



# weekly Worker

**Class, culture and generation:  
Jewish civil war rages in America  
over Israel's brutal war on Gaza**

- Letters and debate
- ABCs of Muslim Brothers
- Dublin riots and left
- Polemics: sharp and personal

No 1469 November 30 2023

Towards a mass Communist Party

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**Transform launch -  
a truly bizarre event:  
Carla Roberts reports**



Hieronymus Bosch 'Garden of earthly delights' (1490-1500)

## LETTERS



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

## Admit defeat

Ian (or should it be Frank?) Spencer has a major problem in explaining the shape of late 20th century and early 21st century politics if he won't admit Mike Macnair's argument that the demise of the eastern bloc was a massive defeat for the working class (Letters, November 23). Indeed, the CPGB PCC has quite correctly characterised the post-Soviet era as a "period of reaction" without having any particular illusions in the regimes of 'official communism'.

Spencer argues: "The political economy of the eastern bloc had no mature form and served only to discredit the entire communist project, as anyone who has had a conversation with someone who said 'Then sod off to Russia, if you like it so much' can attest." This was the calculation of various Trotskyist organisations in the 1990s, such as the Socialist Workers Party, which disgracefully connived in the bourgeois rhetoric of the 'end of communism'. It was an 'us next' mentality, along the lines of 'Once we have dispensed with the burden of being lumped in with this monstrosity, we'll be able to soar unimpeded across the heavens'. In fact, the very opposite happened. Both the Labour left and supposedly 'non-Stalinist' organisations were negatively impacted by the collapse of 'official communism'. Trotskyist groups and individuals themselves began a rapid political march to the right as a result.

As comrade Macnair has explained in a set of unpublished theses from 2004, the very impossibility of workers' revolutions in the death throes of the Soviet Union then echoed through the workers' movement internationally. He argues: "These unexpected results occurred because, though the Soviet bureaucracy had escaped from the control of the proletariat and come to be the Bonapartist representative-master of the petty proprietors, it had not escaped from ideological and social dependence on the quasi-enslaved Russian urban working class, or from ideological dependence on and integration in the international workers' movement."

Spencer, on the other hand, argues in a much more linear, 'economical' fashion, extrapolating a simple positive from the fall of undoubtedly dysfunctional state 'planning' regimes in the absence of any concerted political action from the proletariat in countries ruled by 'official communism'. But if 1989-91 was positive and not a defeat, how on earth does Spencer explain the reactionary politics of the last 30 years and a Marxist movement that has either been fast disappearing or is on its arse?

One can concede this idea of defeat without indulging ourselves in romantic fables of crash industrialisation, forced collectivisation or show trials.

Lawrence Parker  
London

## Scurvy pacifist

Tony Clark's letter (November 16) accuses me of being dishonest (which he seems to think is the same as being 'ultra-left'), before going on to champion the politics of Joe Stalin and Jack Conrad against me, on the basis that a parliamentary, democratic, peaceful road to socialism is entirely possible. I don't think Clark is dishonest: he is simply

a pathetic reformist groveller to the capitalist establishment in the rotten tradition of the anti-Marxist Socialist Party of Great Britain.

Back in 1926 Leon Trotsky demolished this political outlook represented by the Fabians, the reformist Labour politicians of the time. Ramsay MacDonald was the main target of his polemic in 'The Fabian "theory" of socialism', whose political outlook he dubbed "a mental junk shop". MacDonald likened the transition to socialism to the natural world, where the chrysalis turns into a butterfly. Even that was a sudden break, Trotsky observed, and pointed to childbirth, where the mother suffers great pain, but the appearance of the infant makes for great joy. Amongst pigeon fanciers a fashion arose for selective breeding to produce ever shorter beaks. But the beaks became so short that they could not pierce the shell and the chicks inside perished.

Clark's methodology rejects the beak entirely and there are no generals like Pinochet who overthrew Allende in 1973 - such as the serving general who asserted in September 2015 in *The Sunday Times* that the British army "could stage mutiny under Corbyn" - an unpunished act of treason. It is unclear whether this was General Sir Nicholas Houghton, chief of the defence staff, who openly threatened Corbyn in November 2015.

Trotsky observed: "... the political art of the British bourgeoisie consists of shortening the proletariat's revolutionary beak, thereby preventing it from perforating the shell of the capitalist state." The beak being the conscious revolutionary leadership, which must replace the reformist Fabians to make the socialist revolution. In that sense it is not at all a direct comparison with nature: socialism will not come as an objective, unstoppable process - or, to put it another way, the conscious revolutionary leadership becomes itself the prime objective factor in revolutionary situations. Without the Bolsheviks the fascist Black Hundreds would have triumphed in 1917.

It is ridiculous to propose that there should be no relationship between maximum and minimum demands. This is the proposition of renegade Karl Kautsky, so beloved of Jack Conrad and the CPGB. So, whilst our ultimate goal is the socialist society, on no account should we politically prepare the class consciousness of the existing vanguard of the masses for this great outcome: we must blind our eyes and pretend that socialism will come objectively when the time is ripe, irrespective of human agency and political opposition.

So it was with every great revolution that changed history. Oliver Cromwell decreed the swing of the axe that cut off the king's head in January 1649 "with the crown upon it". This was the single most revolutionary act in England's history: the absolute, semi-feudal monarchy was gone forever. Maximilien Robespierre was the great lion of the French Revolution - the reign of terror consigned feudal France to the dustbin of history, along with the heads of the aristocracy. Those 'bloodthirsty' revolutionary women looked up from their knitting and cheered with every head that rolled from the guillotine. Lenin and Trotsky directed the storming of the Winter Palace in October 1917 - the greatest single event ever in the struggle for universal human liberation.

I will dub Clark a "scurvy pacifist" (Trotsky) and, in my defence of the violence of the

oppressed, quote from Tom Barry's *Guerrilla days in Ireland*. Here he recounts the execution of 16 spies and informers in West Cork in 1920 and unapologetically notes the success of this operation in sharply reducing the number of IRA volunteers assassinated by the British army:

"There can be no doubt as to why the death roll of the West Cork IRA dropped so amazingly. It was solely because British terror was met by a not less effective IRA counter-terror. We were now hard, cold and ruthless, as our enemies had been since hostilities began. The British were met with their own weapons. They had gone down in the mire to destroy us and our nation, and down after them we had to go to stop them."

Marxists are opposed to individual acts of terror by the oppressed, but we understand why incoherent outbursts of outrage like the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel happen: appalling oppression causes these killings. Lenin never condemned his brother, Alexander Ulyanov, who was executed in May 1887 for attempting to assassinate the tsar. Lenin had the same goal, but an entirely different method: he aimed to replace individual terror against the ruling class with the mass terror of the risen masses. He never equated the violence of the oppressed with that of the oppressor.

Clark champions Joe Stalin's *British road to Socialism*, but is unable to understand how a psychotic mass murderer of all the remaining leaders and participants in the Russian Revolution from 1936-38 could be the same man who wanted a peaceful road to socialism in the UK and in every imperialist country. This was his obscene grovel to imperialism - both 'democratic' (Britain, France and the US) and fascist (Germany, Italy and Spain) - to prove to them he intended them no revolutionary harm. He drowned the Spanish revolution in blood in 1937 to make his pact with Hitler in August 1939 to allow his corrupt bureaucracy to continue enjoying their ill-gotten gains.

Clark's entire letter is also based on an uncritical acceptance of Stalin's anti-Marxist theory of socialism in a single country: "Communists must not seek to come to power in a backward society. In other words, a society should have reached a certain level of development before any bid for power is made," he claims. That's Stalinism's two-stage revolution theory, which resulted in South Africa becoming the most unequal country in the world, with the black masses worse off now than under apartheid. The statue of Nelson Mandela in Parliament Square is for counterrevolutionary services to British and global imperialism.

