a military coup.

Chile was once known as the 'England of South America' on account of its tradition of democracy. Salvador Allende was elected as its first socialist president in 1970. But the Chilean armed forces, with the assistance, encouragement, and support of the USA, overthrew his government and installed a junta that ruled for 17 years.

Harlow Conservatives are practising a form of denialism. Augusto Pinochet, the tyrannical military dictator of Chile, was a friend of Margaret Thatcher and they seem intent on erasing his crimes from the historical record.

Pinochet's regime "disappeared" thousands of people and, in attempting to 'disappear' the memory of a democratic politician overthrown in a military coup, Harlow Conservatives have taken the side of dictatorship against democracy.

John Wake
Harlow

Workers' list

John Smithee suggests that for Marxists, the best outcome for the next election would be a hung parliament and a minority Labour government dependent on the Liberal Democrats, leading to the introduction of proportional representation (Letters, May 25).

The fact that this scenario would benefit the left by allowing a new workers' party to mount a viable challenge to Labour under a new electoral system is grounds for being sceptical of it as a possibility. Most of Labour's membership and affiliated trade unions might be in favour of PR, but Starmer is dead against it. As for the Liberal Democrats making electoral reform a deal-breaker, they did not push for PR as a precondition for entering a coalition with the Conservatives, when the opportunity arose in 2010 - accepting instead a referendum on 'the Alternative Vote', in which the Tories and many Labour MPs united to defend the current system.

Marxists today cannot follow in the footsteps of the Eurocommunists, who liquidated independent electoral intervention by the Communist Party into unsuccessful tactical voting campaigns and ultimate inactivity - from the 'road to socialism' to the road to nowhere. Of course, at every election now there are tactical voting websites, which allow users to work out how best to "Stop the Tories" - one such effort in the local elections in England claimed hundreds of thousands of visitors. Who knows, it may have had an impact on the results.

The argument for a "workers' list" of election candidates is not that it would substantially alter the outcome in terms of seats, but that it could give coherence to the left as a voter bloc and connect industrial battles over

pay cuts to the politics of the next parliament. The workers' list could say what the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs will not - that Labour's leadership now stands 'for the few, not the many'. And by only standing against rightwing Labour candidates in seats where 'vote-splitting' could not be seen to either 'let the Tories in' or stop them losing, it could campaign on a principled basis.

Ansell Eade
Lincolnshire

Zionist defeat

Anti-Semitism and the holocaust are the weapons of choice for the Friends of Israel in their determination to preserve their favourite racist colony. They will do and say anything to silence criticism of Israel and prevent the exploration of alternatives to the occupation state they have created in Palestine. But they and their political ideology can be beaten.

I have faced their wrath several times over the past five years. The first was when I promoted a petition entitled 'Israel is a racist endeavour', calling upon Labour Party members to sign and show our disgust at the imposition of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance 'working definition of anti-Semitism' upon our party. It is clear that the Zionists want to stifle any free and open discussion of the entity they have created and now sustain; people must not even dare to think about criticising it.

The IHRA definition was cooked up in 2009. Even the lead drafter, Kenneth Stern, has since warned that it has been weaponised in an attempt to silence critics of Zionism. Nevertheless, from 2013 British Zionists have worked to have it adopted by our trade unions, political parties, schools and universities. Not to do so, they claim, is to make all Jews vulnerable to verbal and physical abuse. They have been phenomenally successful in this. Public criticism of Israel's apartheid state is likely to see you expelled from your union, political party or university. The media knows that this is nonsensical - anti-Semitism is a crime, and rightly so, but criticism of the political ideology upon which Israel is built is surely legitimate freedom of thought and speech - but is scared of exposing it. Any major publication taking the risk will face threats of boycotts, public condemnation and calls for defunding.

Anyone sticking his or her head above the parapet is a target. When I launched my petition in September 2018, I was immediately in the firing line. I was incensed that my freedom of speech was being taken away from me. My petition attracted 2,700 signatures but led to my getting expelled from my union. In the process, I uttered the second most forbidden IHRA phrase to my union bosses: "Israel exaggerates the holocaust for political ends." I was always clear that I was using the word "exaggerates" to mean "overemphasises", but this nuance was lost by a media looking for scandal. As far as the Zionists were concerned, I had said that the holocaust was exaggerated. But I didn't. I am now described by Zionists as a notorious anti-Semite and holocaust denier.

The Friends of Israel and UK Lawyers for Israel (UKLFI) decided to go on the offensive again this year, when they learnt of the 'Muslim and Jew: Beyond Israel' tour I organised, which set out to visit 15 British cities in April and May, calling for the peaceful dissolution of the occupation state. The main speakers were Palestinian author and broadcaster Dr Azzam Tamimi and rabbi Dovid Weiss of Neturei Karta USA - Jews Against Zionism. They had worked together in the past and agree that Islam and Judaism are faiths that have never historically been at odds with each other. They are proud of the fact that for 1,500 years Muslims had lived amicably alongside Jews and had frequently given them shelter in

the face of persecution by Christians. Both agree that Israel has no right to exist in its Zionist form. Both feel that Zionists have abused religion to serve colonial ends. By claiming that Jews are at risk of annihilation by Muslims if Israel is attacked, for example, the state of Israel get \$4 billion of military aid from the US every year, which is used to suppress opposition and seize more Palestinian land.

UKLFI thought that it would scupper the tour by keeping rabbi Weiss out of Britain. In March, it called upon the home secretary to exclude rabbi Weiss from the country, claiming that "his entry into the UK would not be conducive to the public good"; that he was coming to create division; and that he would "stir up religious and racial hatred against British Jews and serve to promote extremism and encourage terrorism". In response, I organised a campaign that led to 200 people writing to the home secretary declaring that the rabbi would reduce anti-Semitism as a very obviously practising Jew who holds a sympathetic view of the Palestinians. The letters explained that rabbi Weiss was a peaceful, devoutly religious man who knew only too well the crime of anti-Semitism, given the awful murder of his grandparents in Auschwitz. We pointed out that there were many Jewish people who share his religious views, and that his visit would bring Jews and Muslims together. He duly entered the UK from New York on the day that our tour began with no problems whatsoever.

Zionist groups also set about trying to sabotage the tour by telling our venues to cancel the bookings. I have no doubt that UK Lawyers for Israel (and probably the Israeli embassy) were operating in tandem with Scottish Friends of Israel, as both made exactly the same arguments against the tour. Politicians in whose constituencies events were due to take place were copied into the Zionists' threats. Presumably it was hoped that public funding would be cut, or planning applications would be turned down. At least one of the venues pulled out fearing the latter.

The Friends of Israel are scared of rabbi Weiss, "Although he claims to speak for religious Jews, he is regarded by the overwhelming majority of Jews, religious or not, as a renegade who gives encouragement to their worst enemies." This exposed the anomaly of non-religious Jews claiming that the god they don't believe in (or don't believe in enough to practise Judaism) gave them the land in Palestine.

The assumption is, of course, that the overwhelming majority of religious Jews support Israel, when that is clearly not the case. As rabbi Weiss pointed out in his talks, amongst the religious Jewish communities in London or New York, and even in Jerusalem, Israeli flags and symbols are noticeable by their absence.

UK Lawyers for Israel, meanwhile, wrote to venues declaring that our events were possibly "illegal". This had some success. Some councillors were drawn into the fray, and venues cancelled in Coventry, Edinburgh, Manchester and London. Nevertheless, the events went ahead in all four cities. Alternative venues were found, and in Coventry we simply held the event in a local park. The Zionists thus failed in their objective of getting our tour cancelled. In this sense alone, we beat their pernicious ideology.

That Israel lies behind all this while barely hiding behind the facade of a two-state solution is a contradiction that our tour was intent on exposing. We declared that a single state - where Jews, Muslims, Christians and people of no faith live and elect the government - is the only way forward. And that is the one thing that the Zionist state of Israel fears the most.

Peter Gregson
email

ACTION

Solidarity with St Mungo's strikers

Rallies in support of striking Unite members at St Mungo's homelessness charity, demanding a 10% pay rise. Organised by Unite the Union Housing Workers Branch: www.housingworkers.org.uk/readevents.html?event_id=256.
Friday June 2, 12 noon: Westminster Town Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London SW1.
Monday June 5, 12 noon: City Hall, Kamal Chunchie Way, London E16.

Jews like me

Friday June 2, 6.30pm: Film screening followed by discussion. P21 Gallery, Charlton Street, London NW1. In *Jews like me* Sabby Sagall details his journey from an ultra-Zionist childhood to becoming a life-long supporter of Palestine. He is joined in the discussion by Richard Kuper, Naomi Wimbourne-Idrissi and David Rosenberg. Organised by Camden Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org/events.

Fighting back against the racist offensive

Saturday June 3, 10.30am: Conference, CWU offices, 47 Summer Lane, Birmingham B19. Opposing the new far right; standing with refugees and migrants against government scapegoating. Organised by TUC Midlands and Stand Up To Racism: www.facebook.com/StandUTR.

NSSN fringe meeting at GMB congress

Monday June 5, 5pm: The Old Ship Hotel, 32-38 Kings Road, Brighton BN1. Speakers include Rob Williams (chair, NSSN) and Gary Palmer (GMB). Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/ShopStewardsNetwork.

What it means to be human

Tuesday June 6, 6.30pm: Series of talks on social and biological anthropology. This talk is online only, via Zoom: 'Courtyard and coincidence in prehistoric temples in Malta and Gozo'. Speaker: John Cox. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/728674899013115.

50th anniversary of Critique

Saturday June 10, 10am to 5pm: Online and in-person conference, Thai Theatre, New Academic Building, 54 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2. Celebrate 50 years of *Critique journal of socialist theory*. Sessions include Hillel Ticktin on 'Back in the USSR' and Mick Cox on 'Russia, China and the war in Ukraine'. Entrance free. Organised by *Critique*: www.facebook.com/critiquesocialistjournal.

How we fight, how we win

Saturday June 10, 10.30am to 5pm: Rank-and-file organising conference, Rich Mix, 35-47 Bethnal Green Road, London E1. With the biggest strike wave for 30 years, workers are rediscovering the power of collective action. Workers from across the strikes and the unions meet to discuss how to coordinate, link the struggles and escalate the fights. Registration £5. Organised by Counterfire: www.facebook.com/events/703891511738707.

Oppose Nazis in Leeds

Saturday June 10, 12.30pm: Counter-protest against the neo-Nazi 'Yorkshire Patriots', Victoria Gardens, The Headrow, Leeds LS1. Organised by Leeds Stand Up To Racism: www.facebook.com/events/3455053531400025.

