

# weekly **worker**



**Morning Star's CPB pre-congress discussion begins. Bureaucratic, not democratic, centralism rules**

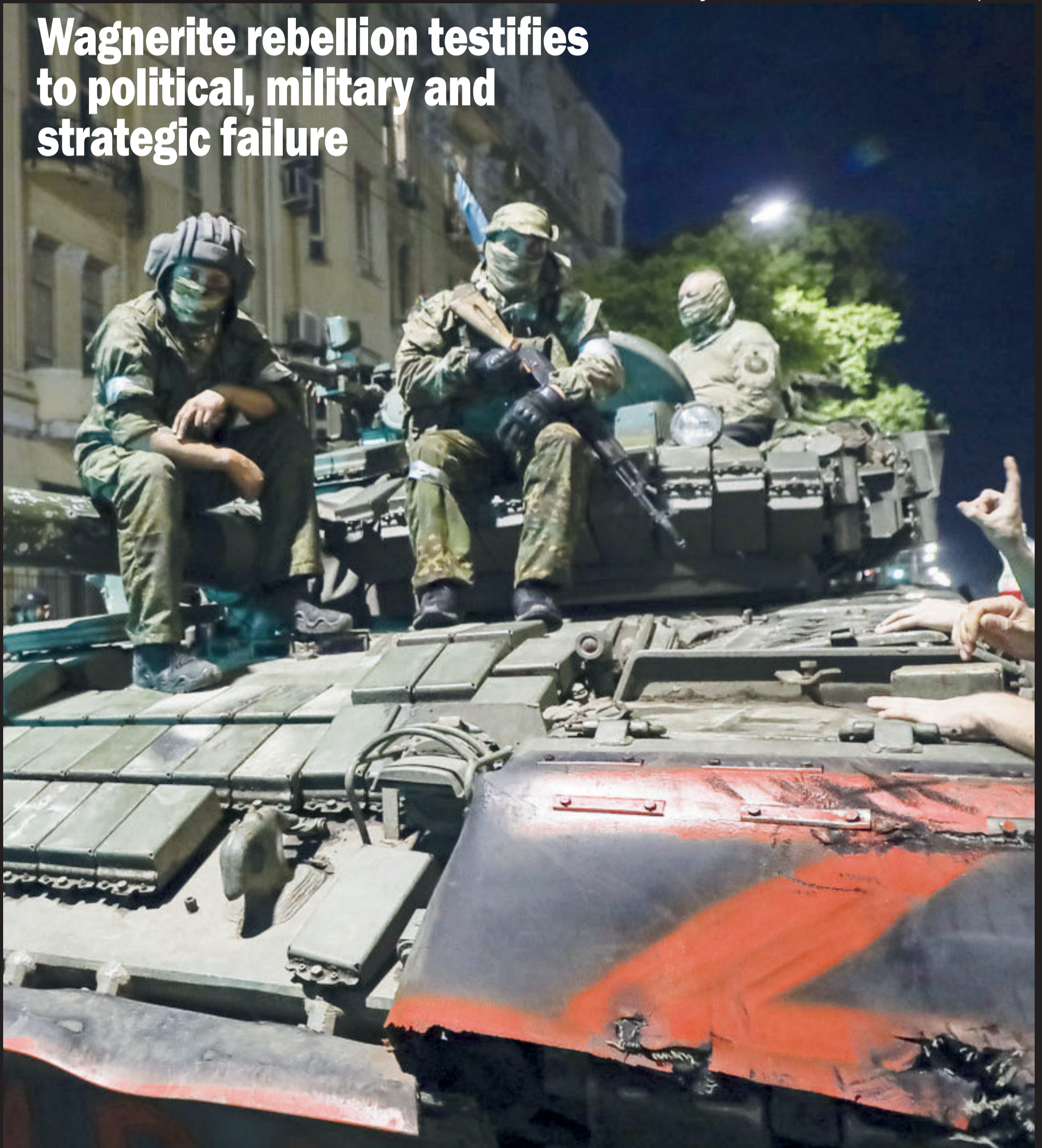
- Letters and debate
- CPGB aggregate
- Media and disasters
- Russia's Zhenotdel

No 1449 June 29 2023

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10

## Wagnerite rebellion testifies to political, military and strategic failure



## LETTERS



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

## Beacon

I'm amazed - you guys are really scientific socialist/communist/Marxist thinkers, in my opinion - unlike all the confessional political sects who stain the name of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and so on.

In theory, I mean. In practice, to be honest, I don't think you're going to make it - but nobody did in a long time, so it's not really your fault maybe. Anyway, you're working very hard and I think your paper is a beacon of light in a very dark world.

In fact, I'd like to congratulate (just to pick one - but I think you have a lot of amazing articles on every issue) Kevin Bean on his article about the surge of strikes and how the trade union leadership is going to spoil things, obviously ('A year of strikes', June 22).

But the article's even better when he gives his opinion on the sectarians: the Socialist Workers Party (Cliff's morons), the Socialist Party in England and Wales (Taaffe's morons) and *Socialist Appeal* (Grant's/Woods' morons); and, of course, the failings of the hopeless Labour left: in fact I think the Labour left got that name mainly because they left Starmer to take over the Labour Party, while doing absolutely nothing.

This part, for instance, is spot on: "*Socialist Appeal* wants to, needs to, keep its recruits excited. Very excited. So what we have is the upturn in strikes painted, yet again, as a prelude to an acute social crisis and the outbreak of social revolution. The danger is, of course, that the false perspectives of today lead to burnout and demoralisation tomorrow."

I was a teenager at the beginning of the 1990s in my home town in Spain, and when I was in high school and university I was a student union organiser. At that time, the old Spanish section of Militant got a huge grip on the Spanish student movement and I saw with my own eyes as they burnt and demoralised a whole generation of the Spanish youth. But that was my generation; the current generation have been spoiled by Mandel's morons (if you know anything about Podemos, the Spanish version of the Greek Syriza. That was what they did - they spoiled a huge opportunity.

I personally know Allan Woods very well - he was the guy who Ted Grant sent to Spain in the 70s, 80s and 90s, where he set up inside the Socialist - Spanish Labour - Youth and the *Nuevo Claridad* paper (the Spanish *Militant*). I worked alongside him a lot of times.

What a political genius! He wrote the other day - just before the Wagner group coup - that Russia was going to win the Ukrainian war; that's how I know Ukraine is going to win it! Don't get me wrong: it's not that I want any of them to win this imperialist proxy war; it's just that I know that with every perspective Allan Woods makes just the opposite happens. For instance, at the end of the 80s he predicted that it was impossible for the Soviet Union to go back to capitalism (I think you know how that turned out).

He also predicted at the beginning of the 90s that it was impossible for the ruling class in South Africa to find a way out of the situation in a Spanish 70s transition style: it would be "apartheid or socialism" ... I think you know how that turned out too. At the end of the 90s he predicted also that the world socialist revolution

would happen "before the turn of the century ..."

For god's sake ... it would be funny if it wasn't so tragic. But, you know, sometimes tragedy and comedy mix very well together in a very Shakespearian way.

**Nacho Diaz**  
email

## Decline?

I thank Frank Kavanagh for his comments (Letters, June 15). However, I don't understand what he means when he says he disagrees with me that "the change in composition of capital won't stop the decline from a productive to a service form of capitalism".

I don't understand what "decline" means in this context. On the contrary, I argued, as far back as the early 1980s, that the change from a manufacturing economy to a service industry economy was inevitable - as significant as the change from a largely agricultural economy to a manufacturing economy in the 19th century. As Marx described, that change largely arose because industrial capital developed in the towns and cities, and increasingly demanded agricultural commodities as food and raw material. The still largely feudal/peasant agriculture could not supply this and in order to do so was despoiling the soil. It's only when capital then takes hold of agriculture to deal with that problem - Lenin describes the process in *The development of capitalism in Russia* - that the very methods (but also the products) of industrial capital enable agricultural production to rise substantially, sending large numbers off the land and into the towns.

But it is the same huge rise in productivity which frees industrial workers too. Marx notes that the rise in productivity in the 19th century led to a large rise in the number of domestic servants employed by the bourgeoisie. In Marx's day, services were almost entirely comprised of individual workers, who exchanged their labour with revenue rather than capital, and so by Marx's definition they were 'unproductive': ie, not productive of surplus value/capital, though they were productive of new value (as he says, otherwise why would anyone exchange an equal value for them?). But that is not at all the case today. Teachers, health and social workers, etc all exchange their labour with capital, albeit state capital, which as Marx and Engels describe in *Anti-Dühring*, is the most mature form of capital. Further huge numbers are employed by media companies, restaurants and so on.

So, far from this being a "decline", it is a further rational development - made possible by the fact that this permits, as Marx describes it in *The Grundrisse*, the "civilising mission of capital". As productivity rises massively in manufacturing, requiring less and less labour per unit of output, so capital looks to produce an ever-expanding range of use-values, including services, by which to employ labour, extract surplus value, and realise that surplus value via the sale of those services.

If I have misunderstood Frank's point, perhaps he could clarify what he meant.

**Arthur Bough**  
email

## Eco-zealots

Oil and gas workers are facing their 'Thatcher pit closure moment' - this time from so-called Labour. A new assault as monumental and destructive as that faced by the miners and our communities in 1984-85 and 92-93 is ready in public view waiting for an election victory

for Labour to let it loose. This will ban all new oil and gas licences and effectively close the bulk (probably 75% or more) of Britain's fuel and power industry.

The stupidity of Just Stop Oil's slogan was plain for even the most technologically illiterate to see, having become Britain's most unpopular organisation. But Starmer, under the direction of the increasingly unhinged Ed Miliband, sees not the writing the wall from this, but the central piece of Labour's manifesto. The sheer arrogance of dropping this upon almost 200,000 workers and their families and communities - 'No ifs, no buts: we're closing you down.' The death-defying illogic of the plan (hypocrisy, virtue signalling - call it what you will) is water off a duck's back. This is rather like telling someone to jump off a high roof, although we don't know how to catch you yet - something will turn up before you hit the floor. Nothing - absolutely nothing - will work without oil: not the turbines, not the manufacture of the blades, not their transportation on land and rail and sea. The same is true of coal, of course, as I have said many, many times - there ain't no new steel without coal; no renewables exist without steel and coal.

Gas is between 40% and 50% of the electricity grid. Not to mention people's heating and cooking, and specialist industrial systems. So if we stop mining gas and oil and making new steel, have we reached a net-zero wonderland, where life goes on just the same without them? Of course not. That's not in the plan - we will still use coal or its produce, still use gas and still use oil, or the country and its infrastructure and every aspect of its existence would come to an end. Someone somewhere else, will mine or produce it and import it all here, having produced the emissions and sent them skyward just the same. The difference is, the price of these extracts and goods will have risen astronomically.

If we look at the example of coal, because Thatcher and Major took 180 million tonnes of coal off the market, the price of coal is now almost 400% higher since 2013. So, with oil and gas, taking about 800,000 gallons off the market will do what? Send the prices not just of oil and gas, but literally everything, beyond the reach of most of the working class population of this island. But Miliband declares that, by letting loose a plague of new, on-land wind turbines, energy prices will come down. The fool - you can't replace oil with wind energy unless you fit sails to your cars and lorries and make international aviation airships or gliders. You can't replace gas with wind energy - the grid cannot work off wind.

He must surely know that the apparent 'cheap' cost of wind is because it is heavily subsidised by a two-thirds fossil fuel tax on coal, oil and gas, steel, cement, glass, etc. Kill the geese that lay the golden eggs and there will be massively increased energy prices or a rise in taxation to pay for them. But Miliband and co know this, of course. The point is to ensure oil and gas prices rise, so fuel at the pump and air travel is priced out of the range of the ordinary Joe Soap and his family. You will not go abroad for holidays, you will not drive a car, you will stay local, you will not use gas boilers. But eco-zealots - like religious fanatics, given vision by grace of God - will have no truck with civil rights and economic liberty. No, they have the word of God and Miliband is their

prophet.

Oil and gas workers or their unions need to stop the game of pat-a-cake with Labour and get serious. The workers must get ready to fight as furiously as the miners did to stop this mass destruction of jobs and working class lifestyles and incomes. Defend coal, oil and gas, and workers' living standards.

**David John Douglass**  
South Shields

## No chattel

The Labour Party clearly regards a wife as the chattel of her husband, but the rest of us simply rejoice that the activist, Laura Alvarez, is participating in the search for a candidate for the seat of Holborn and St Pancras, which is presently occupied by Keir Starmer.

As a Commonwealth citizen who is not serving a term of imprisonment in the United Kingdom or in the Republic of Ireland, Julian Assange is eligible to contest a British general election. He should do so in this case, and he should be elected. Likewise, Islington North should return its member of parliament since 1983 - the husband of Ms Alvarez, Jeremy Corbyn.

**David Lindsay**  
Lanchester

## Too many people

So Miriam Cates, the rightwing Tory MP who spoke at the National Conservatism conference, wants white female graduates to have more kids. This is in spite of Tory government policies, which make it near-on impossible for young couples in London and other major cities to afford to rent or buy a home big enough to raise a family.

At the same time Cates opposes the two-child benefit limit for those in receipt of universal credit. Such a policy was introduced by David Cameron's coalition government in order to stop women from being a baby factory at the state's expense. Call me old-fashioned, but Marxists should support this two-child policy, which encourages people in receipt

of benefits to not have more than two kids.

Marxists support female graduates having fewer kids. There are too many people in the world, and a shortage of workers - all other things being equal - should lead to a rise in wages. As far as there being too many people in the world, I'm with the Greens here who want the population of the UK to be reduced to just 25 million and of the world to just three billion by the year 2100.