It is not possible to develop capitalism in a single country: trade and a global division of labour is necessary. Socialism, as an infinitely more advanced form of production - for need and not for profit - is even more impossible in one country. Moreover, class consciousness is not national in its essence, but international and global. A defeat for one national section is a defeat for all; a victory for a national strike or movement is a victory for every national working class. Lenin understood this when he wrote *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism* in 1916 and his April theses in 1917. This reasserted the practical conclusion: "all power to the soviets" and world revolution.

Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution is the essence of this

understanding. Contrary to Clark, soviet democracy is entirely different and opposed to bourgeois democracy (or even 'extreme democracy' - the CPGB version). The latter is a fraud; the former is the active participation of the masses in deciding their own future by means of instantly recallable delegates on the average wage of a skilled worker to regional soviets and a national body.

I know this will be very hard to take for all scurvy pacifists, but breaking the shell of the state is an act of revolutionary violence - which every ruling class in the whole of human history has resisted with the utmost counterrevolutionary violence.

Gerry Downing  
Socialist Fight

## Significant role

In his political report of November 12, Jack Conrad said that the "work colony" of Zionism is not based on the exploitation of 'native' - ie, Palestinian - labour (this is also covered in Mike Macnair's November 16 article, 'Aim for deZionisation'). True up to a point, but clearly not the whole story. And any study of the political economy of the region needs to consider the role of Palestinian labour in the Israeli economy.

Since the October 7 attack by Hamas, Israeli agriculture has been thrown into crisis, given the banning of Palestinian labour and the departure of much foreign labour. According to Reuters, Knesset data from 2021 showed 73,500 people worked in the agriculture sector - 44% Israeli, 33% foreigners (mostly Thai) and 23% Palestinian. But there are also holes in Israel's construction, retail and hospitality sectors for menial and low-paid jobs previously done by Palestinians. The Israel Builders Association says it is operating at 15% capacity now, as compared to before October 7, due to the absence of both Palestinian labour and Israeli reservists called up. To solve this crisis, the Israeli

government is in discussions to bring in up to 100,000 workers from India.

This problem is not new, but heightened by Israel's military campaign of ethnic cleansing. Israel regularly uses migrant labour or adjusts the number of permits for Palestinian labourers able to enter Israel to fill labour shortages. In that sense, Palestinians act at least as a reserve army of labour for the Israeli economy. But, based on the numbers, probably more than this. So comrade Conrad's assertion of a sharp division between a work-colony economy and a 'native-exploitation' economy isn't quite so clear-cut. In the situation of Israel, they are not "absolutely opposite versions of colonialism" (in his words); something hybrid is happening perhaps?

Israel is not the USA or Australia in terms of completely pushing the native people out of its economy. But neither is it South Africa in terms of relying on exploitation of the 'native' population. Israel's labour force is about 4.37 million, according to 2022 data from the World Bank. Until recently up to 200,000 workers crossed into Israel or into Israeli settlements in the West Bank each day for work.

The International Labour Organisation, in a report from May this year, said: "A total of 192,700 Palestinian workers now work in Israel and the settlements, one third more than a year earlier. More than 40,000 work in settlements, within an unregulated environment and are often underpaid. About another 40,000 from the West Bank work within Israel undocumented and informally ..."

That is more than five percent of the Israeli workforce - and this doesn't include the more than two million Arab-Palestinian population of Israel. Taking into account labour participation rates, this means Arabs are at least 30% of the Israeli workforce.

What the shape of this will be after the crisis point of the war

## Fighting fund

## Contribute now!

Very bad news, I'm afraid. With, as I write, only one day left to reach our £2,250 target for November, the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund stands at just £1,809. In other words, we still need £416!

But, if enough of our supporters read this before midnight on Thursday November 30 and do the necessary, there's still a chance (admittedly small) that we can get there. But that would mean using PayPal (see below for the web address) or making a bank transfer in double-quick time!

Let me stress once again how much we rely on our readers and supporters to keep this paper going. True, our production team is made up of voluntary, unpaid comrades, but our various expenses (not least printing costs) mean that the money received from subscriptions does not cover them.

Now I know that we do get a couple of standing orders on the last day of the month, but they alone will take us nowhere near where we need to be. So please, if you read this in time, click on that PayPal button!

The last week saw a meagre £246 come our way, despite some useful donations - not least comrade LM's monthly £80 standing order. Then there was DB's £50 PayPal contribution (made monthly too), while AC also paid £20 in that way. Then there were SOs/bank transfers from GT (£35), JT (£25), DG (£20) and TT (£6). Finally comrade AR made his two monthly £5 payments - one via PayPal and the other by standing order!

All those comrades are aware of the vital role the *Weekly Worker* plays in fighting for what the working class movement desperately needs - a single, democratic-centralist, Marxist party uniting all committed communists. Please make sure we can continue playing that role for as long as necessary! ●

Robbie Rix

Our bank account details are name: Weekly Worker sort code: 30-99-64 account number: 00744310 To make a donation or set up a regular payment visit [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate)

is unknown. But it does show that Palestinian labour plays a significant role in Israel's economy and can't be dismissed from political analysis.

**Martin Greenfield**  
Australia

## Not terrorist

A petition calling for the removal of Hamas from the UK's list of 'proscribed terrorist groups or organisations' will be delivered to Downing Street on Tuesday December 5 at 10am. Over 1,280 have signed the open letter since it began a month ago. In addition, over 25 people have submitted written applications for Hamas's deproscription to the Head of Counter Terrorism Policy at the home office.

The interim delivery of 1,280 letters will be delivered by myself as chair of One Democratic Palestine (an association of 85 members which campaigns for a single-state solution), along with a few supporters. I will be pointing out that, whilst the Hamas military wing, the Qassam Brigades, were proscribed in 2001, the political wing was only added in 2021, following Priti Patel's secret meetings whilst on an Israeli holiday. The Terrorism Act 2000 provides that any person affected by proscription may call upon the government to remove the proscribed body from the list.

I originally sought to lodge the petition through the Parliamentary Petitions website, only to be informed that it was rejected, because "It calls for an action relating to a particular individual, or organisation outside of the UK government or parliament." Undeterred, I approached GoPetition in the USA, who agreed to carry the petition. It has been featured in various publications, including *Middle East Monitor*, *Russia Today* and *Al Jazeera* - and publicised through flyers and social media.

The bid is particularly relevant at present, given the revelations that the majority of those who died on October 7 were killed by Israeli Mavara tanks demolishing kibbutz homes and by Apache helicopters firing Hellfire missiles at every car they could find, in the hope they may contain Qassam fighters. The Israeli airforce itself admitted that their helicopters shot up every vehicle headed to Gaza, all of which contained Israelis being taken there. Israeli airforce colonel Nof

Erez admitted the airforce targeted Palestinian and Israeli civilians in line with the 'Hannibal Directive' - a policy aimed at preventing Israelis being taken into captivity. Erez described October 7 as "mass Hannibal". Nova music festival-goer Yasmin Porat confirmed this is what took place at Kibbutz Be'eri, on state radio; these claims were backed up in *Ha'aretz*. Because both were in Hebrew, they've been ignored in the west. But helicopter camera footage confirms them.

I believe that the main aim of the Qassam Brigade's action was to take Israelis into detention, who could be used to barter for the thousands of Palestinians held captive, in the exchanges we are currently seeing.

In light of the fact that Israel has been using their massacre of October 7 as a reason to "wipe out Hamas" for deaths that Israel itself mostly caused, we feel it essential that the UK government reconsider this listing. Hamas were elected by a big majority of Palestinians in 2006 - but excluded from their right to govern Palestine - all their requests to the Palestine Authority for fresh elections have been denied. Their 'Document of General Principles and Policies', published in May 2017, makes clear that Hamas are committed to democracy, that their enemy is not Jews, but Zionism - and they would call a truce if Israel withdrew to their 1967 borders. However, their ultimate objective would be the end of Israel and its replacement with one democratic Palestine, with equal rights for all.