Stop the war in Ukraine: peace talks now

Thursday June 15, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, 6 The Friars, Canterbury CT1. The proxy war between Nato and Russia is causing misery for the people of Ukraine and plummeting living standards across Europe. Speakers: Prof Richard Sakwa, Kate Hudson (CND) and Chris Nineham (Stop the War). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/cities/Canterbury.

Jarrow rebel town festival

Saturday June 17, 10.45am: Parade, speeches and musicians. Assemble pedestrian tunnel, Tyne Street, Jarrow NE32. Led by Felling Silver Band. Speakers include Kate Osborne MP, Alan Mardghum (Durham Miners' Association) and Alex Gordon (RMT). Organised by The Seven Lads of Jarrow: www.facebook.com/events/983544752661029.

National Shop Stewards Network

Saturday June 24, 11am to 4.30pm: Conference, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Bringing together active rank-and-file trade unionists from across the movement. All union members are welcome to attend and to participate in the discussion. Registration £6. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/events/1595519607615141.

Marxism 2023

Thursday June 29 to Sunday July 2: SWP annual school, SOAS University of London, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Over 100 sessions, including debates, workshops, panels, live music and a culture tent. Tickets: day £22.38 (£11.55), full event £44.04 (£27.80). Organised by Socialist Workers Party: www.facebook.com/marxismfest.

Peace talks now - end the war in Ukraine

Wednesday July 5, 7pm: Public meeting, Hamaara Centre, rear of 158 Castleton Road, Preston PR1. Oppose nuclear threats in Europe and the Pacific - increase wages, not weapons. Organised by Stop the War - Preston and South Ribble: www.facebook.com/events/786834226285520.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

TURKEY



The country is deeply divided

Small choice between rotten apples

Though Erdoğan deserved to lose, the opposition did not deserve to win. Esen Uslu makes a call for the left to unite on a principled basis

The second-round run-off for Turkey's presidential election took place on May 28, and the incumbent, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, won by a very small margin - 52% to 48% for his opponent, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. In the 2018 elections, Erdoğan won in the first round with 53% of the vote in a six-candidate race. Despite his cohorts' attempts to describe the result as an emphatic win, his popularity has clearly declined.

He may have failed to win an outright first-round majority, but without a particular last-minute failure of the opposition candidate he might have not won the run-off. Sinan Oğan, the far-right candidate, had won about 5% of the vote in the first round, and the crucial problem for both second-round contestants was how to claw back some of those nationalist votes.

Erdoğan got Oğan's endorsement before the run-off, but it was not certain how much of his support he could carry with him. Meanwhile, Kılıçdaroğlu opted to seek the support of a minor partner in the opposition alliance, but the price demanded was that Kılıçdaroğlu would not support basic Kurdish demands. Kılıçdaroğlu signed such an undertaking to much fanfare.

Despite that cocking-a-snook, a large section of the Kurdish population continued to support Kılıçdaroğlu - as was clear from the votes in the Kurdish provinces. However, the level of participation was far lower than in the first round, compared to other parts of the country and that made a huge difference - the effect was most pronounced in the principal cities.

Kurdish groups were not very clear about the reason for their support to Kılıçdaroğlu. They did not unequivocally state that they were supporting him, because primarily they were voting *against* Erdoğan. Instead, there were mild-mannered

and 'politically correct' support messages. The basic mistake was that they believed that there was a chance of toppling Erdoğan, if the entire opposition pulled in the same direction, and the campaigning language was modified accordingly.

The massive earthquake damage and loss of life (and the pitiful response from the state emergency services), plus a brutal decline in living standards due to massive price hikes - all those factors gave this electoral tactic some credibility. However, the two-week campaign for the run-off clearly showed that the opposition was neither united nor pulling in the same direction.

Kılıçdaroğlu and the Nation Coalition that supported him opted to imitate and outdo Erdoğan in nationalism, racism and xenophobia. Kılıçdaroğlu's final rostrum-thumping speeches were about his promise to send Syrian refugees 'back to where they belong' - and, of course, to defeat terrorism. Previously undecided voters flocked back to the original instead of supporting its tattered copy.

The outcome of the run-off displayed how polarised the voters were. Half of the voters were sticking with Erdoğan, while the other half wished to see him off. However, there was no clarity on what policies the opposition would pursue to cope with the difficulties ahead, while Erdoğan's ability to borrow and spend big seemed sustainable. His message was 'stability' and 'order', while Kılıçdaroğlu was unable either to counter that or keep his coalition together.

Among Erdoğan's sops to the Islamist conservative voters was his rabid anti-LGBT rhetoric and anti-feminist misogyny veiled behind a commitment to "sacred family values". He attacked both Kılıçdaroğlu's Alevi religious background and the

secular opposition as a whole. He condemned both those 'enemies of family values' and those 'whose foreheads never touch the ground for prayers'.

Such messages were given full support by religious brotherhoods in the conservative Muslim milieu, and there was no effective counter from the Kılıçdaroğlu camp. Yet, despite that, almost half of the voters did not heed Erdoğan's warnings and voted for his opponent.

Meanwhile, the nationalist-racist and fascist current as a whole has gathered strength despite the fact that the distribution of the votes has not changed much. Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) has lost ground, but its far-right coalition partner, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), increased its vote. Within the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), the rightwing current seems to have grown stronger, while various smaller parties have gained some influence.

In the near future the almost senile leader of the MHP will soon be replaced, and there is a shoulder-butting race to take over his position among the nationalist-racist-fascists. But Erdoğan needs MHP's unwavering support to stay in power, so the outcome of the leadership contest could be very significant. The MHP is also one of the main instruments through which the army bureaucracy and top brass attempts to give direction to Erdoğan's policies.

The question posed by the outcome of the election is: will Erdoğan be able to complete his third five-year term as president? Both the gathering storm clouds in and around Turkey's borders and the unorthodox economic policy hodgepodge suggest that it is highly unlikely that the rightwing coalition of Islamism and nationalist-racists will still want him by the next election.

In 2024 there will be local elections. Back in 2019 the AKP lost several mayoralties in principal cities and next year they will attempt to regain them. However, the AKP's continuing loss of support and Erdoğan's own diminishing popularity do not bode well for them. The outcome of those elections might decide both his position as leader and the AKP's position within the conservative camp.

For working people, the illusions of an alternative government under the CHP or CHP-led coalition have been shattered. However, building an internationalist, working class movement, fighting in solidarity with the Kurdish freedom movement and encompassing the rights of all the oppressed, requires more than shattered illusions. It requires unity around a principled programme ●

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POLITICS

Sir Humphreys vs Tory right

Some civil service mandarins have a different political agenda from their Tory ministers. Indeed, Eddie Ford suspects that the Labour shadow cabinet is far more to their liking

Recently we have had a whole rash of mini-scandals about Tory politicians. In and of themselves, these stories are pretty boring - we are hardly talking Donald Trump-style sensations about serial sexual abuse, rape, porn actresses, dodgy property deals or conspiracies to overthrow the constitution. Rather, attending drink parties, shouting and speeding. However, if only by inference, they all add up to a bigger picture of a civil service - more accurately sections of the civil service particularly concerned with foreign policy, the law and education - pitted against Tory ministers who are part of a party convulsed by chronic internal divisions.

We might as well start with the most recent and newsworthy mini-scandal - yes, Boris Johnson again. Where would the newspapers be without him? Though the story gets a bit involved (or tedious), he got referred to the police over renewed claims that he broke lockdown rules by hosting family and friends at Chequers during the height of the Covid pandemic. These visits were found in his official diary by his government-funded lawyers, as they prepared his defence for the public inquiry into the pandemic led by Lady Hallett. In turn, they raised the issue with senior officials in the cabinet office - who then referred the matter to the police, as they were obliged to do under the civil service code, and also to the parliamentary privileges committee, which is investigating whether Johnson lied to the House of Commons over 'Partygate'. Yes, it is hard to imagine the former prime minister lying about anything, but he has now split with those lawyers over the police referral - saying he has "lost faith" in the system and is currently "unrepresented". Boris, the underdog, up against the powerful British establishment!

Chequers

The Johnson team called the referral a "clearly politically motivated attempt to manufacture something out of nothing" - perhaps an accusation not to be entirely dismissed - and his close allies are talking bitterly about a "stitch-up", warning Rishi Sunak to stop the "witch-hunts" against those strongly associated with a hard Brexit. For them, the decision to hand over evidence of gatherings at Chequers during the pandemic was the "final straw" - they accused cabinet office ministers of having signed off the decision to pass on the former prime minister's diaries to the police. This has been strictly denied, of course, but, according to the *Daily Mail* - which never gets anything wrong - Johnson has threatened to sue the cabinet office in retaliation.

On the other hand, the Sunak government has been accused of a "cover-up" because the cabinet office has been refusing to hand over



Big disagreements over hard Brexit and ECHR

unedited versions of Johnson's correspondence and documentation, and is now claiming to the inquiry that it does not have his WhatsApp messages in its possession or the '24 notebooks' containing contemporaneous notes made by the former prime minister. Not true, reply Johnson supporters: their innocent hero has handed over all this material to the government-appointed lawyers - who then stabbed him in the back by grassing him up to the police! Apparently, with the temperature getting feverish, there were attempted peace talks last week between Sunak and Johnson - but they broke down when No10 insisted that Oliver Dowden must be involved in the process.

As the secretary of state for the cabinet office, not to mention the current deputy prime minister (they seem to give the job to anyone these days), the Johnsonites think he is the weasel who leaked the information that some of the former PM's diaries had been handed over to the police. But there could be other culprits, of course, like disgruntled civil servants with a hotline to the media. Anyway, we are now in a situation where Lady Hallett has demanded that the full cache of messages and diaries be handed over to the inquiry before the first public evidence session. But cabinet office lawyers say the inquiry does not have the powers to request access to all documents, which raises

the interesting prospect of legal arbitration and a potential judicial review. It goes without saying that launching a legal challenge against the ruling by the head of a public inquiry would be an unprecedented step, even for a desperate rightwing Tory government.

Then we have Suella Braverman, home secretary and another hero of the hard Brexit right. Last month it was reported that, when attorney general, she was caught speeding by police and then asked her civil servants whether they could arrange for her an "option" to take a driving awareness course as a private one-to-one session rather than the standard group course with a load of proles. They said, 'No, minister, we are not paid to do that', and reported the request to the cabinet office.