The reasoning for this comes from the need to fight climate change. One statistic says it all - if the average Chinese had the same standard of living as the average American, we would require the resources of four planets. It is therefore disappointing that the Chinese government has recently replaced its one-child policy with a three-child policy. Similarly, it is disappointing that the Nigerian government has not introduced a one-child policy - the population of Nigeria is expected to grow from its current 180 million to 300 million by the year 2050.

Many Marxists oppose population control by bringing up the writings of Karl Marx about the ideas of reverend Thomas Malthus, who wrote about the problems of people having lots of kids. Yet, in the early 20th century, Marxists - especially in America and the UK - fought for a health service which introduced free birth control and family planning. At the same time, Marxists call for free safe abortion on demand - the CPGB's slogan being: "As early as possible, as late as necessary".

The speakers at the National Conservatism conference showed that they are climate-change deniers who want women, especially graduates, to have more and more kids. In opposition to Miriam Cates, Marxists believe that women having fewer kids is a vital policy, when it comes to the battles against climate change and falling wages.

**John Smithee**  
Cambridgeshire

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday July 2 5pm

**A week in politics - political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion**

Use this link to join meeting:  
[communistparty.co.uk/ocf-register](http://communistparty.co.uk/ocf-register)

Organised by CPGB: [communistparty.co.uk](http://communistparty.co.uk) and  
Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](http://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk)  
For further information, email Stan Keable at  
[Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk)

A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: [youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain](https://youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain)

# AGGREGATE

# ACTION



Lenin's paper *Iskra*: illegal but free

# Paradoxes of speech

Left no-platforming plays straight into the hands of the right. The right pretends to champion free speech and in turn no-platforms the left. **Gaby Rubin** reports on the June 25 CPGB aggregate

Last Sunday CPGB members and invited supporters met online for an aggregate. The meeting was divided into two parts: first, Mike Macnair introduced a session on the centrality of freedom of speech, which was followed by a second session on organisational matters.

Comrade Macnair began by pointing out that the Tory Party insists that it stands for free speech. It has appointed a free speech tsar. In reality, though, it acts to suppress unacceptable points of view through culture war campaigns conducted by the advertising-funded media. He discussed four areas where the closing down of free speech can be clearly seen.

First was what he called "knavery and folly". Comrade Macnair gave the example of gender-critical feminists, such as Dr Kathleen Stock, who lend themselves to reactionary ideology - as did anti-pornography campaigners such as Andrea Dworkin in the 1970s, who, in effect, went on to serve as a cover for censorship and religious bigotry. What these gender-critical feminists do today is strengthen those who will eventually censor them.

He then brought up the capitalist media's version of heckling and barracking. It is used to drown out dangerous ideas. Meanwhile, the internet, although originally lauded as a haven of free speech for everyone, has also become a platform for those with the most money.

How do we combat these factors? In the long run it is necessary that the mass of the working class supports the notion that "This person/group does not speak for me". Unfortunately, however, the current left press is not exactly doing a good job. Take the *Morning Star*, which has to tread carefully due to its relationships with China and the trade union and labour bureaucracy. Meanwhile the papers of the various confessional sects are little better than advertising sheets. Except that, often, they are even more boring.

Many of the left takes it as axiomatic that fascists must be denied free speech through no-platforming. This has gone from being a tactic to a principle, one that has been taken over by the Tories and the rightwing media and turned against the left - the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' big lie being the most glaring example.

The next area comrade Macnair pointed to was defamation. An example he gave was George Galloway being libelled by *The Daily*

*Telegraph* at the outbreak of the Iraq war - the newspaper accused him of being in the pay of Saddam Hussein, for which he was eventually paid damages. But it is clear that such allegations are an attempt to silence awkward voices.

## Discussion

A whole number of comrades joined the discussion. Bob Paul raised the targeting of the most vulnerable sections in society by a capitalist media which uses them as scapegoats. Peter Manson criticised the SWP, who want to silence fascists so that ordinary people will not be infected by their ideas. He gave the example of Nick Griffin of the British National Party on the BBC's *Question time* in 2009. Griffin was demolished, in particular by Bonnie Greer. As a result, the BNP split and split again and fell into total irrelevance.

Scott Evans brought up the question of disassociation, when members of a left group dare to publicly disagree with the sect's line. Jim Nelson spoke about the lengths the state will go to in order to limit freedom of speech - giving the example of Julian Assange and the "stitching up" of his case.

Carla Roberts highlighted the attack on the jury system in the courts. For her part, Anne McShane gave the example of migrants being burned out of their living quarters in Ireland. How do we deal with people publicly advocating such actions? Another example is the harassment of women going into abortion clinics. Is this freedom of speech, she asked?

Comrade Macnair came back in to stress that what the left had done with its insistence on no-platforming was to disable itself - the need is for open and transparent discussion. As for the Assange case, it was not only about Julian Assange himself, but also about intimidating journalists and others from 'going too far' in what they write. With respect to juries, he said, judges have been trying to limit their rights for centuries. Responding to comrade McShane, he stated that countering those who threaten violence by threatening them in the same way can be acceptable.

Jack Conrad said that freedom of speech is an essential weapon in the class war. But he agreed that we certainly do not discount the use of violence, which the class enemy is certainly prepared to use as necessary. Stan Keable said that if others try to prevent our free speech we must insist on that right - we must not allow ourselves to be silenced.

Farzad Kamangar spoke out against the promotion of "safe spaces" by sections of the left. Many who feel threatened support that concept, without realising the damage done to free speech as a result. In reality this is the same argument that is used in the Labour Party, when it comes to so-called 'anti-Semitism': any criticism of Israel can be viewed as anti-Semitic.

In his response, comrade Macnair said our principle should be unrestricted freedom of speech. He asked, therefore, if conditions of civil war inevitably imply the suppression of speech. Giving the example of British Union of Fascists march on Cable Street in 1936, he stressed that self-defence is, of course, perfectly justified, but it was a tactical issue whether the far right should be opposed by violence or open debate, depending on the circumstances.

## Organisation

After a short break, various questions of organisation were discussed.

Comrade Conrad stated that CPGB finances were currently in good shape. He gave the example of our recent publication of *The little red climate book* - we must be in a position to take such initiatives as and when necessary. Labour Party Marxists finances were similarly healthy, reported Stan Keable, while Peter Manson added that the *Weekly Worker* is also in good shape - thanks to the ongoing support of so many of our readers, of course.

Following what amounted to a question and answer session, the agenda turned to the question of this year's Communist University, to be held in central London this August. Most of the speakers have now been confirmed. As in previous years, there will be three sessions a day.

The use of the 'hybrid form' (online as well as in-person) posed some problems last year, so this year online sessions will hopefully be limited to those who are unable to attend in person, either because of long-distance travel or health problems. Obviously all CPGB members should make every effort to attend in person.

Finally the CPGB's annual fundraising drive, the Summer Offensive, was launched. The campaign will close on the final day of CU, when hopefully the target of £20,000 will have been raised and greatly surpassed. Comrades attending the aggregate gave pledges worth a total of £9,000 ●

## 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](http://www.facebook.com/marxismfest).

## NHS 75

**Saturday July 1, 10.15am to 4.30pm:** Rally, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Ending privatisation and the market in the NHS, rebuilding a publicly funded, publicly provided and publicly planned NHS. Speakers include NHS workers, union leaders and MPs. Organised by Socialist Health Association: [www.facebook.com/events/1679429559163887](http://www.facebook.com/events/1679429559163887).

## Women Chainmakers festival

**Saturday July 1, 11am to 6pm:** Family festival, Mary McArthur Gardens, Cradley Heath B64. Celebrate the 1910 women chainmakers' victorious 10-week strike against starvation wages. Entrance free. Organised by TUC Midlands: [www.tuc.org.uk/events/2023-tuc-women-chainmakers-festival](http://www.tuc.org.uk/events/2023-tuc-women-chainmakers-festival).

## NHS 75

**Wednesday July 5, 6.30pm:** Online rally to mark the 75th birthday of the NHS. Sadly there are hundreds of preventable and avoidable deaths every week, over 132,000 staffing vacancies and over seven million on waiting lists. Staff are striking to protect pay and conditions and to stand up for the NHS itself. Organised by Keep Our NHS Public and NHS Workers Say No: [www.facebook.com/events/962492601458279](http://www.facebook.com/events/962492601458279).

## 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](http://www.facebook.com/events/786834226285520).

## Durham Miners Gala

**Saturday July 8, 8am to 4pm:** Rally and labour movement festival, The Racecourse, Green Lane, Old Elvet, Durham DH1. Organised by Durham Miners Association: [www.facebook.com/events/1548202148922684](http://www.facebook.com/events/1548202148922684).

## Housing for need, not greed

**Saturday July 8:** Day of action, with events nationwide. Challenge the madness and unfairness of the housing market. Stop the demolition of social housing, provide affordable housing now. Organised by Housing Rebellion: [linktr.ee/housingrebellion](http://linktr.ee/housingrebellion).

## Ukraine: peace talks now!

**Saturday July 8:** Day of action. Nationwide protests just days before the Vilnius Nato conference promotes further escalation.

- Bath** 11.30am: Outside Bath Abbey, York Street, Bath BA1.
  - Bristol** 1pm: Cascade Steps, Bristol BS1.
  - Bromley** 2.30pm: Market Square, Bromley BR1.
  - Ealing** 12 noon: near Lloyds Bank, Ealing Broadway, London W5.
  - Glasgow** 2.30pm: in front of M&S, Argyle Street, Glasgow G2.
  - Lewisham** 3pm: Deptford High Street/Douglas Way, London SE8.
  - Newport, IoW** 12 noon: St Thomas Square, Newport PO30.
  - Preston** 2pm: Flag Market, Preston PR1.
  - Rochdale** 12 noon: Yorkshire Street, Rochdale, OL16.
  - Southampton** 12 noon: Bargate, Southampton SO14.
  - Truro** 11am: Boscawen Street, Truro TR1.
- Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [stopwar.org.uk/events/peace-talks-now-day-of-action-sat-8-july](http://stopwar.org.uk/events/peace-talks-now-day-of-action-sat-8-july).

## Socialists and the Labour Party

**Thursday July 13, 6.30pm:** Public meeting, Indian YMCA, 41 Fitzroy Square, London W1. The drastic rightward shift of Starmer's Labour after the left-leaning Corbyn years opens up questions of how socialists should relate to the Labour Party. Speakers include Emma Dent Coad and Lindsey German. Registration £5 (free). Organised by Counterfire: [www.facebook.com/events/607752401334314](http://www.facebook.com/events/607752401334314).

## Tolpuddle Martyrs festival

**Friday July 14 to Sunday July 16:** Annual commemoration festival, Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum, Dorchester Road, Tolpuddle DT2. Tickets £22.50 to £55. Organised by Tolpuddle Martyrs: [www.facebook.com/events/18459977675068](http://www.facebook.com/events/18459977675068).

## Say no to Yorkshire Patriots

**Saturday July 15, 12.30pm:** Counter-protest outside Brunswick shopping centre, Westborough, Scarborough YO11. Yorkshire Patriots is a fascist group that whips up hatred and intolerance, deflecting anger at the cost of living onto refugees and migrants. Organised by Stand up to Racism Scarborough: [www.facebook.com/events/774490770814131](http://www.facebook.com/events/774490770814131).

## Troublemakers at work

**Saturday July 29, 9.30am to 5pm:** Conference, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. Bringing together workers who have won improvements at work, taken strike action, and transformed weak unions into a strong voice for workers. Also those who want to win a pay rise, start a union or mobilise an existing union at work. Workshops and plenary sessions. Registration £10 (£5). Organised by Troublemakers At Work: [troublemakersatwork.com/conference-2023](http://troublemakersatwork.com/conference-2023).

## 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.

**MEDIA**

# Adriana and Titan

Instinct takes bourgeois journalism down tracks already laid a million times before. Paul Demarty contrasts the treatment given to two different maritime disasters



'The immigrant' (1917): Charlie Chaplin stars as the tramp coming to the United States, only to be charged with theft

In the early hours of June 14, a small fishing boat - the *Adriana* - capsized just off the Greek coast.

Its cargo was not fish, but human beings: some 750 or so souls, *en route* unofficially to Italy, had been packed onto the vessel in Tobruk four days earlier. The vessel had then lost power and, after bobbing around stranded for a while, sank. About 100 people were rescued; the others - packed like sardines into a boat with no safety equipment - are presumed dead. This makes it one of the worst disasters ever to have befallen a ship in that busy sea, and certainly the worst single event in the slow-motion disaster of cross-Mediterranean migration, which has claimed 27,000 lives since 2014.

Despite its grim toll, the sinking of the *Adriana* has barely rippled over the Anglophone press. *The Guardian* offered a few articles (no surprise there), and *The New Yorker* offered some column inches of its own - mostly on the role of the Greek coastguard in the tragedy. (Of course, it was a controversy in Greece itself, though mostly insofar as it impacted on the elections in that country over the weekend.)

A week later, disaster struck in a very different corner of the sea - the site, close to Newfoundland, of the wreck of the *Titanic*. The *Titanic* - a small submersible carrying a handful of tourists to see the legendarily ill-fated liner - lost contact suddenly. We now know, more or less, that what occurred was a catastrophic hull failure, the implosion of the sub and the reduction of the crew to a fine *paté*. We did not know this then, however, and there was a week when a relentless media circus covered the disaster, accompanied by a million memes and *bons mots* on social networks.

The discrepancy in the coverage has been widely noted by people of a broadly liberal or leftwing persuasion. On its face, it seems

pretty fishy (if you'll forgive me) that an ongoing humanitarian disaster is almost ignored, whereas a pretty farcical operational failure on an ultra-luxury tourist venture captures the world's attention for a week. Michael Chessum, in the *London Review of Books*, speaks for many, no doubt, when he explains it thus:

The mass drowning of migrants does not meet the media's criteria for a human-interest story, because the victims have been dehumanised. Centuries of racist conditioning have led us to this point, but there is a new strategy at work too. Donald Trump and Suella Braverman have an air of performative stupidity, and it comforts the liberal commentariat to believe that the far right's spell in power is a blip. But their project is deadly serious and for the long term.<sup>1</sup>

This is a perfectly standard leftwing account of what is going on. There is some value, however, in examining the question in a broader perspective. A certain picture is painted of the bourgeois media by this discrepancy, but the details matter. Is this all motivated by racism, or narrow pecuniary interests? Does the media follow public appetites, or create them?