Hamas's objectives reflect the reality that a two-state solution is impossible; since Israel has ensured there is insufficient territory left to create a viable Palestinian state. Hamas would prefer an Islamic state, but will go along with what the majority prefer.

The UN refuses to proscribe Hamas, as they recognise that Palestinians have a right to use armed struggle to end their 75 years of occupation against a colonising power that denies their rights. We will continue with this petition until we have succeeded in convincing UK parliamentarians that we must do as we did with Northern Ireland, when we kept speaking to Sinn Féin, even whilst the IRA were bombing Britain. Because we have proscribed Hamas, we leave the Palestinians - and most particularly the Gazans -

without a voice.

**Pete Gregson**  
One Democratic Palestine

## Graft and greed

Call it what you will - a truce, a humanitarian ceasefire, a pause, But in reality it is a defeat for the Zionist apartheid regime.

After nearly 50 days of laying waste to the infrastructure and civilian lives in Gaza through a campaign of indiscriminate carpet-bombing of residential areas - worthy of 'Bomber Harris' himself and his firebombing of Dresden during World War II - not one captive had been released.

Netanyahu had publicly pledged: no end to the war on Gaza, until all the captives have been released and Hamas has been destroyed. Undoubtedly internal political pressure on him from the 'release the prisoners campaign' in Israel, where family members and supporters marched from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, demanding an exchange of captives in order to free their loved ones in Gaza, had an influence.

But, six days on, where will it all go? You can be sure of one thing: the Zionist zealots at the heart of the settler-dominated war cabinet want to ethnically cleanse Gaza, as well as the occupied West Bank. They want to seize the opportunity given to them (not by Hamas, but by Biden) to continue the expansion of their apartheid state further onto Palestinian land. They have destroyed and devastated much of northern Gaza, there is nothing left for the residents to return to.

The Zionists are now claiming that the Hamas headquarters are situated in southern Gaza and are thus preparing the path internationally for 'phase two' - the decimation of southern Gaza through the destruction of every hospital, school and refugee camp, as well as the lives of tens of thousands of more defenceless men, women, children and babies.

This war is not an attack on Hamas - a legitimate national liberation organisation: it is a war of depopulation, of attrition and of slow genocide. If the Zionist war-criminal regime is not stopped, they will corral the Palestinians, then through the weaponisation of famine, sanitation, water and medicine, will enforce a modern death march on the Gazans - much like the 'Trail of Tears', when Native American Indians were forcibly displaced by the American army, causing countless needless deaths in an official policy of genocide.

100,000 Asians from India are being recruited to work in Israel. This will allow 100,000 Israelis to remain in Gaza - a garrison to complete the mission, 'Empty Gaza'. With American backing they will pursue this aim over the next 12 months. They will leave nothing in Gaza: no food, no water, no electricity, no sanitation, no fuel, no medicine, no schools, no hospitals, no doctors. Just death, disease and destruction. Leave or die - that will be the choice. Then the Zionists will say they left voluntarily. That's the master plan - the final solution for Gaza, Zionist style.

Who will stop them? That remains to be seen, but, be assured, it won't be our 'democratic', 'humanitarian-led' governments, who are assisting in the genocide. British bases in Cyprus are being used to resupply the Israeli death machine. Biden has allowed the Zionist apartheid regime unparalleled access to American munitions stores and I believe Shannon airport is still being used to support the American war effort in west Asia.

Ah, democracy. Well, not in my name - you can keep it. Democratic dictatorship is what it has become: a duopoly of parties and a duopoly of graft and greed.

**Fra Hughes**  
Belfast

# ACTION

## Socialist ideas to change the world

**Friday December 1 to Sunday December 3:** Marxism weekender for students and young workers, LSE Students Union, 1 Sheffield Street, London WC2. Debate why the system is in crisis - and how to fight to change it. Weekend ticket £20 (£15). Day ticket £10. Organised by Socialist Workers Party: [socialistworker.co.uk/weekender](http://socialistworker.co.uk/weekender).

## Day of action for Palestine - ceasefire now!

**Saturday December 2:** Local actions nationwide. Demand a permanent ceasefire now, and for an end to British complicity in Israeli apartheid, including through the UK-Israel arms trade. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=727471282749616](http://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=727471282749616).

## Freedom for Palestine

**Saturday December 2, 3pm:** Rally, The Atrium, 124 Cheshire Street, London E2. Despite the 'humanitarian pause', the Israeli aim remains ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. Speakers include Jeremy Corbyn and Andrew Murray. Tickets free. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/events).

## Solidarity with Polish abortion rights activists

**Saturday December 2, 3pm:** Protest outside the Polish embassy, 47 Portland Place, London W1. Women in Poland need access to safe and legal abortions. Repeal the laws that criminalise assisting women who seek them. Organised by Amnesty International: [www.facebook.com/events/24601131706151826](http://www.facebook.com/events/24601131706151826).

## What it means to be human

**Tuesday December 5, 6.30pm:** Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'When Eve laughed: the origins of language'. Speakers: Chris Knight and Jerome Lewis.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [www.facebook.com/events/256307307325806](http://www.facebook.com/events/256307307325806).

## The struggle for Palestinian freedom

**Wednesday December 6, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, Augustine United Church, 41 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH1 and online. The role of imperialism in the Middle East and campaigning for Palestinian freedom. Speaker: Anindya Bhattacharyya. Organised by Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century: [www.facebook.com/events/347638031236101](http://www.facebook.com/events/347638031236101).

## Israel-Palestine: oppression and resistance

**Thursday December 7, 7pm:** 'Why Marx?' online education and discussion series, every Thursday. This session: 'Freedom fighters or terrorists: where does Hamas come from?' Speaker: Yassamine Mather (Hands Off the People of Iran). Organised by Labour Left Alliance: [www.facebook.com/LabourLeftAlliance](http://www.facebook.com/LabourLeftAlliance).

## The Workers' Committee

**Thursday December 7, 7pm:** Pamphlet launch and social, People's History Museum, Left Bank, Spinningfields, Manchester M3. Reprint of JT Murphy's 1917 pamphlet, which delves into the struggles and triumphs of the early shop stewards networks. Tickets £5 (free). Free refreshments provided. Organised by Strike Map and Manifesto Press: [www.facebook.com/events/918873893193311](http://www.facebook.com/events/918873893193311).

## Learning lessons from the US strike wave

**Thursday December 7, 7pm:** Online public meeting. Strikes involving Starbucks workers, healthcare workers, pilots, actors, writers and auto workers have seen rank-and-file activists come together to transform their unions. Discuss what we can learn from their struggles. Organised by Troublemakers At Work: [troublemakersat.work/event/learning-from-the-us-strike-wave](http://troublemakersat.work/event/learning-from-the-us-strike-wave).

## Global day of action for climate justice

**Saturday December 9:** Protests nationwide, as Cop28 is held in the United Arab Emirates - a country planning a massive expansion of oil and gas production. Organised by Climate Justice Coalition: [climatejustice.uk/9-december-day-of-action-for-climate-justice](http://climatejustice.uk/9-december-day-of-action-for-climate-justice).

## Fight together to defend the right to strike

**Saturday December 9, 9am:** Lobby of TUC special congress, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Organise for non-compliance and resistance; fight to repeal all the anti-union laws. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: [www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=712356174256772](http://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=712356174256772).

## Reflections on the strike wave

**Tuesday December 12, 7pm:** Public meeting, Working Class Movement Library, 51 The Crescent, Salford M5. A workshop for workers to reflect on the strike wave and plan ahead to win in 2024. Organised by Strike Mcr: [www.facebook.com/events/662065992776929](http://www.facebook.com/events/662065992776929).