She then asked one of her political aides to fix it so that, when doing the online Zoom courses, aliases could be used and her camera switched off. Alas for Suella, the course providers said those options were not available either. Trying to put the flames out, Rishi Sunak consulted the 'ethics chief', Sir Laurie Magnus, as to whether this was a breach of the ministerial code - who, in his wisdom, decided it was not, giving Braverman a lucky escape.

Before that, of course, we had Dominic Raab - another former deputy prime minister - accused of being a loud-mouth bully of civil servants. There is little doubt that he is an unpleasant man who likes to dominate others, but top civil servants are made of strong stuff too. However, he was forced to resign and a month later announced that he would stand down as an MP at the next general election - so a result for those forces who wanted him to go. Earlier, in 2020, we had had then home secretary Priti Patel also accused of being beastly to civil servants - specifically for trying to "force out" Sir Philip Rutnam, the most senior civil servant in her department. After threatening to sue

for constructive dismissal, Sir Philip came out £340,000 better off, with a further £30,000 in costs. There was an unsuccessful campaign by civil servants and others to get rid of her, but she did not resign as home secretary until September 2020 following the resignation of Boris Johnson and the subsequent election of the hard Brexit zealot Liz Truss as prime minister.

Looking at these incidents, it is not particularly surprising that Tory backbenchers on the right of the party are getting agitated about the Whitehall 'blob' underhandedly trying to remove politicians from office - aided and abetted by sections of the media.

Conspiracy?

Since the initial Dominic Raab scandal, we have been arguing that one aspect of the whole affair is civil service mandarins going for ministers they dislike - so maybe the Tory backbenchers are not being totally paranoid after all. Obviously, we are not talking about office clerks here - though you would think so, given the way the subject is often discussed in the liberal media (or even the left press, sadly enough). No, we are talking about the equivalents of Sir Humphreys from the BBC's *Yes minister* series. That is, the people who really run the government, as opposed to ministers and prime ministers who are here today and gone tomorrow (especially at the moment).

We are not suggesting that civil servants are organising a centralised conspiracy out of a favourite club, though it is the case that some top civil servants do like to hang out in the Athenaeum in Pall Mall (if you dine there, you are 'a somebody'). Instead, what you have is a situation where there are two different political agendas that are growing increasingly apart. Civil servants do not like attacks on them by the likes of Dominic Cummings or Michael Gove. Nor do they

like ministers such as Dominic Raab and Suella Braverman, who tarnish Britain's international image with the Rwandan exercise or by defying the European Court of Human Rights. The latter was established, of course, not by the European Union - which the *Daily Mail* might have you believe - but rather the Council of Europe, with Winston Churchill being one of its main instigators (he saw it as the first step towards a "kind of United States of Europe"). In other words, there is definitely an anti-hard Brexit agenda in the civil service - especially at the very top.

In a connected question, another thing the civil service finds an anathema is the crazy policy pursued by the government against migration - even to the point of self-harm to the British economy. So the latest wheeze from Suella Braverman and the Tories means stringent curbs on international students who come to study in the UK for year-long Master's degrees. As from January 1 next year, they will no longer be able to bring dependents or spouses. Nigeria had the highest number of dependants of student visa holders in 2022, with 60,923. Indian nationals had the second highest number, with an increase from 3,135 in 2019 to 38,990 in 2022, followed by students from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Shamefully, but true to character, the Labour Party has said it will not oppose the measures because "proper enforcement" is "long overdue" - getting tough on migrants before the election. Of course, what we know about these students is that they are mainly very talented, not for picking fruit in some god-forsaken field. The university sector is saying that these students are absolutely vital for their business plans, given that you had a shift in the university system under John Major. Not only were universities there to fill jobs at the top of the labour force and act as a transmission belt into the ruling class itself: they were also there to act as a business *money-earner* for UK plc - the ivory tower being banished to the past. Meaning that loads of universities today are financially dependent on foreign students - hence are in danger of going bust because of Brexit and now the new scheme announced by Braverman. If they cannot bring their child or husband with them, many students will vote with their feet by going to America or Germany.

As we have seen above, another crucial factor behind all the stories about scandals is that the Tory Party itself is at civil war, with the different factions going for each other's throat. A war about who is going to replace Rishi Sunak and what will be the *programme* of the Tory Party after a Labour victory, which seems the most likely outcome of the next general election. Indeed, a handsome Labour majority is far from impossible, even if some idiot tells you that it cannot happen statistically.

Therefore, in the run-up to the election, you will have civil servants wanting to help shape the incoming Labour government - meeting shadow ministers to influence their policies. In fact, it is hard to avoid the suspicion that the top civil servants find the Labour shadow cabinet far more to their liking than the existing one under Rishi Sunak ●

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CULTURE

Fallen Phil and Teflon Don

With the Stormy Daniels indictment, the E Jean Carroll civil verdict and the whole eight-year-old campaign of lawfare against Trump, **Paul Demarty** asks why it makes no difference to his political prospects. Meanwhile, here in Britain, we have Phillip Schofield

Two news stories - on the face of it completely unrelated - have stolen headlines, one on each side of the Atlantic: the abrupt downfall of the blandest man in British showbiz, Phillip Schofield; and the sentencing of Stewart Rhodes, leader of the Oath Keepers, a far-right American militia, for his role in the January 6 events.

We can deal with poor old Phil first; a cascade of disasters has led to the discovery that he promised a 15-year-old a job at ITV when he finished school, twisted arms to make it happen, and eventually had a love affair with him (by which time the young man was 20, a mere three decades Schofield's junior). We do not need to litigate this any further; suffice to say that legal-but-icky May-December romances are still very much in the crosshairs of the post-#MeToo media regime.

One could not imagine a greater contrast between Schofield - somehow both omnipresent in daytime TV and utterly forgettable, and until last week so squeaky-clean by reputation that he almost seemed AI-generated - and Stewart Rhodes. The latter is the very model of the modern militia ringleader: ex-military, pudgy, white, middle-aged and middle-class. His eye patch gives him a touch of the grotesque, but he lost his eye not in some act of military heroism, but an oopsie with his own .22 at home.

Rhodes was handed an impressive 18-year sentence by judge Amit Mehta; his comrade, Kelly Meggs, got 12 years. Both were on charges of seditious conspiracy - originally put on the books to deal with pro-Confederate traitors in the civil war. These gentlemen are likely to appeal, but on what grounds? Perhaps they will find some technicality - but they seem quite comically guilty as charged.

Picaresque

They are merely the biggest losers in the post-coup rounding up of the usual suspects. A badly shaken federal government is very keen, it seems, to make an example. But surely that is the result of the most obvious incongruity - why the hell is the most obvious conspirator of all, Donald J Trump, not in the dock for this? Trump indisputably ordered this crowd of deluded middle Americans to march on the Capitol. Close flunkies of his like Rudy Giuliani are known to have come up with the plan for the event, so as to intimidate Mike Pence. It certainly smells like a seditious conspiracy to me.

That is before we get to all the other stuff - the Stormy Daniels indictment, the further indictments to come, the civil verdict against him, which found he had sexually assaulted E Jean Carroll - indeed the whole eight-year-old campaign of lawfare against him. Not to forget obviously fraudulent ventures like Trump University, serial bankruptcies, grabbings by the pussy, payment of lawyers' bills in sport memorabilia; in short, a whole picaresque career of crimes and misdemeanours.

Yet he is still standing - not only that, but, saving some drastic change of circumstances, he is odds-on to be the Republican Party's presidential candidate for the third time in a row. Recent polls have him smoking the Floridian vampire, Ron DeSantis, in the Republican primary when the



Waxwork Donald: nothing seems to stick

circus begins in earnest later this year (voters seem unable even to name any other candidate, which sucks for Nikki Haley, I guess). Nothing sticks to Teflon Don, except the improbable aura of success.

We brought up poor old Phillip Schofield for the sake of contrast, of course. It seems remarkable that some public figures are so easily offloaded for relatively mild infractions - cheating on your wife, and using star power to obtain sex - when others seem to end up 'too big to fail'. Many will consider Schofield a bit of a creep after his confession; probably some will talk themselves into believing that he is a paedophile, but know - deep inside - that they are stretching definitions a little. Before all that, it was not exactly the case that half of British society was clamouring over many years for his ejection from public life. There was no anti-Schofield "#resistance", no Mueller report, no Russiagate fantasies for our Phil. Poor thing, it is quite possible that nobody in Britain had any strong feelings about him at all.

Yet his storied career in the world of British light entertainment - at once utterly bland and profoundly odd - is terminated in the blink of an eye. Nobody will touch him now, in case he turns out to be a new Jimmy Savile. It seems that the system works in the case of the most boring man on earth, but somehow not a technicolour supervillain.

It will be objected, not unfairly,

that this is not an apples-to-apples comparison. Indeed that is true. This demands the further explanation - how are these cases different? In innumerable ways, naturally: about the only thing Trump and Schofield have in common are a teaky tan. Both were targeted for denunciation on the basis of sexual misconduct; it is now strange to think that people really thought that the Access Hollywood "grab 'em by the pussy" tape would be the killing blow, but they did.

At the mere cultural level, Trump had a survival advantage, which was that his whole political schtick was based on crude masculinism and open contempt for the rules of propriety that supposedly governed US politics before 2015 (but really now). At some point in the autumn of 2016, some Trump superfans were photographed in T-shirts emblazoned with the slogan, "America needs a president with balls". His excuse for the Access Hollywood tape - that it meant nothing; it was just "locker room talk", empty braggadocio - was derided by the liberal media, and the few remaining never-Trump holdouts among the neo-con right; his goose was well and truly cooked. So far as anyone can tell, it made no difference; red states voted red, blue states voted blue, and swing states swung red by mere tens of thousands of votes.

If Mitt Romney had beaten Barack Obama by the same electoral map in 2012, liberals would have been disappointed, but would more or less

have just got on with their lives. They could not do the same with Trump: they had become too attached to the idea of his illegitimacy. This was plain to see for Trump's supporters, however; and so every subsequent attempt to ratchet up the picture of illegitimacy resulted merely in *strengthening* his position among the American right. This dynamic has held firm all the way to the present day - on an ascending scale of action that literally included his self-coup attempt and its inevitable backlash.

Political appeal

Trump survives, therefore, because the *political* appeal of Trumpism is undiminished by attacks on his character. That appeal is well-documented: the fraying of American society at the edges, the devastation of deindustrialisation bearing the bitter fruit of pauperisation and deaths of despair, the inability of the liberal ideological fig leaves to hide what he called - to widespread outrage among the great and the good - "American carnage". Indeed, the carnage is distinctively American, though it was exported around the world - first by eager students like Thatcher and Pinochet; then by the dismal operations of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in the global south; and finally by agents of "shock therapy" in the former Stalinist countries.