The answer to both these questions, naturally, is 'yes'.

### Fool's errand

There are certain features of the *Titanic* story, to be sure, that give the thing an intrinsically dramatic feel. There is the ticking clock of the oxygen running out (or so we thought). There is also the hubris. Those aboard the *Titanic* may not have known it, but they were the subjects of a fascinating practical experiment in the psychology of the American bourgeoisie.

Most of them, of course, were

not Americans - British billionaires Hamish Harding and Shahzad Dawood, Dawood's son, Suleman, and the incurable *Titanic* obsessive and Frenchman Paul-Henri Nargeolet. Their leader, and the founder of the company that built the *Titanic*, was, however, about as American as it is possible to get: Stockton Rush. Not only is that a name that might have appeared in any John Ford western: it points to the remarkable fact that this man descended from not one, but two signatories to the 1776 declaration of independence: Richard Stockton and Benjamin Rush.

The nicest thing one could say about Rush's submersible is that it lacked the defects of the 1787 constitution brought about by the ringing declaration signed by his illustrious ancestors - inflexibility, rigidity and imperviousness to external pressure. Alas, he rather over-steered. The safety of the vessel was always doubtful. They cheated out on the material in the hull, and in any case selected carbon fibre, which tends to break when pressure is high. They used various cheap components sourced from consumer stores. At no point did they seem to grasp *just how far* beneath the sea their objective was, nor what Boyle's Law would do to a poorly constructed sub at that depth. Rush opted out of certifying the *Titanic* as safe at such depths, because safety measures were a brake on innovation.

There are no end of capitalists who cut costs in this way, but Rush was unlike them in exactly one sense: he refused to insulate himself from the consequences of his actions. He *really believed* in that sub, goddamnit, and he would pilot it down to the *Titanic* to prove it. It is this that makes the story tragic - or really tragicomic - rather than simply a study in callous, heedless evil, like the opioid crisis or the Hatfield rail crash; or, most relevantly, the Byford

Dolphin incident, in which a drip-drip of corporate neglect led to several deep-sea divers being explosively decompressed on a Norwegian oil rig (it is not something to Google if you are of a sensitive disposition). All these things are disasters born in the same way as the sinking of the *Adriana* - fourth or fifth-order effects of icy bureaucratic-capitalist rationality. There are no tragic heroes in these stories: only victims - the sacrifices demanded by human apparatuses of economic and political power that appear as if they were the Fates themselves.

Put another way, dead migrants is a 'dog bites man' story, and dead billionaires - smashed together into a bloody paste by their own stupidity - is 'man bites dog'. It is not merely that it is rare, rather than gloomily frequent, for such things to happen: it is that it *reverses* a background expectation exactly - that expectation being that the rest of us will suffer for the stupidity of our exploiters, never those exploiters themselves.

In these respects, the instincts of the bourgeois media run happily along tracks already built by a million previous stories of hubris - by no means all as absurd as that which brought these five gentlemen to their doom. There is, nonetheless, a big lie here, which is that the media *merely* follows such tracks, rather than making them to some extent. That is made clear by the *Adriana* story, and the previous calamities inflicted upon desperate migrants fleeing the chaos brought about by imperialist wars. We could imagine a 'human interest' angle here: homing in on one particular victim, their origin and hopes; or even the people smugglers who run these operations. *El País* gave us one such story - of a Turkish oil tanker captain who joined the search for survivors.<sup>2</sup>

There is clearly an element of racism involved, since those who die in such foreordained 'accidents'

overwhelmingly come from north Africa or the Middle East, and are subject to periodic moral panics about the assimilation or otherwise of Muslim immigrants into western European countries. Yet this is just a more acute form of a universal indifference to human suffering that is endemic to the activity of capital and to *Staatsraison*. The media conspire in the big lie, which is merely that the dynamics that propel people into such dangerous waters are something like forces of nature; the inevitable consequences are to be regretted in a wholly passive way, and at length forgotten. Only so many near-identical stories of unavoidable tragedy will ever cut through. But that is quite all right: through mechanisms like advertising, the media are bound to the interests of the capitalist class *in general*, and their standards of newsworthiness are therefore constrained by these interests.

Producing a countervailing media apparatus is no small thing. In the most direct approach, we could follow Sergei Eisenstein, who once proposed to adapt *Capital* into a feature film. Yet nothing so aesthetically ambitious is required: merely a sensitive interest in the fates of those discarded on capital's altar - associated with a meaningful locus of political agency that could *prevent* these tragedies - could show them up not as the works of fate, but of contingent arrangements of wealth and power.

Once again, we issue our *cri de coeur*: for a Communist Party worthy of the name, with party media to match ●

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### Notes

1. www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2023/june/ever-harder-borders.
2. english.elpais.com/international/2023-06-21/the-11-hour-anguished-search-for-survivors-of-the-shipwreck-in-greece-ship-sinking-were-asking-you-to-come-to-the-rescue.html.

LEFT

# Dumbness of dumbing down

The *Morning Star*'s CPB is about to enter its pre-congress discussion period. We have here, though, a classic case of bureaucratic, not democratic, centralism. Mike Macnair investigates

Later medieval urban communes in Europe originated to a considerable extent as institutions through which the emergent bourgeoisie (in its original sense, including what is now commonly called the 'petty bourgeoisie') could conduct practical struggles for freedom from, or reduction of, the claims of feudal and episcopal overlords. By the 1500s, however, most urban communes had been 'captured' by the monarchical state and by the surrounding aristocratic culture, through the roles of external state legal regulation, on the one hand, and the promotion of urban oligarchies of the 'natural rulers' of the (hereditary) *boni homines*, or 'better citizens', on the other.

By this means, the communes ('boroughs' in Britain) became 'outworks' of the feudal-absolutist state regimes, analogous to the ravelins and out-forts outside the main defences of contemporary fortifications. To overthrow this state regime and open the way to capitalism, both in the Netherlands and in England, it was necessary to overthrow the existing urban regimes and their urban-aristo loyalist leaders.

The working class in the last century has been affected by an analogous phenomenon. Its organisations created to defend its own interests - trade unions, cooperatives, political parties - have been captured by the capitalist state regime to serve as outworks. The basis is not hereditary 'urban aristocracies', but rather *managerialism*, under which the organisation's managers have the deciding sway in its decision-making processes.

Unlike the feudal landlords and clerics, the capitalist class does not generally itself directly govern. Instead, it acts through agents: corporate managers and the other bribe-taking classes (lawyers, journalists, lobbyists, professional career politicians).

The working class can to a limited extent exploit the opportunities provided by elections and civil liberties under capitalism to organise its own collective political voice and action. But this is possible through *freeing the creativity of the ranks*, so that numbers and activity can counter the weight of money backing the bribe-taking classes and their institutions. The result is that the acceptance of managerialism in workers' organisations gives the power back to the capitalist class: whether by handing it to the direct bribe-takers (eg, the Labour right) or by simply demobilising the possibilities of workers' organisation down to hollow shells, which cannot effectively counter the dominance of politics by the institutions of corruption.

We have just seen an example of this mechanism in the defeat of the Corbyn movement. Hundreds of thousands hoped, through Corbyn, for a *voice* alternative to the stifling monopoly of the two wings of the 'moderate', 'centre-right' and 'centre-left' bribe-takers. But the Labour left leaders they trusted with this hope were determined to remain within the regime of managerialism - and by doing so demobilised hope. They thus showed themselves to be part of the outworks of the fortifications of the capitalist regime.

These observations provide political context for the character of the 'discussion period', which is about to happen in the *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain. This 'discussion' is tightly controlled, for



Quentin Matsys 'An allegory of folly' early 16th century

the benefit of managerialist control in the organisation's leadership.

## Congress

The CPB has announced that its *biennial* congress will be held on the weekend of November 4-5. This is already a quarter of the time the Labour Party allows for its conferences - since Labour conferences are both annual and over four days. The old German Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) held between 1890 and the later 1920s annual *Parteitage* conferences, each lasting seven days. The Russian social democrats before 1917 suffered disrupted events, which had to be broken off and restarted elsewhere due to repression. But the April 1917 All-Russian Conference of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (Bolsheviks) lasted six days, the Bolsheviks' 6th party congress in July-August 1917 nine days, the 8th party congress in March 1919 six days, the 9th party congress in March-April 1920 eight days, and the 10th party congress in 1921 eight days. Pressure of "work in the real world" was no obstacle to serious and sustained discussions ...

The CPB executive committee's main draft resolutions and amendments will be published to party organisations on July 28. They will then have seven weeks - till September 20 - to submit their own resolutions and amendments, so they "should schedule their special pre-Congress meetings during that seven-week period". This is again a *pinched period* for discussion. Members will in practice mostly need a week to read and absorb the EC's texts, reducing the number of weeks' discussion to six; and it is always more difficult to schedule meetings in the summer, with school holidays running over the period. The schedule gives the executive, on the other hand, a comfortable five weeks (at least) to collate resolutions, and so on, coming from the branches and decide how to respond to them.

Members are reminded that under the party's rules,

During the period of pre-Congress

discussion, members shall have the right to express their views on any aspect of Party policy in their branch meeting, or at any other meeting convened for that purpose on the authority of the District, Nation and Executive Committees.

This principle restricts communication among members to officially sanctioned meetings.

The text goes on to say that "the EC shall ensure the maximum possible discussion and provide the maximum possible space in the party press for the printing of contributions from Party organisations and members". Vague words. The Socialist Workers Party, which is pretty bureaucratic-centralist in its operation, does in its three-month discussion period for an annual conference undertake to publish three pre-conference internal discussion bulletins, in which members can submit articles of up to 3,000 words; the CPB offers merely "maximum possible" - which, given that the discussion *period* is already pretty pinched, does not offer members much at all.

The policy reflected is, in essence, that the membership should remain atomised, but the leadership remains in control throughout. This policy is also reflected in a second aspect of the same rule - 17(d):

Members of elected leading committees who are in disagreement with any decision taken by the committee in question or with any other aspect of party policy shall have the right to express such disagreement first in that committee and then to a higher committee. During the period of pre-congress discussion, such disagreements may be expressed first in the committee in question and then in the appropriate party branch or in communications to pre-congress discussion in the party press.

This rule is, in substance, a requirement of solidarity of the leading committee in relation to the membership. Of course, leading committee members who hold minority views *can* - during the pre-congress discussion period

- carry their disagreement to "the appropriate party branch" or to the party press - assuming the party press allows publication and does not, for example, heavily cut or redact the communication.

A couple of other symptomatic phenomena can be found in the proposed rule changes. The Midlands district committee proposes that 5% of dues income should go to the relevant branch, and 7.5% to the relevant district or 'nation' (that is, Scotland and Wales, which have 'nation' structures under rule 12, with the same powers and structures as 'districts' under rule 11). The EC has an alternative to this proposal. Under the existing rule 5(c) there are to be additional voluntary contributions over and above dues raised from members, and under rule 5(c)(v) "every functioning party branch will be guaranteed a grant from the fund", though the total of such grants is not to exceed 30%-40% of the fund's annual income. The EC proposes to replace grants to *district and nation committees*, and to reduce the share of such grants to 20%-30% of the income of the fund.

The Midlands district committee's proposal reflects the very common experience of trade unions, Labour and far-left groups since the development of dues payment by check-off or by direct debit, when union or party income is swallowed by the centre and the localities are practically unable to take independent action due to being starved of funds. (It should be noted that this is a labour movement equivalent of Tory controls on local government tax-raising and borrowing powers ...) The EC's proposal is to *preserve the excessive centralisation of the finances*, while making token gestures to local empowerment through the 'AVC fund'.

Secondly, the EC proposes new and more limited grounds for 'appeals' to the appeals committee and the congress appeals committee. These amount in substance to the replacement of the right of *appeal* - on the ground that the decision below was for any reason wrong - with the right of *judicial review*: that "The investigation upon which the previous findings were made was not conducted

properly, was demonstrably biased and/or clearly failed to take sufficient account of the evidence provided and any mitigating factors"; that the penalty was too harsh (not, for some reason, that it was too lenient ...); or that there is fresh evidence "since arisen".<sup>1</sup> Even considered as judicial review grounds, missing is the case of manifest irrationality. Such a narrow set of grounds for appeal/review would, in fact, clearly promote the abuse of disciplinary proceedings by reducing oversight through appeals.

## Effects

A managerialist regime of this sort has a number of practically deleterious consequences. In the first place, it actively promotes 'groupthink' errors and makes correcting them harder. This ought to be obvious: the organisational regime of the 'discussion' makes it unlikely both that insiders within the leadership will raise to the membership qualms about the collective view of the leadership, and that the views of 'outsiders' will be taken seriously. That is because these outsider views necessarily take the form of atomised individual interventions, and cannot be developed through the formation of platforms or factions.

Secondly, this in turn has the effect that the regime is positively diseducative. *Education*, as opposed to *training*, equips the recipient with the ability to deploy ideas critically. It does so (beyond GCSE level!) through 'dialectic', in its original sense: because the student is confronted with elaborated *conflicting* views and develops, even at a fairly low level, the ability to choose between them. Radically skewing the discussion procedure so that the 'top table' utterly dominates the discussion thus tends to *dumb down* the membership.

Equally, the leadership is saved by the procedural safeguards it is given from being politically ambushed by the membership. But this dumbs down the leadership too: losing practice at responding to being politically ambushed by the membership is also losing the skills to respond to political ambush by the capitalist class and its agents, or even merely by rival trends in the workers' movement.