## Lenin in Britain

**Saturday January 20, 11am to 4pm:** Symposium marking the centenary of Lenin's death, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1 and online. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/447](http://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/447).

## Latin America conference ¡Adelante!

**Saturday January 27, 10am to 5pm:** Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Learn and take inspiration from the mass movements across the region. Show solidarity with struggles for sovereignty, against neoliberalism and US domination. Over 20 seminars plus stalls and films. Tickets £10 (£8). Organised by Latin America conference 2024: [latinamericainconference.co.uk/laconfprogramme](http://latinamericainconference.co.uk/laconfprogramme).

## 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.

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday December 3 5pm

**Why supporting Israel's war doesn't stop Marine Le Pen's party being anti-Semitic**  
Speaker: David Broder

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)  
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)

**LEFT**

# Sixty seconds and no politics

Launched in Nottingham, Transform is unlikely to set British politics alight. Carla Roberts reports on a truly bizarre event

**T**ransform's founding conference was one of the most bizarre political events I have ever attended. We were told that 6,300 people had signed up - which clearly has not translated into involvement. A mere 85 people travelled to Nottingham on November 25, while another 120 or so watched online (which soon dwindled down to just over 70). And yet, judging by some of the agenda items and speeches, you would have thought we were witnessing the birth of a mass party.

The conference started as boring as humanly possible, with a two-hour discussion of the draft constitution - and, as if that was not bad enough, it quickly transpired that the "10 core principles" were to be excluded. This is despite the fact that they are listed in the first section of the constitution and are, in the absence of anything else, the actual *programme* of this new organisation. This seems to have been decided by the interim steering committee (whose composition has not been publicised anywhere) without any kind of communication to supporters beforehand, which meant that, while plenty of amendments were submitted, they did not see the light of day.

To call these 10 points 'principles' is quite a stretch. They are supposed to sum up the so-called 'things we all agree on' and guarantee that this particular attempt to build yet another 'broad left' organisation is going to be super-popular, because there is nothing in it that anybody could possibly disagree with! Therefore, instead of using scary words like 'socialism' and 'communism' - or indeed discussing how to get there - the self-declared socialists in the leadership have served up the usual sub-reformist hotchpotch of "climate justice", "social justice" and "equality". Take the first of the short points: "Transform is a left party, of and for the working class in all its diversity, seeking to redistribute wealth and power from the elite to the people."<sup>1</sup>

This is the kind of Lassallean nonsense that Marx and Engels argued against at length, over 150 years ago. Surely those running Transform know very well it is not about 'distribution' of the profits stolen from the working class, but about the *ownership of the means of production*. But that is way too difficult to understand for the stupid working class, so let's keep it light.

A couple of amendments sought to at least include references to socialism, but, alas, it is now up to the new executive committee to decide *which* amendments go in and which do not. Nobody quite seemed to know when the EC elections will take place - maybe before, maybe after Christmas. No doubt they will be held electronically, without any chance to question the candidates in any meaningful way (a kind of beauty contest).

To make matters worse, the interim steering committee decided that each amendment could be moved by a speech lasting no longer than a whopping 60 seconds! (One opposing speech was allowed to continue for another measly minute.) By the time people worked out where exactly in the constitution we were, it was time to vote. It is extraordinary that nobody in the admittedly small audience protested against these ridiculous standing orders or the fact that the actual politics were not even up for discussion.

There were a number of potentially



London, November 25: Left Unity's Andrew Burgin (left) and Kate Hudson (sixth from left)

interesting amendments, but there was just no time to develop any kind of serious discussion. For example, the draft constitution already allows for "national parties" to be formed in Wales and Scotland, "creating their own party structures and policies" - but a raft of amendments from Wales wanted to see that "members in Cymru and Scotland will separately consider how to take forward Transform aims and principles in their countries" and "produce their organisational constitutions and have autonomy over all policy, strategic and operational decisions and actions". Basically, form entirely different organisations. Now what exactly would be the point of that? The amendments were quite rightly defeated - leading to a handful of people walking out in a huff.

## Leader cult

Another amendment wanted to add the position of a directly elected 'leader'. This was put forward by Charles James, a vocal supporter of the Breakthrough Party. He argued that, particularly "in a crisis", you just need to be able to "move quickly" and "leave things to one person and not a committee". The reason that "Left Unity has seriously stagnated in the last few years" was the fact that it was run by a committee. "But the Breakthrough Party has grown from zero to just under 1,000 members in less than two years - because of its leader."

What nonsense. Breakthrough leader Alex Mays actually had a fan club of about 15 people with him, who whooped noisily whenever his name was mentioned or when he delivered his underwhelming and delusional closing speech. "Polling shows that 61% want a new party and we have to build it", he said. "We will build a radical blueprint for the world we want to live in. Join us and be part of the change you want to see." You get the drift - build it and the masses will come (no programme or transparency needed). Well, the fact that of the 1,000 alleged members Breakthrough managed to bring a mere 25 or so to Nottingham

tells you all you need to know about the kind of 'breakthrough' it has achieved, politically or numerically. But at least this amendment was voted down.

Perhaps not surprisingly, there was a serious level of mistrust detectable - and not really of the healthy kind. Half a dozen of the amendments wanted to make sure, for example, that "current members" of the interim SC "may not stand for any national role within the first two years of the founding of Transform"; that "no person may serve for more than two consecutive terms without a two-year break"; that "delegates [to the national council] shall take instructions on how to vote at the NEC from their delegating bodies, and shall be responsible to their delegating bodies"; and that places on the national council "shall be declared vacant" if a member misses "three consecutive meetings".<sup>2</sup> No doubt, quite a few of these amendments come from people who have been burned by their experiences in this or that sect. But most of the proposals were based on *technocratic* controls of the leadership, rather than democratic transparency.

This is a constitution for a mass party, with dozens of directly elected officers, which will form the executive committee (much better to have a collective leadership body that decides on those positions among itself) and a national council made up of representatives from yet to be formed regional groups, national parties and reps from various caucuses based on "shared oppression".

Like Left Unity, Transform also allows members to "organise in platforms of like-minded members within the party, to articulate a particular position". However, they "must work publicly within the policy framework agreed by the party conference and national council". This vague formulation leaves the leadership open to silence or censure dissenting voices.

Considering the speed with which the conference raced through

the amendments, it was difficult to follow which ones were carried and which defeated. Only about one third of them were discussed, before the meeting then split into the obligatory working groups for an hour - as usual, they were being sold as 'empowering' the participants, when in reality they do exactly the opposite: without any positions agreed upon or even any feedback to the main meeting, they are designed to bamboozle participants into believing their 'voices are heard'. Quite a few people, including myself, decided to give them a miss.

## Elections

Conference then spent over an hour and a half discussing 'How to win power', which was like something from a parallel universe, considering how few people were there. Speaker after speaker outlined their particular hobby horse, local campaign or 'community action' that would likely inspire the masses to join Transform and "take the power", to quote a few.

The main focus - for the rest of the day - was elections. There is clearly the hope that Transform could serve as an umbrella for the myriad of 'independents' standing in coming local and national elections.

Here Transform is currently in competition with Tusc, SPEW's front campaign, which has been busy writing to each and every organisation on the left, "to ask you to discuss with us your plans for the next general election".<sup>3</sup>

Tusc used to be part of Transform's forerunner: it was one of five organisations invited by former Labour MP Thelma Walker to set up the People's Alliance of the Left (PAL) - an attempt to bring together some of the soft-left groups that were standing in elections on similar platforms. It also included the remnants of Left Unity, the Breakthrough Party, Chris Williamson's Resist and the Northern Independence Party (NIP).