From that point of view, Trump is a case of Malcolm X's chickens coming home to roost. Liberals

liked to think of Jair Bolsonaro as the Brazilian Trump, and not without reason; but one might just as well call Trump the American (oh-so-American) Modi, Netanyahu or Putin. Anomie, atomisation and despair is projected outwards onto convenient scapegoats. Life never gets better, of course - the US was quite as rickety, if not more so, after his presidency than before. Yet failure only ever calls for more of the same medicine. The multiplication of preposterous moral panics in American political life is like a trashy TV dinner: all empty calories and momentary buzz, before you need to pack down another.

Anti-Trumpism served the same purpose for the liberals. Satisfaction was always just around the corner, but never came. There is good reason to suppose that the state machine is on their side, for now, and a successful January 6 is likely to have been met with a serious counter-coup. This is still not enough.

It seems that prissy moralising is enough to get rid of a bland daytime TV presenter; indeed, it was enough to get rid of a serial predator like Harvey Weinstein. Trump has globbed onto something real, however. Unless he meets a Robert Maxwell-style end - mysteriously off the side of a yacht, or crushed under the wheels of a Mar-a-Lago golf buggy - he will die with his base.

The liberals have no plan for that ●
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USA

J6ers await their pardon

Stewart Rhodes, leader of the Oath Keepers, has been handed a 18-year sentence. Daniel Lazare gives notice that the ultra-right combatants of Trump's January 6 self-coup attempt could soon be free

A US federal judge last week sentenced Stewart Rhodes, leader of an ultra-right militia known as the Oath Keepers, to 18 years in prison for his role in the Capitol Hill insurrection on January 6 2021.

It is the stiffest sentence handed down to any of the thousand-plus January 6 defendants to date, and Rhodes was defiant: "I'm a political prisoner like president Trump and my only crime is opposing those who are destroying our country," he told judge Amit Mehta. "I used my protected speech as we had done throughout the Trump administration out of necessity because of systemic violence of the left."

Unimpressed, Mehta described Rhodes as "an ongoing threat and peril to this country and to the fabric of this country," adding:

You are smart, charismatic and compelling, and that is, frankly, what makes you dangerous ... The reality is, based on the words we hear you speak, the moment you are released, you will be prepared to take up arms against your government.

Since Rhodes is in his mid-50s, the sentence means that he will be behind bars until he is well into his 70s, at which point the 'emergency' will have passed and he will no longer be a threat.

Or so America's enervated political establishment hopes. But there is a significant chance that Rhodes will not serve out his sentence, since the two leading Republican candidates have both indicated that they will pardon many - if not most - J6ers as soon as they enter the White House. "I can't say for every single one because a couple of them, probably they got out of control," Donald Trump told a CNN "town hall" meeting on May 11. "But ... they've persecuted these people. And, yeah, my answer is I am most likely [to pardon]. If I get in, I will most likely. I would say it will be a large portion of them, and it'll be very early on."

Not to be outdone, Florida governor Ron DeSantis - who actually accused Trump of "going left" in a recent interview - promised to "use the pardon power ... at the front end" of his administration if he takes over instead:

Now, [in] some of these cases, some people may have a technical violation of the law. But if there are three other people who did the same thing but just in a context, like [the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020] and they don't get prosecuted at all, that is uneven application of justice, and so ... we will use the pardon power.²

With polls showing both men running neck and neck with Joe Biden in 2024, or even pulling out ahead, such promises may well come true.³ If so, Rhodes could be in a position to resume his old activities sooner than people think, while the January 6 uprising will emerge victorious after a four-year delay. Unable to defend itself against would-be putschists, what little is left of America's tired semi-democracy will finally give up the ghost.

In the meantime, the factors that led to January 6 have not gone away, but have only gotten worse. Although Democrats want to blame the crack-



Defiant in court

up on Trump, the fact is that he is the product of a decades-long failure as much as the cause.

Perfect example

The Oath Keepers are a perfect example of how the process works and why it promises to continue. If they differ from other militias, it is because they draw heavily from the ranks of the military and police. Their name comes from the US military's oath of enlistment that requires all military personnel to "solemnly swear" to "support and defend the constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic." The Oath Keepers website explains why this is significant:

That oath, mandated by article VI of the constitution itself, is to the constitution, not to the politicians, and Oath Keepers declare that they will not obey unconstitutional orders, such as orders to disarm the American people, to conduct warrantless searches, or to detain Americans as 'enemy combatants' in violation of their ancient right to jury trial.⁴

Given the increasingly undemocratic nature of the US constitution, this is a rationale for opposing any new-fangled law or initiative that the group regards as contrary to America's ancient constitution.

Moreover, it is not just the ancient constitution in general, but a specific part. This is the second amendment, ratified in 1791, which famously declares: "A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."

Hence, the first item on the Oath Keepers' list of "orders we will not obey" is "any order to disarm the American people." As the website puts it,

The attempt to disarm the people on April 19 1775 [at the Battle of Lexington and Concord] was the spark of open conflict in the American Revolution. That vile attempt was an act of war, and the American people fought back in justified, righteous self-defence of their natural rights. Any such order today would also be an act of war against the American people, and thus an act of treason. We will not make war on our own people, and we will not commit treason by obeying any such treasonous order. Nor will we assist, or support, any such attempt to disarm the people by other government entities, either state or federal.

If disarming the people was vile in the 18th century, then the Oath Keepers see it as no less vile in the 21st. The January 6 uprising was thus constitutional in their view, in that it sought to block a Democrat whose goal was to rob Americans of their ancient liberties by taking away their means of self-defence.

It would be nice to report that all this is so much nonsense on the part of half-baked constitutionalists who fail to realize that the Constitution is a "living" document endlessly suited to the needs of modern society. But this is a self-serving liberal myth. As a wide range of legal scholars now recognize, it's impossible to dismiss out of hand a right to bear arms adopted in the wake of Lexington and Concord when memories of patriotic militiamen driving off the British were still vivid and fresh.

It's also no longer possible to argue in favour of a minimalist reading of the Second Amendment - one that sees the right to bear arms as guaranteeing nothing more than the right to join a well-regulated militia in the form of the US National Guard - while simultaneously adhering to a maximalist reading of the First Amendment, in which the dictum that "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech or of the press" means that Americans can surf the internet to their heart's content, soak up all the porn they want, go to drag shows, or party away on gay-pride day. How can liberals narrow one ancient right to the vanishing point while allowing another to expand and expand?

The question is not whether allowing militias to parade about with AR-15s is nuts - it is nuts - but whether a fair and accurate reading of an 18th century text that is effectively unchangeable says that is what they are allowed to do - which a growing academic consensus says it does. Moreover, as one constitutional scholar argued in 1989, the amendment's language is so sweeping that it all but amounts to a mini-constitution in its own right - one that outlines a theory of government very different from representative government in distant Washington:

Just as ordinary citizens should participate actively in governmental decision-making through offering their own deliberative insights, rather than be confined to casting ballots once every two or four years for those very few individuals who will actually make the decisions, so should ordinary citizens participate in the process of law enforcement and defence of liberty rather than rely on professionalised

peacekeepers, whether we call them standing armies or police.⁵

This is government of, by and for embattled suburbanites, who believe that Black Lives Matter is coming to burn down their homes or that United Nations black helicopters will soon herd them off into concentration camps. Since the Oath Keepers see "professionalised peacekeepers" as wholly in the pocket of anti-constitutional forces, this is a recipe for civil war by gun owners - against liberals bent on taking them away. The more the gun wars intensify, the deeper the US descends into authoritarianism and violence.

Spooky

Rhodes is no dummy. After receiving an honourable military discharge following a parachute injury, he went to work for Rand Paul, a far-right libertarian congressman from Texas, and then won admission to Yale Law School, where he defended gun rights and received an academic prize for a paper criticising George W Bush's use of the term "enemy combatants" to describe alleged Muslim terrorists.⁶

According to one account, he came under the sway of a far-right libertarian named Edwin Vieira Jr - a Harvard law grad who has written several books on the second amendment and who argued in 2012 that the president can create a new militia "at one stroke" by invoking the Insurrection Act of 1807, which allows him or her to mobilise both the military and the people at large against disorder or rebellion.⁷

This is just what Rhodes urged following the November 2020 election. He wrote to Trump in an open letter:

Biden is an illegitimate Chicom puppet. He is about to get his hands on the nuclear codes and command of all our armed forces. You must use the insurrection act and use the power of the presidency to stop him. And all us veterans will support you and so will the vast majority of the military.

As spooky as this was, it did not arise out of thin air. Rather, it is the result of an ancient constitution pushing America over the edge, the more it breaks down. While Democrats think they can solve the problem by locking people up, the only real solution lies in radically overhauling the US political structure from top to bottom - something that only a militant workers' democracy can do.

Another factor was at work on January 6 - the crisis of imperialism. Following Biden's victory, the Oath Keepers website posted an 11-minute video by a Serbian nationalist named

Aleksandar Savič. His message: members should to take a lesson from rightwing protesters who toppled Serbian president Slobodan Milošević in October 2000. He thus urged them to gather in the capital, swarm over and around police blockades, storm parliament, and then burn down pro-government TV stations - which is what rightists did in Serbia and what, except for the last item, rightists would again do in Washington DC. Savič said:

They are going to steal the elections - this is inevitable ... Twitter is going to censor you, Facebook is going to censor you, everybody is going to censor you; they're going to call you names; you will be racist, fascist, supremacist, whatever. Don't be afraid, it's normal ...

So, yes, with your determination and your strength, you can make a difference. People from all over the world are watching you ... You will have no future if you fail now. You must not fail ... You must fight for this justice.

"The man knows of what he speaks," the Oath Keepers website added.⁸ So militia members set about following Savič's instructions in full.