More generally, I said earlier that managerialist regimes tend either to directly give power to the bribe-takers or to demobilise the membership's creativity, and hence reduce the organisations to hollow shells of merely paper members. The result is that workers' organisations become out-works of the capitalist state power. The *Morning Star* as a paper is in itself something the working class needs: a daily newspaper independent of the advertising industry. But the paper has elected to maintain itself through - mainly - subsidy from trade unions - which has the effect that it cannot be fully independent of the trade union officials. This makes it, in turn, an out-work of the out-works.

The managerialist nature of the CPB's narrowly pinched pre-congress discussion faithfully reflects that character.<sup>2</sup> ●

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## Notes

1. I take it that this last is merely a confusion for the standard case of fresh evidence which has become available or been discovered since the decision below.  
2. The Socialist Workers' Party and Socialist Party in England and Wales have arrived at the same result by way of their 'united front policy' towards the same 'official lefts'.

## UKRAINE

# Notes on the war

Putin is in real trouble - the Wagnerite rebellion testifies to political, military and strategic failure, argues Jack Conrad

**M**ake no mistake - whatever Yevgeny Prigozhin says now, the Wagnerite rebellion was no mere protest demonstration. It was an attempted coup ... and yet there are not going to be any prosecutions. We shall see.

Prigozhin conducted a long, unremitting and highly publicised war of words against defence minister Sergei Shoigu and chief of staff Valery Gerasimov: their incompetent planning, their military timidity, their logistical failures to supply Wagner with vital munitions ... and how these “punks” should be “shipped to the front barefoot with machine guns”.<sup>1</sup>

Given that Russia has banned any criticism of the conduct of the Ukraine war by making it illegal to “discredit the armed forces”, Prigozhin’s words were incendiary. The only other person who has been able to get away with such stuff is Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov.

Prigozhin’s tirades against Shoigu and Gerasimov - aspiring dictators both - suited Putin, presumably because it absolved him of responsibility for the obvious failures in Ukraine, not least the inability of the Russian army to capture Kyiv in February 2022 and the surrender of Kherson in November 2022. Amidst the litany of gloomy news, Wagner stood out as the one and only outstanding success story. Prigozhin was awarded the title ‘Hero of the Russian Federation’ in June 2022.

Wagner began life as a private security firm, but quickly evolved into a deniable extension of Russian foreign policy. It was used to some considerable effect in Syria, Libya and Mali; above all, though, it proved its worth in Ukraine - first after the 2014 annexation of Crimea, then after the 2022 invasion. Huge billboards appeared all over Russia: ‘PMC Wagner: Join team of victors now!’ It was certainly Wagner, not the regular army, which was responsible for taking the *symbolically* important town of Bakhmut (not *strategically* important, as some idiots have insisted).

Whereas the military establishment held back, Prigozhin threw human waves at enemy lines. Typically the first wave was recruited straight from Russia’s penal colonies. Average life expectancy for this cannon fodder was short. Weeks, not months. Those who refused to charge, those who held back, those who deserted were shot by special ‘punishment squads’.

However, eventually, despite the huge death toll, Bakhmut was taken. Amongst the Russian nationalist far right Prigozhin became an instant hero. Amongst the regular army rank and file too. They admired his blunt language, his humble origins, his willingness to call out generals and ministers. Wagner fighters certainly walked with an enviable swagger. Russia’s Spartans. Prigozhin claimed that if he were allowed to expand Wagner from the tens of thousands to the hundreds of thousands, he would have the Ukrainians running like rabbits on every front. But Shoigu would not let him ... so goes his story.

## Frankenstein

Wagner, however, became Putin’s Frankenstein monster. Prigozhin’s Telegram outbursts against Shoigu and Gerasimov not only included regular verbal lashings of the monied elite. The whole rationale behind the war in Ukraine increasingly came



PMC Wagner recruiting billboard

under attack too (something that would have landed your average liberal oppositionist or anti-war activist in jail). Prigozhin openly questioned whether there were “any Nazis” in Ukraine at all.<sup>2</sup> Well, there are certainly neo-Nazis in the Russian military apparatus, including Wagner itself: eg, Task Force Rusich.<sup>3</sup> And, of course, Ukraine is awash with Banderite fascists, though they hardly constitute the government or state core. As for demilitarising Ukraine, Prigozhin ironically remarked in a high-profile interview that, whereas it once had “500 tanks before, now they have 5,000. If 20,000 fighters were skilful then, now it’s 400,000.”<sup>4</sup>

Once Prigozhin proclaimed his political credo as ‘Motherland and Putin’. However, he eventually began to consider Putin to be as much of a problem as Shoigu and Gerasimov themselves. Putin was fooled by the ministry of defence into invading Ukraine on the basis of fake news: eg, Ukraine “going mad with aggression” and the “whole Nato bloc” about to attack Russia (Prigozhin’s words).<sup>5</sup> By implication, Putin is little short of being an imbecile and therefore unfit for high office. Of course, this narrative echoes western propaganda - conveniently ignoring, as it does, Ukrainian plans to dramatically escalate military attacks on the Russian majority areas in Donbass and Nato expansionism (Ukraine was placed on the first rung with a Nato membership action plan in November 2022).

Those prone to fantasy politics have thereby, predictably, detected the hand of CIA involvement in the Wagner coup attempt. Sergei Lavrov, Russia’s foreign minister, promises that the FSB is “gathering evidence”.<sup>6</sup> Fox News’s Maria Bartiromo crazily suggests that the threat of a Russian civil war was part of an “elaborate scheme to shift attention away from Hunter Biden”.<sup>7</sup> And it is not

only the unhinged far right. Gerry Healy’s version of baloney lives on.<sup>8</sup> Sure, US intelligence picked up on growing Wagner arms dumps and troop movements from June 10. But so what?

Suffice to say, Prigozhin does not talk of peace. On the contrary, he talks of blood, iron and war. Prigozhin called for an end to the ‘phony war’ and a real commitment to winning. Not for nothing do the logos of the Wagner Group PMC feature swords and a skull. He proposed martial law, sealing borders, full mobilisation and a war economy along the lines of “North Korea”. That means ending needless infrastructure projects, clamping down on the rich and working “only for the war”.<sup>9</sup>

As far as Prigozhin is concerned, it has been the elite who have been holding Russia back. A view which finds a real resonance amongst ordinary Russians and rank-and-file soldiers alike, who are frustrated with the lack of any meaningful progress after more than a year and a half of what is still officially billed not as a war, but a ‘special military operation’.

Nor is the Victor of Bakhmut wrong about the Russian elite. Since October 2022 the top brass has been conducting a *defensive* war. Trenches, tank traps, minefields and dragon’s teeth testify to a keep-what-you-have war. Not a grab everything victory. Perhaps the hope is of a Trump second term, or that Germany will break, or that Zelensky will fall ... or, or, or. Meanwhile, Prigozhin loudly protests about inept generals, the lack of supplies, the hundreds of thousands who have, or will, needlessly die on the battlefield, the grieving wives and mothers. And he demands ‘justice’!

Then there are the so-called oligarchs. These high-class criminals are hated with a passion by ordinary Russians ... and, of course,

Prigozhin has done everything he can to cynically focus and amplify popular anger.

## Oligarchs

No question - they never wanted the invasion of Ukraine and a proxy war with the west. Because of this damned war the oligarchs have suffered. Oh how they have suffered. Yachts, art collections, private jets and swish London, Paris and New York properties have been seized. No longer are they courted and flattered by western government ministers. Instead they find themselves shunned, cold-shouldered and scapegoated “for events outside their control”.<sup>10</sup> God, they have even had trouble paying university and public schools fees for sons and daughters. Their bank accounts are frozen. Prigozhin does not give a “shit” for them nor their “fat, carefree children”.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, the so-called oligarchs are so-called because they no longer rule - certainly not in the way they did under Boris Yeltsin (‘oligarchy’ being Greek for ‘the rule of the few’ and an ‘oligarch’ being one of the few). Back in the summer of 2000, Putin famously summoned Russia’s 21 richest *bizmen* to a closed-door meeting in the vaulted and columned magnificence of the Hall of the Order of St Catherine in the Grand Kremlin Palace. He told them who was now really in charge. Putin.

They could keep their ill-gotten billions, as long as they did not meddle in politics. If they failed to agree that deal he would ‘liquidate them as a class’. Most oligarchs “paid heed to Putin’s warnings”.<sup>12</sup> Not a few, however, found themselves in exile, dead or languishing in jail: Roman Abramovich, Vladimir Potanin, Mikhail Prokhorov, Vladimir Gusinsky, Oleg Deripaska, Boris Berezovsky and Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

True, there is a small, always fractious, circle around Putin, the *siloviki* - former and current KGB and FSB execs and armed forces tops, who are rich mainly through their controlling positions on the boards of Russia’s biggest companies, but *actually* rule. In short, industrial and financial capital has fused with the security apparatus to form a new political order. Combining the words ‘silovik’ and ‘oligarchy’, Daneil Treisman coined the term “silovarchy”.<sup>13</sup> The Russian Federation is ruled by *silovarchs*.

The so-called oligarchs have no liking of Prigozhin or the idea of a Wagnerite state. Total war would be a complete disaster for them. They would lose even more of their precious money. If there is a split amongst the *silovarchs* then Putin would be in real trouble. Indeed they could easily decide to retire him to a sanatorium and sue for peace with the west. However, that would result in a Versailles, not an *antebellum*, settlement. Russia would be disarmed, crippled with reparations and reduced to an oil-producing neocolony.

On the other hand, sections of the *silovarchy* might conceivably have thrown in their lot with Prigozhin. He is Russia’s outstanding war hero. He is popular in the army and on the nationalist far right too. He could have had a wider appeal still. Interestingly, on that score Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the former Yukos oil tycoon, tweeted the Russian opposition on June 24, urging “support” for Prigozhin “in this moment”. He readily admits that Prigozhin is “no ally of ours, and this support will be very temporary and conditional”.<sup>14</sup> Effectively though, the promise is this: first use Prigozhin to get rid of Putin, then use the lure of a rapprochement with the west to stage a colour revolution.

Prigozhin and Wagner would doubtless have their own ideas about this. If they had somehow ended up on top they would have wanted to stay on top. A deal with the *silovarchy* would have been essential, but it would have been the liberal opposition that would have been used, not the liberal opposition who used. If Khodorkovsky had flown to Moscow’s Sheremetyevo airport expecting to be greeted with a red carpet, bouquets of flowers and an official reception, he would have been bitterly disappointed. No, he would have soon found himself back in a Siberian prison cell. You do not need to have studied Machiavelli’s *The prince* to understand that.

While the final straw for Prigozhin was doubtless the decision to incorporate Wagner under Shoigu’s ministry of defence and perhaps even the rocketing of Wagner troops - either accidentally or ‘accidentally on purpose’ by the regular army - he crossed the Rubicon when it comes to Putin. His ‘march for justice’ was no mere protest demonstration. It was to be a coup against “corruption, deceit and bureaucracy”, to prevent things ending up “as in 1917 with a revolution”.<sup>15</sup>

## Talking 1917

The February 1917 revolution was certainly backgrounded by tsarist military defeats, bureaucratic bungling, economic breakdown and generalised discontent. The Petrograd women’s demonstration marking International Working Women’s Day triggered regime collapse. Factory after factory came out in solidarity

with the striking women, troops refused to fire on the crowds ... Nicholas II abdicated in favour of his brother, Michael, and two days later he abdicated too. The parties of the left - the Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries - were already (certainly since 1905) the natural leaders of the masses. They had their soviets, the elite had their Provisional government.

The October 1917 overthrow of the elite's Provisional government relied fundamentally on the Bolsheviks winning a commanding majority in workers' and soldiers' soviets and gaining the backing of the peasant soviets through the split in the Socialist Revolutionary Party.

Suffice to say, though, there are no serious organisations of the left in Russia today - certainly no Bolshevik party; tragically, not even the hint of one.

However, Prigozhin is clearly not wrong about regime collapse. Indeed he and the Wagner mutiny are symptoms of just such a possibility and that has had Putin likewise talking 1917. He accuses Prigozhin of delivering a "stab in the back" - exactly the kind of "strike" that was "dealt in 1917" when the country was in World War I and "its victory was stolen".<sup>16</sup>

Clearly the reference here is to October 1917. Under the 'socialist' prime minister, Alexander Kerensky, the Provisional government continued the predatory alliance with Anglo-French imperialism and the carnage at the front. The Bolsheviks took Russia out of the war and called for proletarian revolution in the west. Whether Putin personally identifies with Alexander Kerensky or Nicholas Romanov need not concern us in the least. He does though consider the Russian Federation to be the continuation of the Russian state, going back to its origins in Kyivan Rus. When considering the Ukraine war, that matters. Putin hates Bolshevism not only because of the October revolution and its 'Land, bread and peace'. He hates Bolshevism because of its commitment to national self-determination and creation of the modern borders of Ukraine, a crime against Holy Russia, according to Putin.