But things went sour pretty quickly. In May 2022, after about a year of monthly meetings held in secret, Tusc was thrown out, because

it decided to allow George Galloway's Workers' Party observer status. PAL also threw out Williamson and Resist (which has since folded into the Workers' Party).<sup>4</sup> Soon after that, NIP left because it could not convince the other groups of its silly demand for "independence for the north". Its founder, Phillip Proudfoot, has since left to join the Green Party!

Transform is, in reality, what is left of PAL - which was not very impressive in the first place. In other words, it is a merger of the Breakthrough Party and the rump Left Unity, plus a few assorted individuals like former Green Party councillor Romyne Phoenix, who gave a long and rambling speech about 'climate justice'. Then there is Andrew Jordan, former national president of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party. Comrade Jordan chaired a session, in which he announced that "Transform already has over 60 local groups" - but after a sceptical question from a delegate he had to clarify that "they are at very different stages of development and some of them exist on WhatsApp or Zoom". I got the impression that quite a few of them consist of little more than a bloke in an attic.

## Corbyn sit out

Left Unity has been hanging on by a thread ever since it decided to sit out the Corbyn movement in 2015. By fluke, it is still a member of the European Left Party, which is how LU's Kate Hudson described her political affiliation on the previous (now deleted) version of Transform's website. She, along with a few other LU 'old timers', gave the conference a miss for the sake of the pro-Palestine demonstration in London.

I did though spot the Mandelite LU veterans, Doug Thorpe and Joseph Healy, now members of Anticapitalist Resistance. In August, they published a rather sweet article about Transform, in which they predicted: "The launch of the party will be the point where we formulate policy beyond our 10 principles ... One of our guiding principles is that the party will be democratic and bottom up from the beginning and that all of our policies won't come from above."<sup>5</sup> Seeing that none of that happened, we are looking forward to their damning report!

To be fair, a few speakers said from the start that this launch might be somewhat premature and that Transform is unlikely to make any real impact at the next general election - it wants to be in place to Hoover up people who will be disappointed with Keir Starmer as prime minister in a year or two. However, while things might indeed start moving politically then - especially if some of the bigger unions start rebelling against the Labour government's inevitable 'betrayal' - it seems somewhat unlikely that any union leaders or substantial numbers of workers will join an organisation that is so lacking in any kind of coherent political outlook ●

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USA

# Class, culture and generation

**Daniel Lazare** welcomes the Jewish civil war that is being fought out in cancellations, sackings, demonstrations, petitions and boycotts

Lenin's 1915 call to turn the imperialist war into a civil war is taking on new meaning, now that the US-Israeli assault on Gaza is igniting a civil war among Jews!

The results are most evident in the United States, where Orthodox rabbis are attacking Reform Jews for calling for a "humanitarian pause",<sup>1</sup> while Jewish billionaires demand that Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania and other schools crack down on anti-Zionist protestors (many of them Jewish), and threaten to withdraw financial support if they do not.

Columbia University, under heavy pressure from Jewish billionaire donors, has suspended two pro-Palestinian groups - Jewish Voice for Peace and Students for Justice in Palestine, for "threatening rhetoric and intimidation". The 92nd Street Y - founded 150 years ago as the Young Men's Hebrew Association and long a cultural mainstay on Manhattan's Upper East Side - is in turmoil after cancelling an appearance by the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, Viet Thanh Nguyen (author of *The sympathizer* and *The refugees*) merely because he signed an open letter in support of a ceasefire. But then the Y was forced to cancel the rest of the literary season when top staffers quit in protest and well-known poets declared a boycott.<sup>2</sup>

## Zionist aggression

The Anti-Defamation League - a pillar of the Jewish liberal establishment - has attacked Jewish Voice for Peace and others as "hate groups, the photo inverse of white supremacists", because they dare to challenge Zionist aggression. But after issuing the blast the ADL was then hit by an internal revolt by young staffers demanding to know how the league could lump Jewish peace activists in with the Ku Klux Klan. ("Zionism is a liberation movement," ADL chief Jonathan Greenblatt defiantly replied. "... If you still feel like you can't square the fact that anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism, then maybe this isn't the place for you.")<sup>3</sup>

*Artforum* magazine stumbled into a hornet's nest for the opposite reason: ie, for running an open letter from nearly 8,000 artists and cultural workers (many of them Jewish) expressing solidarity with Palestinians and "reject[ing] violence against all civilians regardless of their identity". After a flood of protests from Jewish gallery owners, art collectors and advertisers, the magazine's solution was to fire its editor-in-chief for publishing the letter in the first place.

"I'm disappointed that a magazine that has always stood for freedom of speech and the voices of artists has bent to outside pressure," the editor, David Velasco, said. "I have never lived through a more chilling period," added photographer Nan Goldin, who grew up in a middle class Jewish home in Massachusetts and whose work has dealt extensively with drugs and the Aids epidemic. "People are being blacklisted. People are losing their jobs." Goldin vowed never to work for *Artforum* again.<sup>4</sup>

A Berkeley geneticist named Michael Eisen - a Jew with relatives in Israel - was removed as editor of an open-access research journal called *eLife* after re-tweeting a satirical article titled 'Dying Gazans criticized for not using last words to condemn Hamas'.<sup>5</sup>



Pro-Palestine march, Washington DC

"Every sane person on earth is horrified and traumatized by what Hamas did and wants it to never happen again," Eisen said a week after the October 7 assault. "But I am also horrified by the collective punishment already being meted out on Gazans and the worse that is about to come."<sup>6</sup> Nearly 2,000 scientists, many of them Jewish, signed a protest letter in response complaining that "a culture of fear, intolerance and political repression" is taking hold.<sup>7</sup> Palestine Legal, a legal-aid group based in Chicago, says it has received more than 80 inquiries from people who say they have been fired since October 7 due to their pro-Palestinian views.

To be fair, pro-Israelis are getting the boot too. At Washington University in St Louis, a medical researcher was dismissed after tweeting that "Israel is not targeting humans" in Gaza, while a prominent physician was removed as head of New York University's Perlmutter Cancer Center for retweeting an anti-Hamas political cartoon that *The New York Times* said featured an "offensive" anti-Arab stereotype.<sup>8</sup>

While few *Weekly Worker* readers will be able to work up much sympathy for the oncologist, Dr Benjamin Neel, they should appreciate the danger of allowing powerful bourgeois institutions to determine what is permissible and what is not. (In fact, the cartoon, in this writer's opinion, is not especially offensive to anyone other than the super-sensitive *Times*, which gets the vapours whenever the word 'black' is uncapitalised.)<sup>9</sup>

## Revolt

But isn't it sad that people are quarrelling instead of pulling together for the common good? Why can't they all just get along?

The answer, of course, is that they should *not* get along when Zionists are killing thousands of people in the name of fighting anti-Semitism, while at the same time allying themselves with anti-Semitic 'Christian Zionists', such as Texas televangelist John Hagee. As I reported last week, he declared at a pro-Israel demonstration that the holocaust was divinely ordained: "Why did it happen? Because God said, 'My top priority for the Jewish people is to get them to come back to the land of Israel'."<sup>10</sup> As a reactionary ideology through and through,

Zionism can only engender more anti-Semitism, more Islamophobia and more military aggression, no matter how much it claims to be fighting for the opposite.

As Lenin put it in the midst of World War I, "Whoever wishes a durable and democratic peace must be for civil war against the governments and the bourgeoisie."<sup>11</sup> Instead of war *between* nations, in other words, socialists must agitate for class war *within* nations and within ethnic communities as well. Since the last thing socialists want to see is Jews lining up behind Benjamin Netanyahu's murderous policies out of some misplaced sense of group identity, they can only applaud when a portion of the community rises up in support of an oppressed people that the Jewish state has spent decades vilifying and degrading. Rather than passive acquiescence, Zionism is meeting with active resistance in its own ranks and is reeling as a consequence.