What is ironic, of course, is that the US backed the anti- Milošević campaign to the hilt and that Biden was in the thick of it as chairman of the Senate foreign relations committee. A master of anti-Serbian invective, he called in 1998 for the bombing Belgrade and the blowing up of "all the bridges on the Drina". In 1999, he said US troops "should go to Belgrade and have a Japanese-German-style occupation of that country". In 2002, he said that "until [the Serbs] look in their hearts, they can never cure themselves of the disease that they are the oppressed and, as long as they operate on that standard, the cycle will continue and continue and continue."⁹

The punishment would not stop until Serbs confessed their sins. Meanwhile, officials regaled Biden's committee with tales about how they had created a "ring around Serbia" by bombarding it with propaganda broadcasts from neighbouring Bosnia and Montenegro, how they had spent \$16.5 million in support of "democratisation" and how they had spent another \$20 million to encourage Montenegro's president, Milo Djukanović, to break with Milošević in 1998.¹⁰

After helping to overthrowing Serbia's leader in 2000, Biden now finds himself beset by the same kind of rightwing colour revolution at home. What goes around comes around - which is why locking Stewart Rhodes away will not change a thing ●

Notes

1. See my article, 'A tale of two liars', May 18: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1443/a-tale-of-two-liars.
2. *The New York Times* May 25.
3. projects.fivethirtyeight.com/polls/president-general.
4. web.archive.org/web/20201112041809/https://oathkeepers.org/about.
5. constitution.org/1-Activism/mil/embar2nd.htm.
6. www.nytimes.com/2022/11/21/us/stewart-rhodes-oath-keepers-yale-law.html.
7. www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-oath-keepers-radical-legal-defense-of-january-6th.
8. www.democracyinaction.us/2020/chrneday/nov14pr.html.
9. www.youtube.com/watch?v=quTxFbCEVvk.
10. www.marxist.com/revolution-and-counter-revolution-in-yugoslavia.htm.

IRAN

Confessions of a rat

Yassamine Mather gives her judgement on an extraordinary talk and subsequent BBC interview with the former governor of the notorious Evin prison

You can tell a regime is in trouble when some of its most senior security/judicial authority members try to take their distance from it. This week, Hossein Mortazavi Zanjani, the former head of one of Iran's most notorious prisons in the 1980s, Evin, used a meeting on the social audio App, Clubhouse, to reveal the role played by senior officials of the Islamic Republic in what is called the "mass execution of political prisoners". He added that he was making this broadcast because he fears the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, is looking for another round of executions.

In the summer of 1988, as the Iran-Iraq war was ending and ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was forced to accept a rather humiliating peace deal with his arch enemy, Saddam Hussein, the Islamic Republic executed thousands of political prisoners - some supporters of Mojahedin e-Khalq, others members and supporters of various leftwing organisations. Their bodies were dumped in unmarked individual and collective graves. It is estimated that at least 5,000 were executed. Thousands more, who were in prison at the time, were left traumatised for life. It is widely believed that Khomeini signed a *fatwa* authorising the killings.

Zanjani followed up the Clubhouse meeting with an interview with BBC Persian, where he denied claims that he was looking for fame, or that he is trying to clear his name. Apparently all he wants is that his words should be recorded somewhere with his own voice, because "if he dies" this opportunity will be lost. I have listened to the audio recording of this bizarre event and I heard the former governor of Evin and Gohardasht prisons "confessing" to former inmates that they had the right to be angry. However, as far as I could tell, at all times he was trying to exonerate himself: "Although we were not involved in the execution of their sentence, I made a mistake, I should have left, but I was there until the 90th minute."

Zanjani says he is not proud of unfair trials that lasted just a few minutes or the subsequent executions: "Most of the prisoners were arrested *en masse* and many innocent people were killed. I say frankly, innocent people were killed."

Zanjani also spoke about the trucks carrying corpses and various atrocities. He recounted the statement made by the father of a political prisoner about how his daughter was raped before being executed. This was a common practice in the Islamic Republic: our 'devout Shias' thought that executing a virgin girl would mean she would go to heaven. In order to make sure 'the executed prisoner went to hell', young women prisoners were raped before execution! Zanjani claimed he regretted his role in the judicial system, but, of course, after so many decades, to say that all this is 'too little, too late' would be a huge understatement.

Zanjani emphasises that he had no role in the actual executions - he was not even allowed to enter the hall where they took place. Critics do not believe such claims and reckon that, as the governor of a prison, he is hiding facts and wants to "create a narrative" for the benefit of the Islamic Republic.

Zanjani said he was very upset to



Many thousands died

be called "Khomeini's executioner" in social media comments. He also claimed that, as he still lives in Iran, he has faced aspects of the state's repression by the "brothers of Imam Zaman" (intelligence agents) who summoned and interrogated him many times. But he emphasised that he is "never willing to forget the issue of executions" and told them to either "take him and get rid of him or have nothing to do with him". He is aware that many people will not believe his comments, adding

It is possible that many of my words are outdated and not useful. But the Islamic Republic is not ready for these words to be said. We, who were involved in the formation of the government at the beginning of the revolution, must confess, not repent. Repentance does not cure pain. I am ashamed today and I am announcing my shame in the style of the Japanese appearing in public. I am ashamed to speak today. What repentance should I do? They killed the children. They have made the families mourn.

One member of the audience asked of Mortazavi, "Is he ready to write a letter to Ali Khamenei?" He replied: "Khamenei does not understand what he is doing and killing is like drinking water for him, and he is not ready to go back on his word and fail." However, he said that he is ready to write a letter to Khamenei in the name of the [former] head of Evin prison and request that executions be halted.

Zanjani talked for more than 20 hours in total over four consecutive days on Clubhouse. He also answered questions posed by the audience, which included relatives

of those executed, as well as former political prisoners. Below are some extracts.

Questions

Question: What was the role of Ebrahim Raisi (current Iranian president and deputy prosecutor at the time of the executions)?

Zanjani mentioned the death squad, but said that he was informed about the executions through Raisi: "Ibrahim Raisi had a good relationship with me and he was the deputy prosecutor. Those who came to my office said that we went today and got an order for the execution of prisoners from the imam."

Question: Did Ruhollah Khomeini or [his son] Ahmad Khomeini write the letter of execution of the prisoners?

In response to this, Zanjani said that he did not know the truth, but the executions could not be contrary to Khomeini's wishes: "The only way to get rid of the Islamic Republic was to finish this issue of prisoners in the name of Khomeini until Khomeini passed away."

Question: Did he [Zanjani] try to prevent the executions and did he go to ayatollah Montazeri? (Montazeri was Khomeini's heir apparent until 1989, when they had a major falling out, partly because he was horrified to hear about the authorities' role in the mass execution of political prisoners.)

Zanjani claims that he is one of those who informed Montazeri about the executions:

Ayatollah Montazeri held a meeting and asked for the heads of prison to attend, so I went. I was looking for an excuse to inform him. I was one of the

channels that opened the story. I was a slave when I went to ayatollah Montazeri. When I said goodbye ..., I said, 'I am talking to you.' He said, 'Say it here'. I said, 'I can't talk here, it's bugged'. I said in his ear that 'Haj Agha decided to execute the children'. He said, 'What does that mean?' I said, 'They received a ruling from Imam Khomeini, and a delegation has been formed that is supposed to come to Evin.'

Responding to all this, the son of ayatollah Montazeri said in a phone call to a news agency that, if such a claim was true, ayatollah Montazeri should have mentioned it in his memoirs. However, Montazeri does not definitively reject the claim. He says that there is a possibility that another person confidentially told ayatollah Montazeri about this.

Question: How many people were executed?

Mortazavi said that, according to the information he has, 5,000 deaths could not have happened in Evin prison, but he did not deny that executions may have been widespread throughout the country. He said he had a list of all the people who entered and left Evin, which could have contained valuable information, but he did not have it with him.

Question: Did the members of parliament and the government know about the executions?

He said he did not know, but at that time "the matter was completely secret [confidential]". In another part, he emphasised that Mir-Hossein Mousavi, the prime minister at the time, did not know about the executions. Mortazavi was actually

one of the defenders of Mousavi's high-ranking officials and also one of the officials in his headquarters for the 2008 elections. Of course, many officials have remained silent until now - amongst them Mousavi, who was not only the then prime minister, but was close to the leader of the revolution, and subsequently became leader of the Green movement. He is one of those who are criticised for this reason.

Question: Have you seen a refrigerated truck?

This is a reference to trucks used to move the bodies of political prisoners, executed in Evin and other prisons. Mortazavi said he had seen hearses being used and that was "absolutely true", but he had never seen a refrigerated truck. He told how he was sitting in his office in Evin prison when some people from radio and television who were familiar to him came and took him with them to see what was going on. According to his own account, they opened the door of the truck and he saw "many" bodies lying on top of one another.

Zanjani says that he was *persona non grata* as far as the Islamic republic is concerned, mainly since the executions. However, we know that he stood in the parliamentary elections of 2016 - his candidacy and qualification were confirmed by state authorities.

So should we believe what he says? Yes and no. Some of what he says gives detailed information about the dark days of mass execution of political prisoners in Iran. However, we should not forget that everything he says is to save his own skin - like a rat escaping from a sinking ship ●

ECONOMY

Hierarchy of automation

Michael Roberts discusses Daron Acemoglu's warning that artificial intelligence will be used to flatten living standards and increase capital's profitability

There is a new burst of techno-optimism emerging over the application of the ChatGPT artificial intelligence chatbox and other such 'learning management systems' (LLMs). One analyst reckons that artificial intelligence "has huge potential to boost economy-wide productivity" and cited a recent study that showed a massive improvement in productivity through using ChatGPT. Also, much of the productivity gains were seen between 21 to 40-year-olds.

ChatGPT has gained 100 million users - faster than any other application in history - and these rapid adoption rates are not confined to individual users. Major corporations, such as Bain & Company, have entered into deals to use generative AI in their strategy consulting business, while companies like Expedia have integrated ChatGPT through plug-ins.