What of Prigozhin? His politics are hard to fathom. He has approvingly referred to 'comrade Stalin' and reportedly has links with the A Just Russia party through the novelist, Zakhar Prilepin.<sup>17</sup> If true, this would mean Prigozhin is a milk-and-water national socialist. A Just Russia sees itself as socially conservative, calls for the recreation of the welfare state and a reduction of social inequality. Not that this involves challenging the rights of property or the market economy. Its "New Socialism in the 21st century" ideology is, however, presented as the antithesis of "barbaric, oligarchic capitalism". Formerly a member of the Socialist International, A Just Russia was expelled for supporting the invasion of Ukraine.<sup>18</sup>

No, the probability is that Prigozhin was looking out for a suitable political vehicle. One which he could bend to his will. His 'Wagner - the Second Front' national speaking tour in May surely testified to political ambitions. He says the Second Front is a "media community which will share accurate information about the state of the special military operation, how things really are". The organisation is supposed to rally the people and make them "realise the actual threat level".<sup>19</sup>

Many Russian journalists saw the Second Front tour as an opening bid to join the 2024 presidential contest. Political scientist Abbas Gallyamov told *Novaya Gazeta Europe* that, being an "ambitious man", Prigozhin

"might also be counting on the fact that, in a time of revolution, the power will be literally up for grabs. If he takes it, he could lay claim to the top ruling positions."<sup>20</sup>

But, whatever half-baked plans Prigozhin may have had, they are very much on hold now. Having seized the Rostov-on-Don HQ of the Southern Military District and with an armoured column just 125 miles away from Moscow, Prigozhin ordered his Wagnerites to return to their bases - to prevent, he said, the shedding of further Russian blood. Six helicopters and an IL-22 airborne command post were shot down in flames during the march up the M4.<sup>21</sup>

Further bloodshed is a pathetic excuse from a man who drove thousands to their death in Bakhmut. There are stories of terrible FSB threats against Wagner families. Raids on Wagner offices. But so what? Would a Julius Caesar, an Oliver Cromwell or a Napoleon Bonaparte have hesitated? No, no, no. They risked all, because they knew they *could* win all. Yevgeny Prigozhin hesitated because he knew he *would* lose.

He had no co-conspirators in the FSB, no genuine allies in the army high command, no organised political movement, no Duma faction, no mass media. His coup attempt was carried out in anger - impetuously, prematurely, without any meaningful preparations. His chances of success were always nil. So less Adolf Hitler January 1933; more Algiers April 1961.

Reportedly the intervention of Belarus president Alexander Lukashenko stopped a bloodbath and brokered a deal which guarantees the safety of Prigozhin and his men. They can either sign up to the regular army, head back home or go to Belarus. Despite Putin demanding severe punishment and the FSB opening criminal charges, it appears that there will be no prosecutions.

Will Prigozhin some day triumphantly return to Moscow as the head of a rightwing nationalist movement and get himself elected president? Mainstream journalists, sensible folk, educated opinion, liberals of all kinds dismiss such a possibility. How could a foul-mouthed ex-con go from the gutter to the gilded halls of the Kremlin? Impossible, they snort. But precisely if there is defeat in war, regime collapse and national disintegration, then such monsters appear as angels sent to bring deliverance. So do not discount Prigozhin quite yet. Though to pull off a second coming he will need to mend fences with the FSB and the army, and build an effective political machine. Meantime, he will be painfully aware that those deemed traitors by Putin have the funny habit of getting themselves shot or poisoned. And, yes, Yevgeny Viktorovich, be careful, very careful indeed, when you go near one of those high windows.

## Wagner

Dismissing PMC Wagner as nothing more than a mercenary outfit that just sells its services to the highest bidder is beyond stupid. The 2,000-strong cadre who constitute Wagner's inner core are hardened veterans who love the military life and its bonds of male friendship and camaraderie. They are motivated by far more than the next pay cheque (between 250,000 and 300,000 roubles - roughly £2,500 per month<sup>22</sup>). Wagner's code of honour says: "fight not for money, but from the principle of winning always and everywhere". They are prepared to die one for the other ... though they would much prefer to kill the enemy bastards. Experience of battle, the loss of fellow fighters, a strong military ethos unites Wagner into a tight-knit brotherhood, which

politically combines contempt for the corrupt elite with an eclectic, ultra-right nationalism ... and from all the evidence an intense loyalty to the boss.

An additional point: PMC Wagner is not some reflux of the autonomous Cossack cavalry units that performed military service for the tsars in return for pay and special privileges. Wagner took its business model from the United States: Blackstone, Xe, Academi, KBR, MVM Inc, etc. These companies were used in US operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and elsewhere ... and a very profitable model it has proved to be. Prigozhin has reportedly a net worth of \$1 billion.<sup>23</sup>

In power, if that had happened, the Wagnerite cadre would, of course, have enriched themselves beyond the dreams of Croesus, but also merged with the business and state elite, albeit as the *dominant* element ... and thereby create disappointment below. But that is another story.

Whatever happens to PMC Wagner and Second Front Wagner now, there is still Prigozhin. If we are going to get a handle on him, we might perhaps draw an analogy with Rome's barracks emperors, who typically came not from equestrian stock, but were low-class commoners from the far-flung provinces. The first being Maximus Thrax. In the crisis years of 235-284CE there were approximately 14 of them who donned the imperial purple. They relied on their legionnaires to lift them into power. Of course, there were countless other would-be barrack emperors.

There is more than a whiff of Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler about Prigozhin too. Like them he is an outsider, not an insider. Mark Galeotti of UCL makes the point that Prigozhin is "not one of Putin's close figures or a confidant". He was "part of the staff, rather than part of the family".<sup>24</sup>

So, properly speaking, June 24 was a split *with*, not a split *within*, the ruling elite.

## Z left

Inevitably there are those who in the name of my enemy's enemy is my friend act as spinmeisters for Putin and the *silovarchy* regime. Every Russian defeat thereby becomes a victory and every retreat a stunningly clever ruse. We have had it ever since the failure to take Kyiv back in stage one. Now, amazingly, we have it with the Wagner revolt too.

I am thinking about the Z left, the orphaned left, the pro-Kremlin left. A motley band: eg, in the UK, George Galloway's Workers Party, the Brarite CPGB (Marxist-Leninist), the New Communist Party, Gerry Downing's Socialist Fight, Socialist Action and (unofficially, using devious language) perhaps the CPB's Young Communist League. All strategically adrift since the collapse of bureaucratic socialism in the USSR, true: but morally brave, albeit in a particularly stupid way.

Yes, they oppose the main enemy ... which is at home (not least in the form of the Rishi Sunak government's cruel persecution of migrants, attacks on free speech, still further curbs on street protests, below-inflation pay limits and draconian anti-trade union laws). But supposedly, when the most effective fighting force available to your enemy's enemy delivers a "stab in the back", this strengthens your enemy's enemy and therefore weakens your main enemy. Weird.

Putin can now, we are excitedly told, reorganise Russia's armed forces at last and bring them all under centralised control. Undoubtedly that is what will happen with Wagner. There is little choice about the matter. Ramzan Kadyrov's militia

in Chechnya, the Vostok brigade, the Kolchuga group, the Cossack regiment, the Batman battalion and the countless other semi- and unofficial militias in Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia are likewise included, as far as I know, under the scope of the presidential decree too.

Probably that will not lead to more Wagner-type revolts. However, it is worth asking whether or not the centralisation of each and every fighting unit under Shoigu and Gerasimov will produce more than the sum of its parts militarily? A dubious proposition, given the endemic corruption, the incompetence and the complete absence of politically coherent war aims. Prigozhin's Wagner and Kadyrov's 141st Special Motorised Regiment have proved to be by far and away the most effective military units.

Anyway, the pro-Kremlin left further claims that Putin will use the coup attempt to clamp down on opposition in the manner of the Turkish AKP regime in July 2016. Sure, every crisis is an opportunity - if there is the will and the determination to act.

Having crushed the Gülanist coup, Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, swiftly staged his own countercoup. It saw the mass round-up of 40,000 people, including generals, admirals, judges, police officers, university teachers and journalists. Some 160,000 were subsequently sacked from their posts because of alleged connections with Fethullah Gülen and his shadowy Islamic movement. There was a clampdown on TV stations and newspapers too. Erdoğan wanted to transform Turkey into an autocratic quasi-democracy and found his moment.

But, to state the obvious, Russia is already an autocratic quasi-democracy. There is voting every four or five years, but everyone knows the result of the presidential election campaign even before a single vote has been cast. The Duma is a mere fig leaf - a talking shop and always obedient. There is no genuine opposition. What passes for the left is, in the main, supine. Inept Stalinite nostalgics predominate. Trade unions barely function. The media is almost entirely under direct or indirect state control. Even the mildest of liberal reformists have either fled abroad, keep their heads firmly down or rot in jail. Just to call the Ukraine war a 'war' is illegal.

Doubtless there will be further oppression. Not a sign of strength, however: rather weakness. And the simple fact of the matter, surely blindingly obvious, is that the Wagner coup attempt was itself a sign of weakness. To ram home the point, when the Zelensky regime bans the main opposition parties, closes papers, oppresses the Russian Orthodox church, this too speaks of weakness.

And imagine for one moment (not hard to do), that Ukraine's offensive grinds to a halt, makes no headway whatsoever, because of Russian trenches, minefields, artillery killing zones and electronic warfare. Tens of thousands die, hundreds of tanks and fighting vehicles lie wrecked ... and, in frustration, the famed Azov brigade rebels. Led by Mykyta Natchochiy, they stage a march on Kyiv to much popular acclaim. They demand the sacking of the chief of staff and defence minister and their replacement by those acceptable to, or chosen by, the Right Sector.

Any such move testifies to government failure, constitutional breakdown and extreme political fragility (as is certainly the case with Putin). Members of the *silovarchy* will be thinking hard about a replacement: they will be jostling, manoeuvring, plotting between and

against each other. Putin's authority has taken a hammering.

And, in the midst of a war, an event like the Wagner rebellion will have a seismic effect ... on both sides. Besides wars being decided by troop numbers, food, fuel and munition supplies and the quantity and quality of equipment, there is too the vital question of morale. A point emphasised again and again by the Prussian military philosopher, Carl von Clausewitz, in his classic 1832 study, *Vom Kriege*: "In combat the loss of moral force is the chief cause of the decision."<sup>25</sup>

Wagner's march on Moscow might conceivably have momentarily lifted the morale of regular Russian troops. Those bastards, Shoigu and Gerasimov, will be swept away. Just as conceivably its halt, the return to bases, might have momentarily lifted morale. Those Wagner bastards will be swept away. But, on balance, any sober-minded assessment must, surely, conclude that morale will not have been lifted. Quite the reverse.

From what we know about the Ukrainian side, hopes soared with news of Wagner's march on Moscow. The expectation was not that Prigozhin would succeed and turn the Russian Federation into a North Korean war economy. Obviously not. Rather that the Putin regime was about to fall and the Russian Federation about to disintegrate.

While there is no clear evidence from the front lines about rising Ukrainian confidence and sinking Russian confidence producing any sudden shifts, a collapse of Russian morale is certainly all too thinkable now.

I have argued for many months now that the war is at an impasse - the predictable result of Russia's inability to overwhelm what is a people's war on the Ukrainian side, plus Nato's Stingers, Nlaws, Switchblades, Himars, Patriots, Storm Shadows and Leopards. However, there is now the question of regime collapse in Moscow - not tomorrow, not the day after, but sometime soon ●

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**ZHENOTDEL**

# Veiled lessons

Yassamine Mather spoke to **Anne McShane** at a Hands Off the People of Iran meeting. Given the recent wave of arrests in Iran and new legislation reinforcing the wearing of the hijab, the experience of the Soviet Union's Zhenotdel in the 1920s is of particular relevance.



**AM**: I want to talk about the work of the Women's Department of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party - the Zhenotdel - in particular in Uzbekistan, my main area of study, though I have also looked at Azerbaijan.

The veiled women of Uzbekistan were viewed as profoundly oppressed and the veil was seen as emblematic of their oppression. It was a total covering, with a *paranji* (a long veil) and a *chachvon* (facial covering). The practice actually became more predominant during the middle part of the 19th century. There was resentment of the tsarist regime and fear of Russification.

When Russian Zhenotdel activists first went to central Asia in 1920, they described a society which was dominated by large, patriarchal families. Women were separated from men, apart from husbands, brothers and male children. They were allowed to unveil when they were among female relatives in particular and immediate male relatives. They were not, however, allowed to leave their homes without a male chaperone and rarely ventured outside as a result.

When Alexandra Kollontai wrote on the question in 1920, she argued that the liberation of veiled women had to be achieved by these women themselves. They would have to take their lives into their own hands. At the first conference of activists of the east she argued that the forms of organisation had to be suitable for the material circumstances. Rather than having delegate meetings, which would involve working with men, they needed to set up women-

only establishments. They formed women's clubs, where women were to be taught skills like weaving, shoemaking and carpet-making. There were literacy classes, medical consultations with visiting doctors and all kinds of cultural activities too.

Childcare was available. So children were looked after and educated, while the women joined in the activities of the club. It was a community hub. The model was the Ali Bayramov club in Baku, which was very successful. However, in contrast to Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan was slow to make progress. It was not until 1923 that things began to move under the leadership of Serafima Liubimova, who was a follower of Kollontai. She had attended her lectures at Sverdlov University in 1921.

The main challenge for Liubimova was how to build a self-sustaining organisation and financially sustainable clubs. The New Economic Policy had led to major cuts in Zhenotdel funding and the organisation was strapped both financially and in terms of staffing. It was not possible to make money from the goods made in clubs. Indigenous women were not allowed to go to markets to sell them. And the cooperative organs ignored requests to assist and sell the goods on their behalf.

Then in 1924 there was a breakthrough, when an Uzbek-language journal, *Yangi Y'ol* (New Path) was launched by Zhenotdel. With it came the proper involvement for the first time of Uzbek women in large numbers. The editors were

### Third Congress of Comintern (1921).

Alexandra Kollontai (right) alongside Clara Zetkin

Detail from a Soviet poster from civil war years calling upon Muslim women to support the struggle for liberation



connected with the Jadid movement, which flourished in the late 19th and early 20th century, seeking to reform Islam and advocating an active engagement with modernity. There was a strong anti-clerical element about it too.

The initiative was then taken to organise working class and peasant women in cooperative shops. What was important about them was that they were self-sustaining. Women would bring their produce and sell it and also buy what they needed. So, rather than having to be accompanied to a market by their husbands, they could go into an environment where they were among other women and felt free but did not put them on a collision course with their families and community.

The coops were also social and educational centres. There were readings of *Yangi Y'ol*, literacy lessons and medical consultations. The staff all spoke Uzbek. All the facilities that had been planned to be provided in the clubs were now provided in these coops.