The reasons for the revolt are not hard to discern. American Jews live thousands of miles away from the battlefield and therefore, as Zionists like to claim, have the luxury of being peace-loving and democratic, when frontline Israeli Jews do not. But this merely stands Zionism on its head, since the old argument that Jews need a state of their own in order to be safe and secure turns out to be false.

But it is also clear that the two biggest Jewish communities in the world have been following opposite paths since the 1940s. Where Israeli Jews isolated themselves in a besieged ethno-state - or rather found themselves *herded* into a Jewish state by a Zionist cabal intent on closing off all other escape routes from the Nazis - their American co-religionists plunged headlong into a multi-ethnic society filled with conflicts of every conceivable sort, yet one nominally dedicated to certain over-arching democratic principles. While supporting Jewish supremacy in Israel, Jewish leaders have therefore long preached the opposite in the United States, which is that the only way to ensure Jewish equality is by fighting for equal rights for all.

It is a question of racial supremacy versus racial equality, and the result is a powerful contradiction that is finally beginning to explode. The conflict is class-based, since it pits

wealthy and conservative Wall Streeters against those who are less firmly established. It is also generational, in that it pits older Jews against young people who feel thoroughly at home in America's freewheeling society. Young US Jews are more liberal according to a recent poll, more culturally detached, more likely to intermarry, and more inclined to atheism or agnosticism. Those in the 18-29 age bracket are less attached to the Jewish state and less likely to believe that Jews occupy the land of Israel by divine right. Among American Jews in general, only 33% think Netanyahu is sincerely trying to make peace with the Palestinians, while 25% characterise Israel as an apartheid state and 22% say it is guilty of genocide.<sup>12</sup>

## Jewish ethics

That is quite an indictment of a state that claims to have been created on the Jews' behalf. To the degree young American Jews feel a residual loyalty to Judaism, it is not because of the *Talmud*, *Torah* or anything like that, but rather because of a vague sense of Jewish ethics - the belief, to quote first century sage Simeon ben Gamaliel, that "the world rests on three things: justice, truth, and peace", and that the Jewish mission is to see to it that all are firmly established.

There is much for Marxists to quarrel with here: eg, how to reconcile such high-minded sentiments with the gory massacres that the Hebrew *Bible* otherwise celebrates; or whether ethics can be considered ethics at all when seen as 'handed down by god' rather than fashioned by human beings on their own. (Humanism, of which Marxism is a part, holds firmly to the latter.)

Regardless, the upshot is a growing split among Jews in terms of religion, morality and culture. It is a civil war in the making that Israel's war on Gaza is now turning into the real thing. Ethnic solidarity is shattering, as a significant sector of American Jewry rises in rebellion - which is all to the good.

What will replace it, however, is unknown. Marxists believe the answer to endless fratricide is a Hebrew-Arab workers' state in a socialist Middle East. But, given the liberal nature of American protest politics, they may as well be speaking a foreign language. While protestors are united in calling for a ceasefire,

few seem to have any sense of what lies beyond.

How to provide peace and security on both sides of the divide, how to respond to homicidal tendencies on the part of Likud and Hamas, what to do about a region ravaged by militarism and war - such supremely difficult questions are put off for another day, while everyone concentrates on a ceasefire in the here and now. Almost no-one celebrates the murderous October 7 assault, other than a few idiots in the Socialist Workers Party in the UK or the played-out Northites who put out the World Socialist Web Site in the US.<sup>13</sup> But Hamas is still the great unmentionable - something that protestors dare allude to in only the most roundabout terms.

Then there is the dual problem of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. With anti-immigrant riots in Dublin, Geert Wilders' astounding election victory in the Netherlands, and Donald Trump's vows to re-impose a ban on Muslims entering the US, the former is plainly growing by leaps and bounds. Anti-war activists must fight it as hard as they can. But how can they do so without allying themselves with the same liberal politicians backing Israel to the hilt?

The same goes for the Jews. So far, anti-Semitism has been remarkably restrained. While some protestors no doubt blame Jews in general for the horrors in Gaza, they are holding their tongue in order to appeal to as broad a population as possible. But, the uglier the war, the less likely such sentiment will remain under wraps. Will peace activists hold their tongues, once they finally emerge? Or will they try to counter them with an aggressive programme of socialist internationalism?

The latter is the only course, and yet it requires more than just calls for compromise and peace. While resistance is welcome, anti-war forces must confront Zionism head on - along with the US imperialism behind it and the dead-end jihadism of Hamas.

The growing horror in the Middle East is a multi-dimensional problem that demands a multi-dimensional response that only an international workers' movement can provide ●

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## MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

# ABCs of Muslim Brothers

Three typologies, three stages, three martyrs. In the second of three articles, Jack Conrad investigates a highly variegated history of the organisation in Egypt

Whatever its undoubted limitations, we shall adapt the church-sect typology of the US Christian theologian, Helmut Richard Niebuhr, and apply it to the Islamic movement.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt will be classified as an Islam of the *transformation of culture* - a revivalism or conversionism which seeks to redeem humanity through returning it to an imaginary pristine ideal. Needless to say, all such attempts necessitate radically refashioning social realities in the here and now: by definition something which requires a well-tuned political antenna and ability to rapidly manoeuvre. Not a purist withdrawal from society and separatism (*Islam against culture*) nor accommodation and loyalty to the existing order (*Islam of culture*).

Not that these types should be considered fast and fixed. No, we are inevitably dealing with a continuum whereby various schools of thought, movements and groups undergo change and in the process become their opposite. Nonetheless, classifying MB as an Islam of the *transformation of culture* is helpful for our purposes here, not least because it brings out both its oppositional character and its grand historic ambitions.

Some simply place MB under the heading of 'political Islam' - contrasted with quietist or ethical Islam. Political Islam is sometimes dated from 1979 and the coming to power of Ruhollah Khomeini and the ayatollahs in Iran: this "turned political Islam from a dream into a reality".<sup>2</sup> Of course, MB has rather older antecedents. But leave aside that quibble. Political Islam is a highly problematic term and those who use it certainly need to acknowledge that there is nothing new about the fusion of Islam and politics (indeed in pre-modern times it is impossible to separate politics and religion). The prophet Mohammed certainly established and ruled over an Islamic state in Medina and Mecca and his immediate successors built an extensive Islamic empire. Obviously running a state involves, by definition, politics, which is why presenting political Islam as a recent phenomenon is so crass. Not that we should get hung up on terminology.

### Foundations

Suffice to say, from the start, in 1928, the Brotherhood not only looked to the certainties of the *Koran* and the *Sunna*. Faith in a semi-mythical 7th century ideal was fused with the politics of purity and the patient, solid, practical work needed to establish a mass base. Its charismatic founder, Hassan al-Banna, was keenly aware that the vast majority of Egyptians, like himself, loathed with a passion the domination of their country by British imperialism and that this was felt in both national and religious terms. Not surprisingly, therefore, he championed both "defence of the homeland" and the "struggle in the path of god".<sup>3</sup> Put another way, Muslims were urged to join the fight for an Egyptian-centred political-religious *caliphate*.

Banna's Islamic renaissance would deliver Egypt from "decadence, corruption, weakness, poverty and humiliation".<sup>4</sup> He wanted Egypt to be genuinely independent, freed from economic dependence and, presumably with himself as caliph, put on a par with the leading countries of the day. Simultaneously a rebellion against imperialism and



Hassan al-Banna: founder, leader and martyr

an impossible bid to *become* an imperialism.

It is clear that the 'puritan' Wahabite sect - the dominant form of Islam in Saudi Arabia - served as something of a blueprint. Following its example, Banna taught that Islam is "creed and state, book and sword, and a way of life". Banna urged political activism and insisted that Islam went beyond the four walls of the mosque: "There is no meaning to faith unless it be accompanied by works, and no profit in a doctrine which does not impel its possessor to bring it to fruition and to sacrifice himself for its sake."<sup>5</sup> He wanted dedicated cadre who were willing to do their all for the sake of the cause.