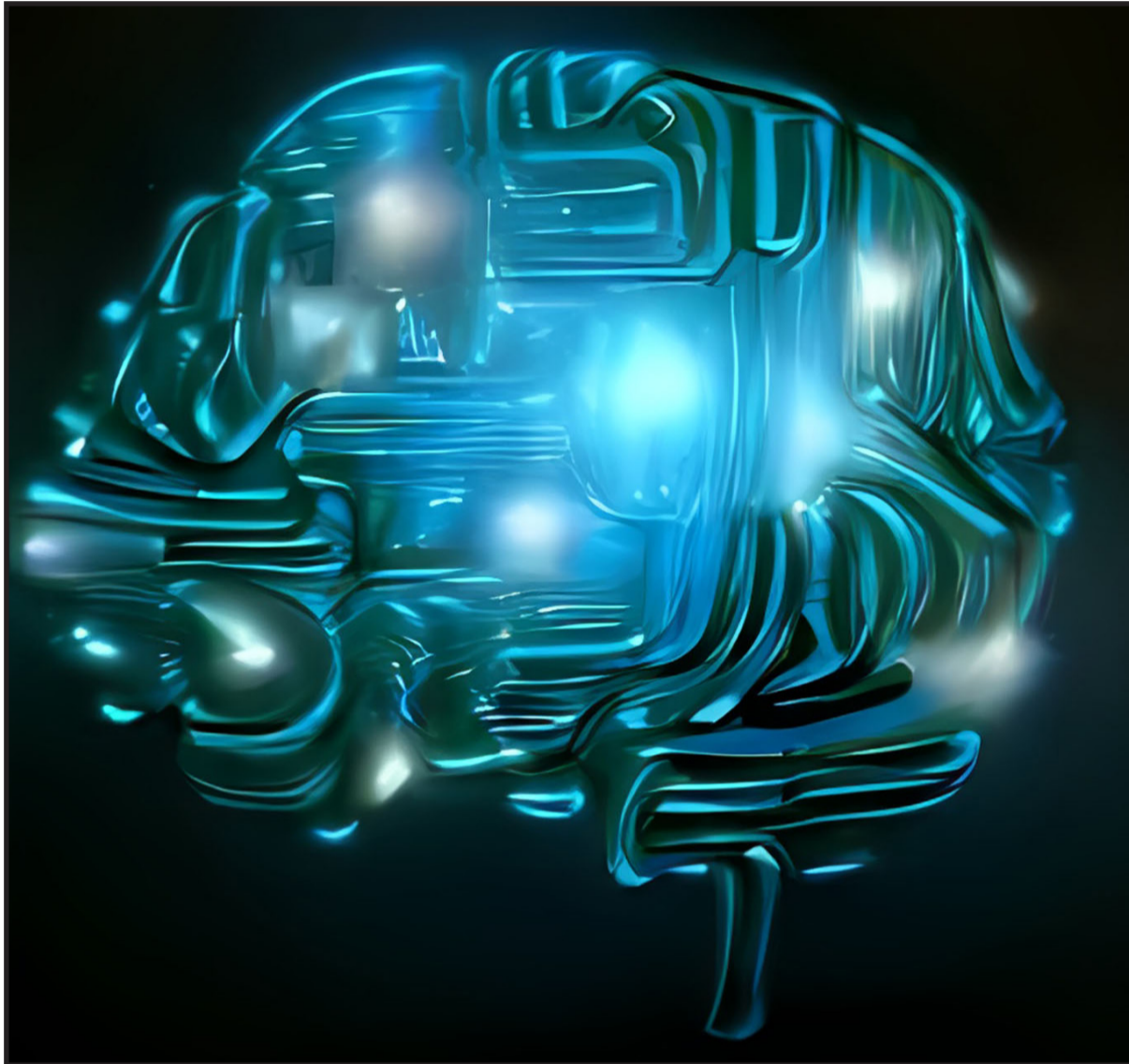
So are ChatGPT, etc part of a game changer for capitalism? Massachusetts Institute of Technology economics professor Daron Acemoglu is the expert on the economic and social effects of new technology, including the fast-burgeoning artificial intelligence (AI). He has won the John Bates Clark Medal - often a precursor to the Nobel Prize.

But he is no techno-optimist. His research shows that major technological disruption - such as the Industrial Revolution - can flatten wages for an entire class of working people. In a recent interview in the *Financial Times*,² Acemoglu said: "... capital takes what it will in the absence of constraints, and technology is a tool that can be used for good or for ill." Referring to the technology in the 19th century onwards, he went on:

Yes, you got progress, but you also had costs that were huge and very long-lasting. A hundred years of much harsher conditions for working people, lower real wages, much worse health and living conditions, less autonomy, greater hierarchy. And the reason that we came out of it wasn't some law of economics, but rather a grassroots social struggle, in which unions, more progressive politics and, ultimately, better institutions played a key role - and a redirection of technological change away from pure automation also contributed importantly.

These comments echo the conclusions on the impact of technology that Friedrich Engels made during the height of the industrial revolution in the mid-19th century. Back then, Engels argued that mechanisation shed jobs, but it also created new jobs in new sectors.³ Marx also identified this in *Grundrisse* in the 1850s:

The real facts, which are travestied by the optimism of the economists, are these: the workers, when driven out of the workshop by the machinery, are thrown onto the labour market. Their presence in the labour market increases the number of labour-powers which are at the disposal of capitalist exploitation... the effect of machinery, which has been represented as a compensation for the working class, is, on



Jobs under threat, along with the threat of more managerial control

the contrary, a most frightful scourge.... As soon as machinery has set free a part of the workers employed in a given branch of industry, the reserve men are also diverted into new channels of employment and become absorbed in other branches; meanwhile the original victims, during the period of transition, for the most part starve and perish.⁴

The implication here is that automation means increased precarious jobs and rising inequality for long periods.

Acemoglu reaches similar conclusions to Engels and Marx:

I think one of the things you have to do as an economist is to hold two conflicting ideas in your mind at the same time. That's the fact that technology can create growth, while also not enriching the masses (at least not for a long time). Technological progress is the most important driver of human flourishing, but what we tend to forget is that the process is not automatic.⁵

Under the capitalist mode of production - for profit, not social need - there is a contradiction, so "mathematically modelling and quantitatively understanding the struggle between capital - which benefits most from technological advancement - and labour isn't an easy task." Indeed.

Acemoglu's own extensive research on inequality and automation shows that more than half of the increase in inequality in the US since 1980 is at least related to automation, largely stemming from downward wage pressure on

jobs that might just as easily be done by a robot.⁶

The result in the last 30 years has been a rising inequality of incomes. There are many factors that have driven that up: privatisation, the collapse of unions, deregulation and the transfer of manufacturing jobs to the global south. But automation is an important one. While growth in gross domestic product in the major economies has slowed, inequality has risen and many workers - particularly, men without college degrees - have seen their real earnings fall sharply.

Productivity

Moreover, under capitalism, Acemoglu adds that not all automation technologies actually raise the productivity of labour.⁷ That is because companies mainly introduce automation in areas that may boost profitability, such as marketing, accounting or fossil-fuel technology, but not raise productivity for the economy as a whole or meet social needs:

Big Tech has a particular approach to business and technology that is centred on the use of algorithms for replacing humans. It is no coincidence that companies such as Google are employing less than one tenth of the number of workers that large businesses, such as General Motors, used to do in the past. This is a consequence of Big Tech's business model, which is based not on creating jobs, but automating them.

Acemoglu reckons modern automation, particularly since the great recession (2007-09) and then the Covid slump, is even more

deleterious to the future of work. "Put simply, the technological portfolio of the American economy has become much less balanced, and in a way that is highly detrimental to workers and especially low-education workers." He reckoned that more than half - and perhaps as much as three quarters - of the surge in wage inequality in the US is related to automation:

For example, the direct effects of offshoring account for about 5%-7% of changes in wage structure, compared to 50%-70% by automation. The evidence does not support the most alarmist views that robots or AI are going to create a completely jobless future, but we should be worried about the ability of the US economy to create jobs, especially good jobs with high pay and career-building opportunities for workers with a high-school degree or less.

His analysis of automation's effects in the US also applies to the rest of the major capitalist economies.

As Acemoglu once explained to the US Congress, "American and world technology is shaped by the decisions of a handful of very large and very successful tech companies, with tiny workforces and a business model built on automation."⁸ And, while government spending on research on AI has declined, such research has switched to what can increase the profitability of a few multinationals, not social needs:

government spending on research has fallen as a fraction of GDP and its composition has shifted towards tax credits and support for corporations. The transformative

technologies of the 20th century, such as antibiotics, sensors, modern engines and the internet, have the fingerprints of the government all over them. The government funded and purchased these technologies and often set the research agenda. This is much less true today.

That is the business model for AI under capitalism.

Acemoglu balks at conventional policy for dealing with tech-based inequality, such as universal basic income, because "it leaves the underlying power distribution the same. It elevates people who are earning and gives others the crumbs. It makes the system more hierarchical in some sense."

Instead: "I think the skills of a carpenter or a gardener or an electrician or a writer - those are just the greatest achievements of humanity, and I think we should try to elevate those skills and elevate those contributions," he says. "Technology could do that, but that means to use technology not to replace these people, not to automate those tasks, but to increase their productivity by giving them better tools, better information and better organisation."

But he has a touching belief in the current US administration, not to mention Joe Biden's 'progressive' policies: "Biden is the most pro-worker president since Franklin D Roosevelt." Acemoglu reckons: "We need to create an environment in which workers have a voice" - though not necessarily the current union structure." He looks to the 'Germanic model', in which the public and private sectors and labour "work together", rather than the US's neoliberal regimen.

But Acemoglu hints at a better alternative:

You read evolutionary psychology or talk to many people who would say they want to be richer than you, more powerful than the other person and so on, and you think that's the way it is. But then you talk to anthropologists, and they'll tell you that for much of our humanity we lived in this egalitarian hunter-gatherer manner - so, what's up with that?

An egalitarian society where automation is used to meet social need requires cooperative, commonly owned, automated means of production. Rather than reduce jobs and the livelihoods of humans, AI under common ownership and planning could reduce the hours of human labour for all. That would be the real game-changer ●

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.com

Notes

1. See my previous article: thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2023/04/08/ai-gpt-a-game-changer.
2. www.ft.com/content/67e49261-d046-424e-adf7-7cef5cb00292.
3. See my book on Engels' economics: M Roberts *Engels 200 - his contribution to political economy 2020* Morrisville NC, pp54-57.
4. K Marx *Capital* Vol 3, Moscow 1971, p339.
5. www.ft.com/content/67e49261-d046-424e-adf7-7cef5cb00292.
6. See, for example, news.mit.edu/2022/automation-drives-income-inequality-1121.
7. thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2022/07/04/the-future-of-work-3-automation.
8. www.govinfo.gov/pkg/CHRG-116hrg42322/pdf/CHRG-116hrg42322.pdf.

REVIEW



Meloni's antecedents

David Broder *Mussolini's grandchildren: fascism in contemporary Italy* Pluto Press 2023, pp240, £17.99

The title of David Broder's new book, *Mussolini's grandchildren*, whilst obviously designed to be eye-catching, is slightly misleading, if interpreted too literally.

By giving his introduction the subtitle, 'Mussolini's granddaughters', he presumably aims to keep the attention of any casual browser who has glanced at the title page in a branch of Waterstone's, but Rachele Mussolini - the daughter of the Duce's youngest son, Romano, and now a councillor for the rightwing Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) in Rome - makes a brief appearance on p1, never to be mentioned again. Her better-known half-sister, Alessandra, although appearing 11 times in his index (hardly surprisingly, as she has played a political role throughout the three decades since she stood as a mayoral candidate for the far-right Movimento Sociale Italiano in Naples in 1993, gaining an impressive 44% in a run-off ballot), is a peripheral, rather than central, figure in Broder's account. Moreover, he makes no mention of Alessandra's parallel show business career, which would arguably have served as a good illustration of the normalisation of fascism in the Italian mainstream media - something which he discusses elsewhere in the book.