Russian leaders of Zhenotdel were really happy with these developments. It meant that collective organisation was taking root and indigenous women were fashioning the shops according to their own needs. They were small in number - a reported 27 in total by 1927. But they were popular.

Although Zhenotdel activists wrote about the veil in very disparaging terms, they did not campaign for its removal. They wanted to educate and empower women, while also winning over

working class and peasant men to support the project. They were very aware of the lack of a viable alternative to the patriarchal family during that period. Women who rebelled could be disowned by their families. Unless the Zhenotdel was able to absorb them into its projects, they would be homeless and destitute, often ending up in prostitution.

**It is interesting that the veil was used in opposition to threatened Russification. That is similar to the current situation in the Middle East - not only in Iran. The way that the west has presented itself as superior to the Islamic world has actually increased the number of women wearing the veil.**

**Could you expand on the relationship of the Zhenotdel to the Communist Party?**

**AM**: The Zhenotdel was created as a department of the central committee, but it involved many non-party women. Its leaders wanted to recruit to the party, while at the same time providing a voice for women in general within the party. So it had a dual approach, which challenges some views of it as an obedient adjunct of the CC.

From the very beginning it demanded autonomy. Kollontai and another leader, Konkordiia Samoilova, planned a non-party conference of eastern women to be held in April 1921. Its agenda was circulated at meetings of women throughout the east in 1920 and early 1921. But the party leadership postponed the conference to



June - and then cancelled it on the basis of food shortages in Moscow. That was while allowing the Comintern congress and the Communist Women's Movement (CWM) conference to go ahead ... along with numerous other events associated with Comintern. This suggests to me that eastern women were not viewed as a priority.

A group of these women who turned up for their planned conference in June actually ended up on stage at the CWM event. They were greeted with enormous enthusiasm. This was widely reported as its most inspiring moment. But the truth was that these veiled women were not there to be on show: they had come to Moscow for the purposes of organisation.

That they were not able to do that was a big setback for the autonomy of the movement in the east, which had initially been enthused by the revolution. However, while the lack of real support from the party leadership and the local branches caused a lot of difficulties, it did mean that there was little interference with its work. The Zhenotdel in Uzbekistan overall had significantly more autonomy than in Russia for example.

**What happened once Stalin came to prominence? How did that change the situation in Uzbekistan?**

**AM**: After Stalin had solidified power around himself in 1926, he decided to do something about the prominent role of the clergy in the east. The Central Asian Bureau of the party was ordered to launch a campaign to break the hold of religion. This was called the Hujum ('assault'). The most prominent aspect of this campaign was the plan for the mass unveiling of women.

During the summer of 1926 meetings of the Zhenotdel were addressed by leading members of CAB. They were instructed to lead the Hujum. Liubimova is reported as having objected, saying that she believed it would incite reactionary elements. But despite such protests, a Hujum commission was set up, with indigenous women given a leading role. They were told to organise mass unveiling events in the cities of Uzbekistan on March 8 (International Women's Day). And there were mass demonstrations, with a reported 70,000 women unveiling and burning their veils. An order had been sent out to party members to send their wives and daughters to unveil.

There was too enthusiastic participation from young Jadid women. They saw the Hujum as striking a blow against the old society. Reports in Soviet papers immediately afterwards claimed that this was a new revolution against the clergy and the hold of Islam. There were predictions that the women of the east would be totally unveiled by the 10th anniversary of the revolution in October 1927.

But very quickly it became clear that the Hujum was a stunt that had gone badly wrong. A wave of opposition came from both the clergy and Uzbek men, including many party members. Hundreds and possibly thousands of unveiled women were attacked - some actually murdered. Those who escaped the physical backlash were forced to stay at home.

The Hujum was relaunched again on May 1, with a similar result. Almost all of those who took part ended up revailing.

**What was the role of the Zhenotdel in the Hujum?**

**AM**: It appears to me that there was little enthusiasm for the campaign. There was no mention

of the Hujum in their journal *Kommunistka* until July 1927, and this was in an article which criticised activists for not doing enough. The Hujum meant the obliteration of the Zhenotdel's advances in Uzbekistan. Reports in *Kommunistka* were of clubs closing down. No women could attend them in safety, and it was the same with cooperative shops - they were closed down by the general cooperatives, with the claim that there was no need for them any more. Zhenotdel members were really angry, especially as the cooperative shops had been closed down without them being even notified.

In 1928 Nadia Krupskaya, then the editor of *Kommunistka*, initiated a debate on the Hujum. This was a brave move on her part, given that criticism of the party leadership was effectively prohibited by this stage. During the debate a general view emerged that the Hujum had been a very superficial campaign, which meant little without women having real economic and social independence. There was also a lot of criticism of the fact that there had been no thought of protecting unveiled women, so they could continue to attend clubs and shops. It was apparent that, despite the proclamations of party leaders, the Hujum was not about emancipating women.

Criticism of the central committee were not made directly, but the implication was obvious. I think it would have been impossible for them to write in direct terms. There was condemnation of male party members who were described as worse than non-party men in their reactionary attitudes towards women, and their eagerness to close down the shops.

Because of the Hujum indigenous women were losing their access to society. Zhenotdel members argued that unveiling women by dictat was completely counterproductive. Seeing a woman's face did not mean she was any freer overall. The choice had to be theirs alone and in a context where they were safe to make it. Of course the Hujum was a softening-up exercise, aimed at bringing Uzbek society under central control. It was part of the war on religion launched in 1926 under Yemelyan Yaroslavsky - by then one of Stalin's henchmen. It also needs to be understood in the context of the moves to initiate the first five-year plan in 1928. The party leadership knew from the Zhenotdel reports that indigenous women were becoming more autonomous from the family and that many wanted more freedom. It manipulated that genuine desire for its own purposes but as a result the indigenous women were left in a far worse position than before.

Debates in *Kommunistka* led to new demands being raised. One was for complete independence from the party. In Kazakhstan an autonomous society had been set up to campaign against polygamy and arranged marriage, which included men and women. Similar moves had been taken in Azerbaijan, and were being discussed among activists in Uzbekistan. Some of those who favoured breaking away from the party argued that being autonomous meant that you could work with men who were actually in favour of change - as opposed to local party members, who often undermined their work.

Complaints about men in the party was a constant theme - not just in Uzbekistan, but throughout the Soviet Union. There had been moves in 1925 to set up a separate organisation. Zhenotdel's leadership managed to prevent a breakaway. However, now that the Zhenotdel's painstaking work of building

organisation among indigenous women had been destroyed virtually overnight by the party, calls for independence grew even louder. Liubimova, while being against a split, nevertheless defended the Zhenotdel in Kazakhstan against accusations of feminism. The organisation included men too. She also supported a call for a ban on the veil, which had been raised by many indigenous women following the Hujum. *Yangi Y'ol* campaigned for such a measure. They believed that a ban would give more confidence to women that they could rely on the Soviet government to defend them. The party leadership was still calling on women to unveil, but did not want to institute a legal ban.

At a conference of activists in the east in December 1928, Krupskaya took up these questions in a speech which was published in *Kommunistka*. She opposed the creation of separate organisations, while being sympathetic to the women who wanted to break away because of their frustration with the party. She argued that it would be even more difficult to make progress without having a presence within the party and trying to act without its authority.

Her sharpest criticism was directed at those who wanted to "impose a dead level" on eastern society. She argued that a ban on the veil could perhaps be a normative measure, in the same way that bans on arranged marriage or polygyny worked. They sent a progressive signal to society. But the bases of such practices were economic as well as social and were deeply rooted. She included in her critique bans on religious baptisms and coming-of-age ceremonies. She argued it was foolish to suppose that religious customs and beliefs could be eradicated immediately by the state. The peasantry and working class of the east had to be won over, not forced to deny their religion.

In making this stand Krupskaya was directly opposing the central committee's war on religion, led by Yaroslavsky. And he was at the conference to oppose her stand. In his speech he condemned the calls for autonomous organisation as a petty bourgeois, feminist deviation. And he made it absolutely clear that the Hujum would go on, despite the Zhenotdel's criticisms and the devastating effect it had on work among women. The Hujum would now be used as an opportunity to "cleanse the party".

The Zhenotdel was instructed to lead a purge of "alien elements in the party" - those party members who refused to unveil their female relatives, or continued to practice 'kalyim' (bride-price) and polygyny. The hold of religion had to be broken. Yaroslavsky was joined by regional leaders in demanding loyalty from the Zhenotdel. They were clearly disturbed by the dissenting voices within its ranks and were determined to silence them. A resolution on autonomy was voted down, and a ban on the veil promised at some time in the future.

*Kommunistka* was devoid of open criticism on the Hujum in the following year. Krupskaya remained editor, but her promotion of discussion was superseded by a drive to implement the first five-year plan.

This was having devastating consequences in Uzbekistan, as the population were corralled into collective farms and large production plants. Moves to force women to unveil continued in this new environment. Various writers did condemn their low status within the new mass workforce. They often did the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs. They also had to work alongside men and this caused huge tensions and put them at risk. One suggestion

was that male Komsomol members accompany unveiled women in public to prevent attacks.

In March 1930 the Zhenotdel was closed down, and *Kommunistka* ceased publication. The decision was made by Stalin, and the article announcing its demise was published in *Pravda* before it was printed in *Kommunistka*. The official reasons were numerous and contradictory. One was that there was no need for the organisation any more. Women's equality had been largely 'achieved'! Another was that the Zhenotdel had become too sectional and the question of women's emancipation needed to be taken up by all party members. But all party members dealing with it meant that no organ of the party had a real commitment to the question. A temporary form of women's organisation was allowed to remain in Uzbekistan because of the many problems which I have described. But it was completely under the thumb of the party.

The closure of *Kommunistka* meant the silencing of an important voice for women party members. It had had authority with Krupskaya as its editor and a proud history of open criticism and self-criticism.

**The experience of the Zhenotdel in Uzbekistan is very relevant to my view of the left in Iran, Turkey and other parts of the world, where veiling continues. What would you say is its legacy?**

**AM**: Overall I think the experience is an important one, as it shows what can be done in a situation where there is a commitment to women's liberation as part of building socialism. It shows how important it is to be sensitive to religious culture, and how successful you can be if you create avenues for political and social involvement.

The Zhenotdel promoted the involvement of women without demanding that they unveil. Veiled women took part in demonstrations on International Women's Day and were applauded for having the courage to march publicly. Photos in *Kommunistka* show both veiled and unveiled women at various events. Some activists did believe that the veil had a bad effect on women's health because of the lack of light and the inability to converse freely with others outside the home. But, by creating women's spaces, they

gave women the ability to educate themselves, learn from each other and gain self-confidence.

The Zhenotdel did not directly attack Islam, but found ways to work with Muslim allies in spreading the values of solidarity, secularism and socialism. So Uzbekistan in this period provides an example of what works and what does not. Through culturally sensitive methods the Zhenotdel managed to connect with indigenous women in a real way - although the Hujum destroyed all of that.

Today many academics argue that the Zhenotdel was completely under the control of the party leadership and was part of this mass attack on religion in 1927. However, if you read its journals in a systematic manner, you will see that this is not true at all. What is true is that the leadership was made up of committed party members who considered themselves to be putting the ideas of Kollontai and Zetkin into practice. This was what Marxism meant to them - making formal equality, substantive equality.

**I agree that there needs to be sensitivity, but you do need to take action against the clergy. We have seen how Islam is not easily defeated and continues to present a real problem for the left in places like Iran. It cannot be wished away.**

**AM**: I completely agree. You have to confront it, but how you do so really matters. My view is that you need to be able to reach out to people in order to educate them. Krupskaya, for example, proposed the use of theatrical events, which were very popular. In Azerbaijan, Zhenotdel members would veil themselves and attend weddings and other events. When the women unveiled in their own quarter, they could have debates on all sorts of issues, and sometimes the bride would make donations towards their work. They would go to the women's bathing houses and have discussions with them there. Initially in Uzbekistan they visited women at home.

So religious society and its oppression of women was being challenged, but in a way that sought to integrate those ideas with women's lives and allow them the opportunity to get some economic independence ●

**Fighting fund**

**Two days left!**

As the end of the month approaches, once again we have not reached our £2,250 fighting fund target. But the difference is, of course, that there are still two days to go and we have £2,022 in the kitty,

In other words, we need to raise another £228 in those two days - and we really must get there this time, following a number of failures to do so in recent months. There are two ways you can help us get that money in time: either by PayPal via our website ([weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate)) or - better still, as there are no costs deducted - by bank transfer (to account number 00744310, sort code 30-99-64).

Please follow the example of this week's donors. Best of all was comrade JC, who made a £70 transfer. Then there were GT (£35), JT (£25), DG (£20), OG (£14) and TT (£6) - all of whom contributed either by bank transfer

or standing order. In addition AR also made a £5 transfer, although in his case it was matched by a PayPal donation for the same amount! Another PayPal donor was regular contributor DB, who made his usual £50 monthly donation, while comrade Hassan chipped in with a £20 note. All good stuff!

But now we really must do the necessary by Friday June 30 - please make sure that this time we crash through that £2,250 barrier. You have two days left, comrades!