Banna combined religious conviction with charity work and organising institutions which supplemented, or paralleled, the state. Male adherents were given jihad training: acquiring religious, organisational and political knowledge (later military knowledge). Crucially, Banna actively sought out the "sources of power in the community": eg, leading families, clerics, influential elders, the shaykhs of the Sufist orders, those running religious social clubs and societies and other such traditional "opinion makers".<sup>6</sup>

Almost from the outset students and ex-students provided the vital

mediation between the MB's leadership and the wider population. Students lived in the vast shanty towns and often came from rural areas. Once professionally qualified they were directed to take up various appointments throughout the length and breadth of the country. Not only did these doctors, pharmacists, teachers, lawyers and civil servants bring practical assistance: they brought the political-religious message of the Brotherhood.

Having been one of many Islamic grouplets, MB saw its membership soar from a mere half a dozen in 1928 to 800 in 1936, by 1938 the boast was of 200,000. This, the 1928-38 period, being what Noha Mellor calls, using the jargon of Madison Avenue, MB's "branding stage".<sup>7</sup>

After that came the "bargaining stage". In mosques, universities and coffee house meetings, in leaflets, pamphlets and papers, and above all on the street, holy criticisms were fired at the debauched king Farouk, his parasitic family and his British paymasters. At the same time, the Brotherhood called upon the very same Farouk and his government ministers to resist the British infidels, redistribute land, nationalise the country's financial institutions, including the Egyptian-owned Misr bank, abolish usury and introduce a zakat-based system of social security.

There were all sorts of clandestine meetings - even secret deals and compromises.

However - and this is fundamental - democracy, class struggle and proletarian socialism were emphatically rejected as un-Islamic. MB was therefore simultaneously a rebellion against the present and a rebellion against the future.

### Nazi links

In his head, body and soul Banna imagined Allah had chosen him for greatness. His account of MB's founding has six Suez Canal Company employees coming to him as humble supplicants:

We possess nothing but this blood ... and these souls ... and these coins ... We are unable to perceive the road to action as you perceive it, or know the path to the service of the fatherland, the religion and the nation as you know it.<sup>8</sup>

Duly moved, Banna agreed to become the *murshid al-amm* ('supreme guide'). MB was run according to the *Führerprinzip* ('leader principle').

The Nazi connotations are not - definitely not - me mischief making. Banna openly expressed admiration for Adolph Hitler and MB willingly distributed *Mein Kampf* and other Nazi propaganda. Of course,

rightwing nationalists did much the same in India, Ireland and South Africa - the Third Reich being seen as a potential liberator from British chains. Banna wrote glowingly to Hitler on many occasions. He too hated Jews, he too wanted the overthrow of the British empire. During the initial stages of World War II MB was considered a valuable asset by Germany. Its military wing, *al-nizam al-khass* ('special organisation') was meant to rise up on cue. Rommel's Afrika Korps would then cakewalk into Egypt. Exposure of secret contacts with Germany did MB little or no harm - such was the popular detestation of Britain.

By 1948 there were around half a million MB members and as many close sympathisers. Banna fashioned this human mass into a social battering ram - ultimately in the heavily disguised interests of those classes and strata which opposed British imperialism and feared secularism, democracy and socialism: dissident clerics, bazaar merchants, patriarchal peasant farmers and shopkeepers, etc.

Throughout its existence, MB has faced stiff competition from various liberal, nationalist, pan-Arabic, 'official communist', leftist and youth movement radicals. At times this competition has seen uneasy alliances; at other times bloody confrontations. Yet, when it comes to winning mass support, the Brotherhood has often proved more successful. Rivals are typically technocratic and promise to bring about change mimicking this or that European, American or Soviet bloc model, *after* they have the reins of state power in their hands. By contrast, MB has had the wherewithal to provide *immediate* benefits in the form of schools, clinics, hospitals, food hand-outs, pilgrimages to Mecca and even arranged marriages.<sup>9</sup> It also speaks using familiar Egyptian terms and religious phrases.

Of course, with Anwar Sadat and especially Hosni Mubarak, MB dramatically expanded its own professional and managerial class: full-time functionaries, parliamentarians, political advisors, trade union officials, publishers, journalists, technicians, accountants, charity executives, business operatives, etc. There were even MB multi-millionaires. Nevertheless, Brotherhood leaders proved highly effective in giving the impression of putting aside their own particular economic interests. Instead the sufferings, fears, dreams and longings of the masses were championed and given an Islamic coloration.

In terms of religious doctrine nothing could be easier. After all, oppression, greed and exploitation are forthrightly condemned in the *Koran*. Rich Muslims are told that they have binding obligations towards the downtrodden, the poor and the unfortunate.

### Disintegration

Strange though it may seem nowadays, MB was willingly used by the British authorities against the Zionist insurrectionary movement in mandate Palestine. Members of the Brotherhood were given military training by the British army. There had, note, been a major falling out between the colonial sponsor and its colonial agent. The 1936-39 Arab revolt 'persuaded' the Foreign Office to clamp down on mass Jewish migration into Palestine. Even before the end of World War II Irgun had taken up armed struggle (hence

Stalin's brief moment of support, including supplying arms, albeit via Czechoslovakia, to the Zionist insurgents).

With the declaration of the state of Israel in 1948, king Farouk's government was accused of criminal passivity in face of the new Crusader state: MB mobilised some 10,000 volunteers to fight alongside the beleaguered Palestinians. While that ended in a fiasco, Palestine continues to be a cause dear to the heart of the Brotherhood. Indeed, because of the treacherous role of Farouk and his ministers, MB's special organisation launched a wave of terrorist attacks in Egypt, which, naturally enough, led to a swift ban. In revenge, a Brotherhood assassin gunned down prime minister Mahmud Fahmi Nokrashi. Tit for tat, Banna himself was killed by government agents on February 12 1949 and was instantly elevated into the top rank of Brotherhood martyrs.

MB supported the officers' revolution in 1952 - government posts were accepted. Within a matter of weeks, however, relations soured. After general Mohammed Naguib was elbowed aside, Gamal Abdel Nasser was widely credited as being the moving spirit behind the declaration of Egypt as a republic and the promise to nationalise the Suez canal. However, as a pan-Arab socialist, Nasser refused to generalise sharia courts: indeed in 1956 he summarily abolished them. His mantra was modernisation: ie, nationalisation, industrialisation, secular education, land redistribution, the advancement of women and a strong military. A hugely popular package, which implicitly threatened classes and strata reliant on neo-colonial, pre-capitalist and religious forms of exploitation.

Unable to navigate these *forward-moving* currents, MB rapidly began to lose coherence. Hope was on the march. Increasingly its doctrines appeared anachronistic. The popular tide ebbed away. Exposed, confused, fearing social extinction, MB's core constituency opted for either cringing accommodation with Nasser or violent confrontation. Ruinous internal battles and debilitating splits followed. The national HQ in Cairo was physically fought over. Embracing the cult of death, various breakaway factions transformed terrorism into their *raison d'être*. MB members co-organised the botched attempt on Nasser's life in 1954. Immediately thereafter the Brotherhood as a whole was subjected to intense repression. Four thousand members were arrested and many more hightailed it to Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Lebanon. What had been a mass organisation all but disintegrated. Noha Mellor calls 1949-71 the "fragmentation stage". MB would only recover under president Sadat, Nasser's successor.