However, potential readers should not be put off by this slightly sensationalist presentation that is probably a by-product of Broder's new role as Europe editor of *The Jacobin*. This is a very serious work, and, as far as I am aware, the only book-length study of the origins of prime minister Giorgia Meloni's FdI available in English. The bulk of it is devoted to a detailed historical account of the three successive political parties that have represented the neo-fascist tradition in Italian politics since World War II - the MSI (1946-95); the Alleanza

Nazionale (1994-2009); and the FdI from 2012 onwards. The central core of the first of these was made up of veterans of Mussolini's Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI) during 1943-45, the most extreme phase of Italian fascism, during which the RSI worked closely with the German Nazi occupiers.

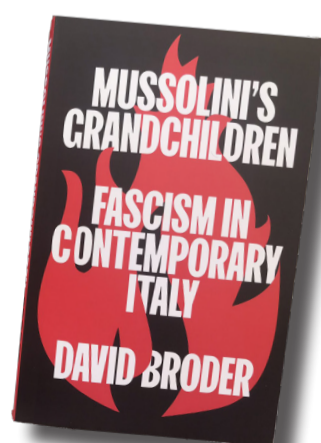
Chapters 2, 3 and 5 deal with these three groups, while the other two chapters have a slightly different, less chronological focus. Chapter 1 discusses the attitude of the neo-fascists to historical memory, particularly questions relating to World War II - which some might think is a little esoteric (or merely the product of Broder's earlier interest as a researcher and translator in the history of the Italian resistance), but is in fact absolutely essential to any genuine understanding of the Italian neo-fascist world view. Chapter 4 looks at recent neo-fascist groups of a more extreme and openly violent character than the FdI (eg. Casa Pound and Forza Nuova) and marshals a lot of evidence to show how closely entangled they are with both Giorgia Meloni's FdI and Matteo Salvini's Lega.

Post-fascist?

Broder's research - drawing on many historical works in Italian, as well as a wide array of newspaper and internet sources - has in my view all the thoroughness of an academically trained historian, rather than the superficial and slipshod approach of so many journalists, both British and Italian. Many who have written about Giorgia Meloni and the FdI have often made elementary mistakes, such as claiming Meloni was never in the MSI, or that she never publicly praised Mussolini (Broder points out that she did in an interview with French television in 1996).

When it comes to foreign policy, Giorgia Meloni has been completely in line with the Nato narrative about 'plucky little' Ukraine

Should fascism be defined as an ideology that is uniquely anti-Semitic? David Broder has a better approach: he looks at actual practice



But I have to take issue with some of his more general conclusions. First and foremost, I do not think the FdI is a "post-fascist" party; I would describe it as fascist or perhaps neo-fascist. The fact that FdI does not seek to restore the dictatorship of 1922-45 is irrelevant to such a definition. The MSI's long-standing official position was that it would "neither restore nor renege on" Mussolini's regime. The one party amongst the triad of MSI, AN and FdI that seemed to be moving towards a genuinely "post-fascist" position was the AN under the leadership of Gianfranco Fini, but Fini was regarded with increasing suspicion by many of his members by 2009, and was viewed as an absolute traitor to the fascist cause by the hard-core group that set up FdI in 2012.

There have been various public instances of this hostile attitude towards Fini being displayed by Meloni and her close associates, but it became most apparent at Pino Rauti's funeral in November 2012, a few weeks before the foundation of the FdI in December 2012. As many readers will be unfamiliar with the conflicting strands within Italian neo-fascism, I will explain Rauti's role within the MSI, before quoting Broder's account of his funeral.

Rauti (1926-2012) - a veteran of Mussolini's Repubblica Sociale Italiana, although briefly MSI leader in 1990-91 - was for much of his life so extreme a neo-fascist that he found the MSI's relative moderation too much to bear, leaving it in 1957 to lead the terrorist organisation Ordine Nuovo, before rejoining in 1959, when the more extreme Giorgio Almirante, the erstwhile editor of the notorious *La Difesa della Razza* from 1938, became leader. Rauti left again in 1995, in protest against Fini's 'Fiuggi turn' to form the Movimento

Sociale Fiamma Tricolore (a sort of continuity MSI), although he was in due course expelled from this splinter group by younger, even more extreme leaders. Broder points out:

Hundreds of militants waved Rauti goodbye with fascist salutes. But it was the attendance of Gianfranco Fini that made the most headlines. As the president of the Chamber of Deputies [Fini] arrived at Rome's Basilica di San Marco, dozens of mourners began to shout 'Fuck off' and 'Get lost'. While Rauti and Fini had been *camerati* in the MSI for some two decades, the Alleanza Nazionale founder had a dismal reputation amongst those who opposed his many concessions to anti-fascism. This was surely the reason why the shouting and spitting also included shouts of 'Badoglio', the ultimate insult for someone from this political tradition. The name refers to the marshal who fought in Mussolini's wars, only then to break with him in July 1943, abandoning the Nazi ally and siding with the Anglo-Americans (pp147-48).

Whilst both Meloni and Ignazio La Russa - a co-founder of the FdI in 2012 and president of the Italian Senate since October 2022 - were present on this occasion, Broder does not indicate whether or not they participated in the heckling. Rauti's daughter, Isabella - who will not hear a word against her Nazi collaborator and terrorist father - is now one of the FdI's leading parliamentarians, having beaten the PD's Emmanuele Fiano (the son of a Jewish holocaust survivor, who in 2017 had unsuccessfully attempted to tighten the Italian law against

What we fight for

fascist apologism) in September 2022. Readers may perhaps be a little sceptical that the choice of such a candidate in a direct contest with Fiano proves that the FdI is a 'post-fascist' party.

Whatever moral judgement one makes about Fini, who was politically marginalised in the decade after the incident at Rauti's funeral, he did genuinely turn his back on the fascist tradition. In a speech to the Azione Giovani youth group in September 2008, he actually said that "the men of the resistance were on the right side; those of Salò on the wrong one", and that "the Italian right, and especially the young, must unambiguously say loud and clear that they identify with the values of our constitution" and "fully identify with anti-fascist values" (p109). Many in the audience were shocked, and heckled Fini.

As Broder points out, Meloni, who had been the leader of Azione Giovani since 2004, but by 2008 was also youth minister in Berlusconi's last government, responded with an ambiguous open letter, including phrases like "Enough about fascism and anti-fascism". It is worth mentioning that when this year, on the eve of April 25 (Liberation Day - the anniversary of the anti-fascist uprising by the Italian resistance in 1945), Fini called on her to make a statement along the lines of his 2008 one, she responded with a very ambiguous statement in *Corriere della Sera*, which avoided using the word 'anti-fascism', and focused on the alleged crimes of the resistance, whether real or imagined, while some of her leading FdI cronies made poisonous off-the-record comments about Fini.

Anti-Semitism

Even if one leaves to one side the extent to which the FdI has retreated from Fini's post-fascism back into a traditional neo-fascist bunker in relation to the events of 1943-45, there was another issue, which in my view defines Meloni's world view as neo-fascist, or even neo-Nazi. This is her consistent use of the 'great replacement theory', or as she normally calls it '*Sostituzione Etnica*' (ethnic substitution).

It is true that she is very well aware of its negative connotations outside Italy, ever since its notorious

use by both the Norwegian terrorist, Anders Breivik, and the Christchurch Mosque mass murderer, Brenton Tarrant, who entitled his manifesto 'The great replacement'. Therefore Meloni has made no reference to it since becoming prime minister, and indeed was somewhat annoyed when her brother-in-law, Francesco Lollobrigida (a distant relation of the late film star!), whom she has appointed agriculture minister, made a public reference to it, which got picked up by foreign media.

Nonetheless, not only did she refer to it in the early days of the FdI, but was still using it as the climax of a public speech she made a few days before the 2022 general election. Whilst attacks on immigrants and immigration are the stock in trade of rightwing politicians all over the world, as they seek to direct the anger of the indigenous working class against a 'foreign' scapegoat rather than against employers or the ruling class as a whole, the 'great replacement theory' is qualitatively different. Its essence - very rarely publicly stated in so many words (except by the Charlottesville neo-Nazis, who chanted, "The Jews will not replace us!") - is that the Jews are engaged in a conspiracy to replace white Christian Europeans with blacks and/or Muslims.

I would argue that this is really an updating of Hitler's world view, in which the Jews, whether capitalist or communist, are engaged in a conspiracy against the Aryans, making use of various 'inferior' races, such as the Slavs or very occasionally - since *Mein Kampf* was written in the mid-1920s - blacks, as their tools. Most of the time, Meloni and her associates use euphemisms like 'international finance', 'big capital', 'international elite' and so forth, but from time to time she lets the anti-Semitic cat out of the bag. For example, in her Facebook post of March 7 2017 she wrote that "Soros, the greatest financial speculator in the world, finances the invasion of Europe by illegal immigrants", and two years later, on March 24 2019, she told her followers on Facebook:

Soros, the financial speculator who sustains the NGOs to favour mass immigration into Europe and destroy the nation-states, has just officially financed Emma

Bonino's Party, +Europa, with €200,000. Soros and great finance have taken to the field for the next European elections: they have chosen the left as their allies, and us *sovranisti* ('sovereinists') as their enemies. The FdI can be proud of this: keep the money of the *usurers* - our strength is the Italian people.¹

Whilst Broder does point out that Meloni is "a propagator of anti-Soros conspiracy theories" (p159) and quotes a number of Meloni tweets - such as one attacking Soros as the "financier who supports and finances mass immigration and the plan for ethnic substitution worldwide" (January 8 2018, quoted on p45) - he does not actually home in on her anti-Semitism, even to the limited extent of the cautious liberal political scientists, Salvatore Vassallo and Rinaldo Vignati, who suggest that the term 'usurer' "if used in relation to somebody of Jewish origin such as Soros... echoes a rooted anti-Semitic stereotype"².

Broder quite rightly illustrates the rather demented character of Meloni's ranting at the June 2022 election rally of the Spanish far-right party VOX:

Gender ideology pursues not the much vaunted fight against discrimination, or the overcoming of male-female differences: no, the undeclared, but tragically obvious, aim is the disappearance of women and the end of maternity (p158).

However, her attacks on 'the LGBT lobby' are really only a secondary strand in her conspiratorial world view.