Please don't disappoint me - we really must get back on track. Just a handful of comrades who log on to their online bank account or make a PayPal transfer would do it for us, but please do one of those two things as soon as you can after reading this! ●

**Robbie Rix**

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

## USA

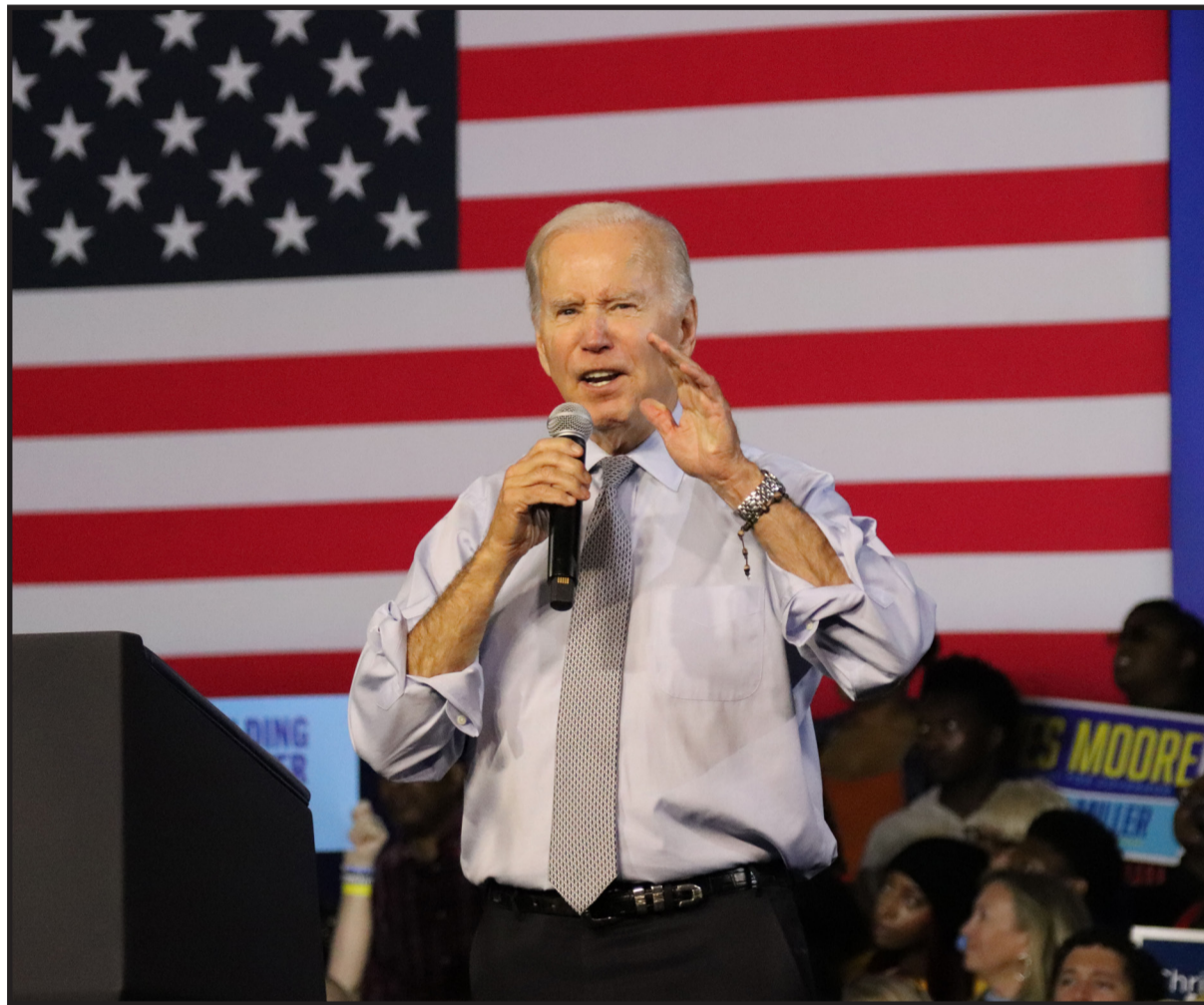
# Both sides cracking

Russia is not the only major power that is feeling the strain, argues Daniel Lazare . The US is too

**R**ussia cracked wide open last week - but the United States of America continued crumbling as well.

Although not as dramatic as Yevgeny Prigozhin's would-be coup on June 24, events in Washington showed that *destabilizatsiya* is not limited to the Russian Federation alone. The action started on June 21, when the House of Representatives voted along party lines to censure Adam Schiff - a California congressman who for years led the charge against Donald Trump for allegedly colluding with Russia, thereby turning himself in Republican eyes into a latter-day Joe McCarthy, albeit with a Democratic twist.

A day later, the Republican-controlled House Ways and Means Committee released testimony by a pair of federal whistleblowers that government higher-ups tried to squelch an investigation into tax fraud by Hunter Biden, the president's troubled 53-year-old son. Among other things, the witnesses laid bare a stunning WhatsApp message that Hunter allegedly sent a Chinese businessman named Raymond Zhao in July 2017, six months after Joe Biden stepped down as vice-president and just a few months before he began putting out feelers about a presidential bid in 2020. The message said:



Joe Biden: warmonger

I am sitting here with my father and we would like to understand why the commitment made has not been fulfilled. I am very concerned that the chairman has either changed his mind and broken our deal without telling me or that he is unaware of the promises and assurances that have been made have not been kept. Tell the director that I would like to resolve this now before it gets out of hand, and now means tonight. And, Z, if I get a call or text from anyone involved in this other than you, Zhang, or the chairman, I will make certain that between the man sitting next to me and every person he knows and my ability to forever hold a grudge that you will regret not following my direction ... I am sitting here waiting for the call with my father.

The chairman is Ye Jianming, a high-ranking businessman who founded a Chinese energy company known as CEFC, while "Zhang" apparently refers to Tian Zhang, co-owner of Hudson West III - a firm that CEFC used to funnel money and credit to Hunter and his uncle James, the president's younger brother. Whether or not Hunter was telling the truth about his father sitting at his side is unknown. But the message at least raises the possibility that the elder Biden was in on a scheme to pressure CEFC into transferring more than \$5 million to Hunter's account - something it did within days.

The testimony suggests other things as well:

- that the Biden administration engaged in unlawful recriminations against tax investigators for delving too deeply into Hunter's affairs;
- that Biden's 2019 claim that "I have never spoken to my son about his overseas business dealings" was flat-out false;
- and that charges that prosecutors have one standard for Democrats and another for Republicans are not easily dismissed.

One of the whistleblowers - a 14-year veteran of the Internal

Revenue Service named Gary Shapley - testified that superiors blocked his requests for warrants to search a guest house on Joe Biden's property in Delaware, in which Hunter was staying, to go through his emails, or to search a storage room that he maintained in northern Virginia. All are routine in IRS investigations, he said, yet the answer he got back was that the "optics" were not good, even though "there was more than enough probable cause for the physical search warrant".

"Hunter Biden still has not reported approximately \$400,000 in income from Burisma" - the Ukrainian oil company that hired him for a lucrative no-show job in order to curry favour in Washington - "and has not paid the tax due." Yet, even though the bill comes to around \$125,000, Shapley said he was warned that he would be committing "career suicide" if he tried to go after the money or file charges. As he told the committee,

For over a year, I've had trouble sleeping and wake all hours of night thinking about this. After some time, I realized it was because I subconsciously knew they were not doing the right thing, but I could not fathom concluding that the United States Attorney's Office or DOJ Tax [department of justice tax division] were in the wrong ... My choice was to turn a blind eye to their malfeasance and not sleep or to put myself in the crosshairs by doing the right thing.<sup>1</sup>

He chose the latter by going public. For Republicans, his testimony about blocked search warrants was especially galling since the DOJ sent more than two dozen FBI agents last August to raid Trump's residence at Mar-a-Lago, Florida, in search of secret documents without even bothering to notify his attorneys. It is further evidence

from their perspective that the old rule still applies - one law for me, another for thee.

## Structural roots

So last week's Washington fireworks are a reminder that civil war is growing not in one country, but in two. The structural roots of Prigozhin's rebellion are clear. In a state that is little more than a federation of semi-autonomous oligarchs, it was inevitable that Vladimir Putin would fall back on semi-autonomous militias like Prigozhin's Wagner Group, once the Russian military bungled the assault on Kiev in the opening weeks of the invasion.

Yet Prigozhin's only reward after suffering brutal punishment in the battle of Bakhmut was to see his militia folded into the same Russian military that he had been forced to rescue. It was 'unfair', which is why he rose in revolt not against the tsar (heaven forbid, since the tsar is god's anointed!), but against evil advisors leading Putin astray - people like minister of defence Sergei Shoigu and Valery Gerasimov, chief of the general staff.

But the structural roots of growing political warfare are equally clear in the US: an overstretched empire, an economic slowdown that just will not quit, a 236-year-old constitutional structure still reeling from the January 2021 attempted coup d'état, plus partisan hatreds that have no place to go but up. Since it is a fight between equally reactionary forces, workers have no interest in siding with one or the other - just as Russian workers have no interest in siding with Prigozhin or the general staff.

The Schiff censure is especially illustrative as to why. The congressman from Tinsel Town - yes, Hollywood is part of his southern California district - is a neocon whose pro-war record has been nonpareil since entering

Congress in 2001. He voted for the "authorization to use military force" in the wake of 9/11, which gave president George W Bush unchecked power to launch a war on terror across the globe. He voted for the 2003 invasion of Iraq - a vote he later blamed on the intelligence agencies for providing false information about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, even though millions of anti-war protestors could have told him at the time that the charges were phony through and through. In 2009, he co-sponsored a resolution slamming a UN report on Zionist-Hamas violations of international law as "irredeemably biased" against Israel, even though the report was even-handed to a fault.

When Barack Obama came out in support of Saudi Arabia and its criminal air war against Yemen in March 2015, Schiff patted him on the back. The Obama administration "made the right decision", he said. "The military action by Saudi Arabia and its partners was necessitated by the illegal action of the Houthi rebels and their Iranian backers." Eight years later, the upshot according to the UN is one of the greatest humanitarian crises on earth - a war-torn country of 34 million in which 80% of the population is unable to put food on the table without outside help.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, Schiff urged Obama in 2016 to veto a UN Security Council resolution criticising Israel for building Jewish settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, while in 2018 he parted ways with fellow Dems by backing Trump's request for a two-year, 11-percent boost in military spending.<sup>3</sup>

None of which bothers Republicans a bit, needless to say. What does bother them, however, is that Schiff, as the ranking Democrat on the House intelligence committee, repeatedly trumpeted findings by MI6 veteran Christopher Steele that Russia was using a secret sex tape to blackmail Donald Trump and

force him to do its bidding. "Is it a coincidence that the Russian gas company Rosneft sold a 19% share after former British intelligence officer Steele was told by Russian sources that Carter Page was offered fees on a deal of just that size?" he asked in March 2017 with regard to an unpaid foreign-policy advisor who supposedly profited from his Trump connections. "Is it a coincidence that Steele's Russian sources also affirmed that Russia had stolen documents hurtful to secretary Clinton that it would utilize in exchange for pro-Russian policies that would later come to pass?"<sup>4</sup>

It was all baloney. As special prosecutor, John Durham told a congressional committee last week: "There is not a single substantive piece of information in the dossier that has ever been corroborated by the FBI or, to my knowledge, anyone else." All we know is that the Hillary Clinton campaign secretly paid Steele to cook up his dossier that the FBI then used to obtain secret search warrants against Page - who, by the way, never received a penny from Rosneft. But Schiff barreled on regardless. In March 2017, he told TV viewers that he could not "go into particulars, but there is more than circumstantial evidence now" that Trump had colluded with Russia to win the election. "The Russians offered help, the [Trump] campaign accepted help," he declared in December. "The Russians gave help, and the president made full use of that help." In April 2018, he said that a Republican finding of no collusion "was unsupported by the facts and the investigative record".

This was *after* a parade of top Obama officials secretly told the intelligence committee that they had no evidence of collusion whatsoever. As James Clapper, Obama's director of national intelligence, testified in July 2017, "I never saw any direct empirical evidence that the Trump campaign or someone in it was plotting/conspiring with the Russians to meddle with the election." Yet, once Democrats won control of the House a year later and made Schiff the intelligence committee's new chairman, he was in a position to keep such testimony under wraps. And so he did for two full years in order to keep the collusion scandal going.<sup>5</sup>

The only thing that is clear is that there is a direct line from Schiff's fulminations at the start of Russiagate to the beginning of hostilities in February 2022. "The United States aids Ukraine and her people, so that we can fight Russia over there and we don't have to fight Russia here," he told Congress in January 2020. Such words took on a new meaning when Russian forces crossed the border two years later in the face of relentless US-Nato provocations.

The destabilisation effort that Schiff helped initiate back in 2017 continues to wreak havoc on both sides of the divide - in Russia and America too. Both sides are cracking, as the war wears on ●

## Notes

1. [waysandmeans.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Whistleblower-1-Transcript\\_Redacted.pdf](https://waysandmeans.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Whistleblower-1-Transcript_Redacted.pdf).
2. [www.unfpa.org/yemen](http://www.unfpa.org/yemen).
3. [www.commondreams.org/views/2019/10/31/message-progressives-adam-schiff-not-your-friend](https://www.commondreams.org/views/2019/10/31/message-progressives-adam-schiff-not-your-friend).
4. [schiff.house.gov/news/press-releases/intelligence-committee-ranking-member-schiff-opening-statement-during-hearing-on-russian-active-measures](https://schiff.house.gov/news/press-releases/intelligence-committee-ranking-member-schiff-opening-statement-during-hearing-on-russian-active-measures).
5. [www.wsj.com/articles/all-the-adam-schiff-transcripts-11589326164](https://www.wsj.com/articles/all-the-adam-schiff-transcripts-11589326164).

REVIEW

# Putting the record straight

Alexei Sayle (narrator), Chis Reeves (director), Norman Thomas (writer), Oh, Jeremy Corbyn - the big lie, Platform Films

I would definitely urge readers to go and see this film, whenever it is shown locally - but please be aware that our enemies have been handed a couple of easy weapons - through a lack of political editing perhaps and various shortcomings.

The "big lie" is a reference, of course, to the campaign to get rid of Jeremy Corbyn. I recognise much of the footage, because the leftwing filmmaker, Chris Reeves of Platform Films, which produced it, has attended many of the meetings, stunts and activities put on by Labour Party Marxists, Labour Against the Witchhunt and other pro-Corbyn groups over the years. We even paid him to record a couple of events that are now part of the film and a lot of my friends and comrades can be seen on screen, either in the background or in the interview section. It is heartening to see reminders of the huge, enthusiastic crowds of Corbyn movement supporters.