Another area on which I differ with Broder is his analysis of the 2022 general election campaign.³ He rightly points out that "the overall rightwing coalition only increased its vote by 150,000, compared to four years previously" and argues, with a certain amount of justification, that "the main factors" in the FdI's success were "shifts within the rightwing coalition, together with the collapse of the Five Star Movement" (p146).

But he ignores the important role played by the suicidal electoral strategy of the Partito Democratico (PD), which, by refusing to make a deal with Five Star, handed the vast majority of the first-past-the-post constituencies (roughly one third of the total, two thirds being allocated by PR) to Meloni on a plate. One might have thought that an historian would have been mindful of the precedents - the division between socialists and communists in Italy in the early 1920s and Germany in the early 1930s.

I realise that some readers may feel that an electoral pact centred around the PD and M5S (ie, what were at that stage a centrist, neoliberal party and a vaguely leftist populist party) would have been merely a sort of 'popular front' and not the classical 'united front' of workers' parties against fascism advocated by Trotsky and other early 20th century Marxists. However, as somebody who has lived eight months in a country with this monster as prime minister, I think it would have been worthwhile to try and stop the FdI via the ballot box ●

Toby Abse

Notes

1. These posts are cited in S Vassallo and R Vignati *Fratelli di Giorgia: il partito della destra nazionale-conservatore* (Bologna 2023, pp207-08). This is a book written by two Italian political scientists from a liberal perspective that covers some of the same ground as Broder.
2. S Vassallo and R Vignati *op cit* p208.
3. I realise that, as Broder himself admits, "Finishing the book overlapped with the campaign itself" (pxvi), so this criticism may be slightly unfair.

Fighting fund

Difficult times

As I write, on the very last day of May's fighting fund appeal, I'm afraid I have to inform readers that once again we've fallen quite a bit short of our monthly target of £2,250.

In fact, in spite of what we received over the last week, the total for this month has once again not even reached £2K. That means that our supporters really do need to help us out over the immediate period - otherwise we could be falling into some very difficult times.

But let me start by thanking all this week's donors - not least RG (£100) and BK (£50) for their bank transfers/standing orders. Also contributing in that way were GT (£35), JT (£25), DG (£20), another DG (£14), plus VP and MD (£10 each). Then there were those regular PayPal donations from TB (£60), DB (£50) and AR (£5), while comrades LM (£20) and Hassan (£5) made their usual cash donations.

But all that only came to £404, taking the final total for May to

just £1,959 - in other words, almost exactly £300 short of target.

So now, both collectively and individually, we really have to think about what we can do to rectify things. First, I would ask all current supporters to consider upping their contributions, but - more importantly - to contact all *Weekly Worker* readers and sympathisers they know to make a donation or - better still - take out a standing order (sort code 30-99-64, account number 00744310). Just a dozen or so comrades responding positively would make a huge difference.

Do your best to make sure that over the rest of the year we regularly break through that £2,250 barrier. Please do your best to get more comrades to help us out, starting with our June fighting fund ●

Robbie Rix

Fill in a standing order form (back page), donate via our website, or send cheques, payable to *Weekly Worker*

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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weekly Worker

State seeks to limit legal arguments of defendants

Defending the right to oppress

Ian Spencer gives his take on the trial of the Shenstone Six after their militant protest against Elbit Systems

Elbit Systems is Israel's largest arms manufacturer, with a presence around the world. It has an extensive catalogue of offensive weapons and surveillance hardware, which has been deployed in the killing of Palestinians, including children.¹ These war crimes are part of an Israeli government policy of ethnic cleansing the Arab population of Palestine.² In recent years, Elbit has been the subject of divestment by companies and pension funds in Norway, Denmark and Sweden, among others.³

UAV in Shenstone, Staffordshire, make engines for armed drones and is a company owned partly by Elbit. It has been the target of campaigns by Palestinian solidarity activists, particularly Palestine Action. Two years ago, Tony Greenstein, a founding member of the Palestine Solidarity Movement, went with comrades from Palestine Action to draw attention to the company's murderous activities, but was arrested, detained and has recently been tried at Wolverhampton Crown Court for "conspiracy to cause criminal damage". He was convicted by a majority verdict, along with Ibrahim Samadi. Alex Waters and Jeremy Parker were convicted unanimously. Bethany Clowackin pleaded guilty before the trial began and the jury failed to reach a verdict on Helen Caney.⁴ Those convicted have been warned that they face custodial sentences.

It is important to note just how effective Palestine Action has been. In 2022, Elbit Systems lost two lucrative contracts for the Royal Navy, arguably due to the attention drawn to the repressive use of their systems in Gaza.⁵ Palestine Action activists have also previously been acquitted of conspiracy to commit criminal damage at Southwark Crown Court in 2022. The five defendants had thrown red paint, to symbolise the blood on the hands of Elbit Systems, during their picket of the London HQ in October 2020.⁶

Until recently, the defence of 'lawful excuse' has been employed to defend people charged with criminal damage. The legal argument is that the law against criminal damage should not be so pervasive as to prevent another legal right - that of protest. However, in the case of the Shenstone Six, judge Michael Chambers had from the outset prevented the defendants from including their motives as part of their defence - or including anything other than a statement of the 'facts'. However, the fact that the drones were being produced in order to commit war crimes was ruled inadmissible, thereby excluding the defence of the necessity to prevent a greater crime.

The defence of the Colston Four followed that of those tried for the successful removal of the statue of the slave trader, Edward Colston, to the depths of the Bristol docks. They argued that the damage to the statue was lawful because it was a proportionate exercise of the right to protest, and the prosecution was a disproportionate interference



No explanations allowed to juries

with the right to protest under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). This has led to unease in the ruling class about the irksome tendency of working people to make use of rights which they have won over the years. One consequence of the acquittal was that home secretary Suella Braverman referred to the court of appeal the question of whether the ECHR could be used as a defence in future, making it less likely that a similar defence could be successfully mounted.⁷

Conscience

In 1670, the 'Bushel case' supposedly established the independence of the jury from coercion by judges. Edward Bushel was a member of the jury in the trial of William Penn and William Mead. He and the rest of the jurors refused to bring the expected guilty verdict of 'unlawful assembly' against two Quakers, though the jury were held without food, water or heat for two days.

The jury members were fined, and Bushel refused to pay. Following a writ of *habeas corpus*, the ruling was that a jury could not be punished simply on account of the verdict it returned and that it "established the right of juries to give their verdict according to their convictions". The decision is commemorated at the Old Bailey by a plaque.

Now, it would seem, merely reminding a jury of their right to reach a verdict according to one's

conscience can lead to arrest. In March 2023, judge Silas Reid ordered the arrest of retired social worker Trudi Warner for holding up a placard saying, "Jurors you have an absolute right to acquit a defendant according to your conscience", while outside a trial of three Insulate Britain activists. The case was subsequently referred to the attorney general.⁸

The basis for what some legislators regard as 'perverse acquittals' has a distinguished history. In 1984, civil servant Clive Ponting revealed official secrets about the sinking of the Argentine warship, General Belgrano. He was acquitted, despite the judge directing the jury to find him guilty, because, the defence argued, that the secret was revealed to a member of parliament, Tam Dalyell, and it was in the public interest that it should become known by one and all. The Official Secrets Act was subsequently amended to prevent such a defence in the future.

It is not as if the importance of civil disobedience is not acknowledged (depending on the situation, of course). As Lord Hoffman put it,

My lords, civil disobedience on conscientious grounds has a long and honourable history in this country. People who break the law to affirm their belief in the injustice of a law or government action are sometimes vindicated by history. The suffragettes are an example which comes

immediately to mind. It is the mark of a civilised community that it can accommodate protests and demonstrations of this kind.⁹

Of course, the noble Lord goes on to apply a series of caveats and exclusions which assert that civil disobedience is acceptable *providing it stays within acceptable perimeters*.

The increasing pressure on the judiciary to prevent protest, the development of laws such as the Public Order Act 2023 and the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (2022) and others strongly suggest that the state is afraid - but of what? Even the recent increase in industrial action does not suggest that the ruling class faces an immediate threat. Most of the trade unions have continued to police themselves and employ the kinds of action that are easily contained within the framework of law, while calls for the overthrow of capitalism are unheard in union circles.

While Palestine Action has caused considerable inconvenience to Elbit and the state of Israel, its actions could have been contained by existing law. However, perhaps the fact that the actions of Israel are becoming more transparently brutal and juries are less likely to regard Elbit as the victim of criminal action means that something has to be done. It is always worth remembering that the struggle against apartheid, at least in Britain, was fairly muted until the 1980s.

The weaponisation of anti-Semitism in the UK against the left and its equation with criticism of Israel has, paradoxically, made the struggle of the Palestinian people more visible. It has taken place in the context of increasing opposition, within Israel, about the way the law has become explicitly racist and is therefore moving away from 'law' in the bourgeois sense. For law to be effective as ideology, it must at least appear to correspond to reality and at least appear to apply to universal bearers of rights: ie, all citizens.

Could it be that capitalism, in decline, is finding it harder to maintain the superficial appearance of the impartiality of law and is developing an unease regarding any form of protest? The arrest of Republic protestors on the eve of the coronation of Charles Windsor, despite weeks of negotiations with the police, appears to be an act of weakness rather than strength and has doubled the membership of Republic. Right now capitalism is not maintained by

force in the first instance. Commodity fetishism and the reserve army of labour are both much more effective for containing a restive proletariat. Exploitation must at least seem to be a natural feature of society.

While we continue to exist in a condition where there is no viable alternative to capitalism, the means by which protest can be expressed takes an individual form, on the one hand - often valiant, but isolated and easily defeated. On the other hand, another form it can take - as we saw in the terminal decline of the USSR and increasingly today throughout the advanced capitalist countries - is that people just work badly. As the social contract of capitalism is violated by an uneasy bourgeoisie, which becomes authoritarian and intolerant of dissent, so the proletariat probes the defences of the labour contract by reducing the quality of work to match the level of one's pay.

Sentencing

The five defendants will be sentenced at Wolverhampton Crown Court on Monday June 26 at about 10am. I will be there to protest, to bear witness and hopefully report on the events.

We need to draw a distinction between direct action which undermines the interests of workers and that which is squarely directed at the actions of the ruling class. The case of the Shenstone Six is that of the latter. We also need to engage with organisations whose tactics we might be critical of, but whose aims we may support in a qualified way.

The means by which the proletariat realises its historical mission will probably continue to surprise the most advanced cadres of any organisation ●

Notes

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