Refreshingly, however, the film is also critical of Corbyn - taking him to task for appeasing the witch-hunters who accused him and his supporters of 'anti-Semitism'. "The Labour leadership's answer to the attacks seems to be to say 'sorry'," laments narrator Alexei Sayle. Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi of Jewish Voice for Labour says: "We kept thinking, Jeremy and John McDonnell will see that they will have to stand up to this now. Surely, they can see that these criticisms are not made in good faith." Graham Bash, Tony Greenstein and Jackie Walker make similar comments.

Interestingly, we also hear from Andrew Murray, who left the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain in 2016 to join the Labour Party and was seconded from Unite the Union to Labour HQ for the 2017 general election. He subsequently worked as an advisor to Corbyn from 2018 to 2020. "I am critical of how we handled the anti-Semitism thing", he says, "because in my view we didn't." Apparently Jeremy was "very, very upset by the allegations, very personally wounded and it sort of paralysed a political response." It is a real shame that neither Murray nor Corbyn spoke out when it still could have made a difference.

*The big lie* is not the kind of exposé that contains bombshells or knockout blows. It is unashamedly of the left and for the left. The film simply tries to tell the story of what happened - and why. Mostly that works well. But, on a few occasions, the film gets things wrong politically. My criticisms however, are relatively minor and, crucially, they are very different to the nonsense heaped onto the film by the mainstream press and so-called leftwingers like Paul Mason, Novara Media and singer Billy Bragg (standing in for Owen Jones in the *Guardian*, who has been surprisingly reticent on this whole issue). Of course, none of these darlings of the establishment stood up to the witch-hunt in the Labour Party and often they actually supported it. So their presentday stance comes as no surprise.

## Anti-Semitic

The main charge is, naturally, that the film is "allegedly 'anti-Semitic'", as *The Times* put it. Their journalists do not seem to have watched the damned thing, so instead Rupert Murdoch's august publication turns to that useful idiot Paul Mason (for decades a Trotskyist, first in the SWP, then Workers Power, then Permanent Revolution).



The film they do not want you to see

In his review posted on LabourList (June 19), Mason claims that

the film presents a full-blown conspiracy theory about Corbyn's opponents, conflating Zionists, Jews and Israel as part of a force that 'orchestrated' his overthrow. That, to me, appears to match at least two examples of anti-Semitism in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition, and should raise legal and ethical questions for any venue considering screening it.

Not only does Mason present the hugely controversial IHRA fake 'definition' as some kind of holy script: he also thinks non-compliance with it raises "legal questions" - perhaps he believes it has official legal status? Sadly for Mason, this is not the case. It is *not* legally binding: it is also *not* a definition, as legal experts have pointed out many times - it is extremely vague.

But then Mason's claim that the film "conflates Zionists, Jews and Israel" is utter nonsense anyway - and Mason has to admit as much. His single piece of 'evidence' consists of his description of a scene in which Moshé Machover states, quite correctly, that "nobody can fail to see that this was a concerted, orchestrated campaign" against Corbyn, followed by the narrator, Alexei Sayle, asking: "But if it was an orchestrated campaign, who was in the orchestra?" Mason himself lists the Zionist groups involved: "the Jewish Board of Deputies, the Jewish Labour Movement, Labour Friends of Israel, and the Israel Advocacy Movement".<sup>1</sup>

In other words, even by Mason's own logic, the film - as it is - *could not* be accused of anti-Semitism. But that is a minor admission that, of course, none of the venues which have banned the film will lose much sleep over. From the union bureaucrats of the Tolpuddle Festival, via the cowards in various town halls and council chambers to Sharon Graham of Unite - they all have been falling over themselves to stop the film being shown. To little avail, of course: every cancellation has led to at least two more screenings at other venues. Good.

Of course, the film goes on to add some other members of the said "orchestra", which Mason fails to mention: the mainstream media, former deputy Labour leader Tom Watson and almost the entire Parliamentary Labour Party. Mention could also have been made of alleged leftwingers like Mason himself, as well as chief appeaser and Momentum founder Jon Lansman. He was so eager to please the witch-hunters that he went over to them (in a genuinely cringey interview for *The Guardian*, for example, in which he and Owen Jones try to outdo each other with

their witch-finding skills, he actually claims that the phrase, "I hate Israel", is "clearly anti-Semitic").

Of course there was a conspiracy against Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters. *The Lobby*, Al Jazeera's documentary, and the report by Martin Forde KC on Labour, contain a mountain of evidence. There was a concerted campaign of sabotage, which most left activists on the ground experienced directly - from day one of Corbyn's leadership.

The most effective tactic came to be the "big lie" - the claim that anti-Zionism and criticism of Israel are anti-Semitic. Thousands were vilified, smeared and kicked out the Labour Party and other organisations. So successful has that been, it continues to this day.

Until Mason's review, it was the title that the mainstream media concentrated on (after all, the film can only be seen at special screenings and none of the mainstream media hacks seem to have gone to the trouble to attend).

"There are big lies everywhere and one of the big lies today is of the Labour Party being infested by anti-Semitism", as Moshé Machover explains in the film. "I doubt there is a single Palestine solidarity activist who has not been accused of anti-Semitism. The Zionists have certainly successfully redefined anti-Semitism, says Tony Greenstein: "It does not mean hatred or hostility to Jews as Jews, but for the Zionists ... is opposition to a Jewish, racial, supremacist state."

On this key issue, the film is very strong.

## Problems

There are, however, a few criticisms that have to be made.

Firstly, at no point does anybody point out that in fact there were a few (very, very few) cases of anti-Semitism - it would have been a miracle if there had not been. The Labour Party is part of society and reflects the anti-Semitism, racism, sexism and homophobia that exists in society (though probably on a much smaller scale). Most allegations were utter nonsense, based on trumped-up charges. But on a very few occasions, the recommendation of Labour Against the Witchhunt was that the accused should indeed retract and apologise for a particular thoughtless phrase or problematic tweet that indeed conflated 'Jews' and 'Zionists'.

This underlined our demand for education and discussion on all issues to do with this subject - not an approach of 'zero tolerance', as so stupidly pursued by John McDonnell MP and Jon Lansman. Zero tolerance - ie, the banning of discussion - is the opposite of the kind of open, democratic culture a healthy working class organisation needs. On the particular subject of anti-Semitism it is doubly wrong,

because it was the chief weapon of the right against the left.

More importantly - and Mason picks up on this too - the film makes some rather outlandish and frankly bizarre claims about Keir Starmer, which reflect a serious misunderstanding of how the Labour Party and indeed modern capitalism work. The claim is that Starmer is some kind of operative in the intelligence services. Jackie Walker exclaims "Starmer worked for the CIA, didn't he?" Actually, no, he did not. Rebecca Massey from Brighton gets it right: "He had worked quite closely *with* the CIA", which is rather different. Starmer was, after all, appointed Director of Public Prosecutions in 2008 ... and duly received a knighthood for services rendered. Andrew Murray puts it like this: "I think Starmer will simply be seen as someone who did the establishment's bidding, which is really what he's been doing all his life. He is above all a servant of the state." Exactly.

Now we get to the most shaky part of the film's narrative. Starmer is presented as using his undoubted opposition to Brexit first and foremost because it would wreck Corbyn's election chances. Andrew Murray, showing that he still adheres to the CPB's nationalist road to socialism, sees Starmer's creeping advocacy of a second referendum as the means to scuttle the Corbyn project: "It became clear that [a second Brexit referendum] is the thing that can undermine Corbynism."

Rebecca Massey piles it on: "[Starmer's] best trick was to make Labour a 'remain' party. Let's stick two fingers up to the majority of the British people who voted for Brexit." The film then spends a considerable amount of time interviewing Labour Party members, who explain how they did not understand Labour's policy on Brexit. And, of course, that is exactly how Keir Starmer planned it.

This is overegging things to put it mildly. Surely the comrades at Platform Films will remember that the *vast majority* of Labour Party members opposed Brexit. In the 2016 referendum around 70% of Labour voters ticked 'remain'<sup>3</sup>. Corbyn, however, and many members of the traditional Labour left are of the view that a smaller, a nationally fragmented, capitalism is somehow preferable.

Despite his *sentimental* internationalism when it comes to the Palestinians or other solidarity movements, Corbyn at no point tried to win over the population to a positive vision of workers' unity across Europe and beyond. Labour's *repudiate* Brexit policy was weak, confused and self-defeating. Clearly, Corbyn did not believe in it and it showed. But to claim that this was somehow Starmer's sneaky doing - on behest of other, shadowy forces - is idiotic.

Starmer did what he did because he believed in it. He believed what liberal capitalism believed. Big business, top civil servants and most of the political class believed that Brexit was bad.

That is the truth and the truth needs no lies, either big or small ●

Carla Roberts

## Notes

- labourlist.org/2023/06/the-big-lie-jeremy-corbyn-glastonbury-screening-film-watch-conspiracy-mason.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlZ7Zcoi8wU.
- www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-48039984.

# What we fight for

■ 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.

# weekly worker

**Battle for  
public opinion  
should not be  
rejected**

## Back on the picket line

The pay battle in the NHS is a mixed picture, but, when it comes to doctors, there can be no denying the determination to fight, writes **Richard Galen**



Strikes by junior doctors are due to reach a new high, with the British Medical Association announcing a five-day walkout starting on July 13 - the longest industrial action ever taken by medical professionals in England. This, of course, stands in stark contrast to the Royal College of Nursing ballot.

While an overwhelming 84% of RCN members voted for action, the anti-union laws took their toll once again. Less than 50% of the membership voted - there was a 43.4% turnout. Therefore, the result is deemed 'invalid'. A further, more dynamic campaign within the RCN will be needed before another ballot is called.

The BMA dispute has so far seen three separate strikes since March and the union is currently conducting a ballot to ensure industrial action can continue past the current mandate in August. At the heart of the dispute is the push for "full pay restoration", bringing junior doctors' back to 2008 levels. Adjusted for inflation, that means a 35% increase will take us back to where we were 15 years ago!

Current grievances have seen a sea change in the operations and tactics of the BMA - initiated by grassroots action on social media, led by a left coalition of doctors and medical students, including the Doctors Vote and Broad Left groups. A stark contrast with the leadership back in 2016 - the last time that junior doctors took industrial action. The outcome then was the imposition of a new working contract, widely seen as discriminatory against women and single parents and resulting in further pay erosion.

At the time, many of those on the BMA's junior doctors committee (JDC) were careerist and self-

serving. They certainly had no experience of negotiating in the context of strikes. This was evident in the course of action seen towards the latter part of the dispute. There was a dearth of communication to members about the state of affairs. The cancellation of further planned strikes, followed by the invitation to health minister, Jeremy Hunt, to discuss his plans, left them no more cards to play.

Thankfully, it is clear that lessons have been learned since then. Interaction with the media has been handled more skilfully, with BMA reps undergoing media training and strict messaging to members that press enquiries should be handled exclusively by the union. This has produced the desired effect, with no mixed messages seen in interviews with JDC members. The rightwing press has struggled to find dissenting voices. Not the case back in 2016.

Hence the media seems to have tried to ignore the dispute. Even when the strikes happen there has only been minimal coverage. This has been viewed positively by the junior-doctor community - no publicity supposedly being better than bad publicity.

There has been a shift away from focusing on public opinion and garnering sympathy. Partly this is due to the new BMA staff (hired specifically for their previous experience working in the trade union movement). The priority given to public opinion is widely thought to have contributed to the failure of the 2016 action, through strike fatigue and concern about destroying the reputation of doctors.

### Formidable

In this respect, the BMA has been clear - its dispute is solely with the Tory government and the Department of Health, which bear full responsibility for the current situation. That the union has had to resort to industrial action is down to them. The BMA seems to believe that having the public onside carries little weight in negotiations. Clearly the DoH simply wishes to drag out the dispute for as long as possible, hoping lost pay and a lack of commitment from the membership will eventually lead to capitulation.

Either way, a recent BMA survey shows that 83% of junior doctors have found their patients to be fully supportive of the strikes. So we are

winning the war of public opinion.

Government tactics are further evidenced by the initial offer presented to the JDC by health secretary Steve Barclay - a paltry 5%. This would fall well short of current inflation figures and represents yet another real-terms pay cut. Interestingly, the Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration pay review body has recently been reported recommending 6%, coupled with a 'consolidated payment' of £1,000. This has, though, yet to get the green light, and, of course, the government has routinely ignored pay recommendations in the past. Indeed, health and social care minister, Helen Whately, has refused to say whether or not the DDRB's advice will be followed - that despite the fact that its chair is government-appointed, as is the whole caboodle.

The pressure is mounting on Barclay, however. The Scottish government, which has devolved powers for health, has already made a 14.5% offer over two years. This is a starting point, but, quite rightly, BMA members have stood firm, the offer has been rejected by a 71% majority. BMA Scotland has made

it clear that only full restoration of pay will be accepted.

Also, this week, we have the strike ballot by BMA consultants - 87% voted in favour. They will go on strike on July 20 and 21. The margin was very much like that for the RCN - except, of course, that there was a 71% turnout. It should be noted that many of the grievances over the consultant contract are to do with the lifetime allowance on pensions, which the government abolished shortly after the ballot closed. Nevertheless, the vote represents a significant challenge to the DoH - with costs due to lost elective work now running into hundreds of millions. With more strike action, that can only but increase.

Further adding to Barclay's woes are GPs, who in April balloted in favour of industrial action if their working contract is not reviewed in the next few months.

If the Tory government thought they were facing the same disorganised and timid union as in 2016, they have been proven wrong - and the change has wholly come from rank-and-file members, who, when properly galvanised, represent a formidable challenge ●

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