## Qutbism

Because of Nasser's mass round-up of Brotherhood activists, Sayyid Qutb (1900-66) found himself arrested and imprisoned. He is, note, still considered one of the "most influential and controversial Muslim and Arab thinkers".<sup>10</sup> With the luxury of time provided by prison, Qutb developed his ideas. First and foremost he studied, moulded and sought to apply the seminal ideas of Syed Abul A'la Maududi (who in 1941 established the revivalist party, Jammaat-e-Islami, in British India). But Qutb forged his own unique programme and strategy. Released in 1964, he was almost immediately rearrested ... then tried and - presumably on Nasser's direct orders - executed. Another MB leader martyred.

Qutb's key work is *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* or *Signposts on the road*<sup>11</sup> - first published in 1964. His basic thesis

being that humanity faces a crisis of leadership: "All nationalistic and chauvinistic ideologies which have appeared in modern times, and all the movements and theories derived from them, have ... lost their vitality" - Nazism, fascism, Peronism, Nasserism, etc.<sup>12</sup>

Marxism, he declared, had failed too. Not a "single nation in the world is truly Marxist", because "the whole of this theory conflicts with man's nature and its needs". Marxism only prospers in a "degenerate society or in a society which has become cowed as a result of some form of prolonged dictatorship". As proof of his contention that Marxism had floundered, Qutb pointed to the increasingly dysfunctional Soviet economy and how the USSR was "suffering from shortages of food".

What of the west? It is, he said, "now in decline". Not because its culture has "become poor materially or because its economic and military power has become weak". Rather Qutb believed that the west had become morally decadent: it is "deprived of those life-giving values which enabled it to be the leader of mankind".<sup>13</sup>

He had visited the US on behalf of the Egyptian government over 1948-50. A lifelong bachelor, and, one presumes, sexually repressed, he recoiled from the supposed libidinal wantonness and promiscuity of America's women. As an aside, Qutb claimed a link between what he saw as sexual riot and the unnatural chastity of monastic Christianity - one excess provoking the other. Qutb argued that Christianity had still to fully free itself from paganism.

Not that the Muslim world was let off the hook. Using a combination of hard facts and dehistoricised koranic quotes, *Signposts* castigated all existing Muslim countries. None were Islamic. "If Islam is again to play the role of the leader of mankind," Qutb insisted, "it is necessary that the Muslim community be restored to its original form." The first step had to be the washing away of the "debris of the man-made traditions" and "false laws and customs", which are not "even remotely related to the Islamic teachings". Qutb said Muslims were living in the midst of a new "*jahiliyyah*."

By tradition the *jahiliyyah* was originally the period of ignorance corresponding to life in Arabia before the prophet. Qutb's new *jahiliyyah* was effectively everything he disliked and therefore a "rebellion against god's sovereignty on earth".<sup>14</sup> He and other MB leaders were equated with Mohammed and his close companions. They must form a "vanguard" amongst the youth and single-mindedly fight to destroy the *jahiliyyah*. *Signposts* has been described as the *What is to be done?* of Qutbism (showing an elementary lack of knowledge when it comes to Lenin and Russian Marxism).<sup>15</sup> Either way, Qutb advocated a purist withdrawal, a separation from society, ie, what we have called an *Islam against culture*.

Qutb reckoned his programme might take many years - perhaps hundreds of years - to complete. His followers were urged to approach their mammoth task of winning global leadership through a series of strategic stages: hence the *Signposts* or *Mileposts* title of his book.

Once in power, in their first national outpost, they would not simply return to the conditions of the 7th century, but creatively adapt a purified Islam to fit in with the demands of modern technology - industrial production, air travel, telephones, etc. In other words, monopoly capitalism would be embraced.

Despite that, in the meantime, Muslim mutualism serves to hoodwink: part mythologised

past, part protest against existing conditions, but always hostile to working class interests. Social aid is combined with MB moral-purity campaigns directed against alcohol, prostitution, homosexuality, women's equality, religious minorities and militant trade unionism. Such campaigns have, of course, a material base in the patriarchal economy. Shopkeepers, peasants and artisans exploit not only themselves: they traditionally rely on the labour of family members - mainly wives, children and close relatives, who work endless hours for little or no pay. Moral-purity campaigns serve to keep them in their place - under the thumb of the head of the family. Their exploited position is sanctioned by the *Koran*. To defy the patriarch is to defy Allah.

## Militant workers

What of militant workers? The Brotherhood acts to weaken and divide. In the words of the *Communist manifesto*, what the Brotherhood lambastes capitalism for is not "so much that it creates a proletariat", but that it creates a "*revolutionary* proletariat".<sup>16</sup> Muslim trade unions are therefore established, pitted against secular trade unions and *united* with Muslim employers. Workers and employers are told that they have mutual rights and obligations - in return for "punctually" paid wages, workers are expected to work "fully and faithfully".<sup>17</sup> Strikes against Muslim employers are in effect outlawed as running counter to Islamic law: eg, the right to strike is recognised, but only as long as it "does not disturb work".<sup>18</sup> Working class unity is thereby broken in practice, while leaving religious and state structures intact. The Brotherhood has insisted from the beginning that Islam "does not tolerate divided loyalty, since its very nature is that of total unity".<sup>19</sup>

Qutb's ideas proved inspirational - and not only amongst fellow Sunnis. The Islamic movement in Iran - which climbed to power in 1979-81 - drew many of its theological innovations from Qutb. Khomeini himself translated Qutb's *In the shade of the Koran* (1952) into Farsi.

Khomeini, in essence a Bonaparte figure, successfully mobilised a broad section of the urban poor - first against the shah, then against the left. Those who had fled from an impoverished countryside and scratched a living in the sprawling shanty towns of Tehran flocked to his banner. The left was hopelessly outmanoeuvred, not least because of a basic failure to grasp the politics of Khomeinism: anti-Americanism was confused with anti-capitalism. With this grossly false notion clouding minds, most left groups willingly backed Khomeini. Disgracefully, in defence of the so-called 'imam's line', that included some justifying the execution of fellow leftwingers, the crushing of the women's movement and the banning of strikes and workers' councils.

Yet the simple fact of the matter is that the Khomeinists accepted capitalism. Indeed the top clergy quickly merged with finance capital to form a single social amalgam. As for the rest of Iranian society, it was restructured along the vertical lines of religion. Independent working class, minority nationalist and secular forces were driven underground and a suffocating, theocratic dictatorship imposed. The only tolerated institutions were Islamic.<sup>20</sup> Hence today the Islam of Iran's Islamic Republic is the *Islam of culture*.

Like the prophet and his close companions, Qutb said MB needed to know when to withdraw from, and when to engage with, existing society. The Islamic vanguard "should keep itself somewhat aloof" from the "all-encompassing *jahiliyyah*"; it

should "also keep some ties with it".<sup>21</sup> His dual approach was modelled on Mohammed's withdrawal from Mecca in 622 and then his engagement with the Medinan city-state.

Subsequently, in Egypt, one group of Qutb's acolytes developed an ever more rarefied purism, even rejecting objective natural laws (militant irrationalism being closely related to nihilist self-destruction). Those around Shukri Mustafa designated the whole of Egyptian society as infidel. They alone were authentic Muslims. A refusal to pray in 'infidel' mosques followed (government-appointed imams were not recognised). Mustafa's sect also refused to serve in the armed forces. In effect it formed a semi-autonomous counterculture. The Egyptian press dubbed the lot of them the *Takfir wal Hijra* (literally 'excommunication of holy emigration'). Shukri was executed in 1977 after kidnapping an official cleric.

Another group, led by Abd al-Salam Faraj, lurched towards terrorism ... as a strategy. Four members of Islamic Jihad were responsible for the assassination of Anwar Sadat in September 1981. He became hugely unpopular when he signed the Camp David peace deal with Israel in 1979.

The *jihadists* were, however, completely quixotic in their expectations. Led by lieutenant Khaled Islambouli, they infiltrated a commemorative victory parade with the intention of wiping out the entire Egyptian cabinet. They thought the population would spontaneously rise up to back their organisation's bid for power. The town of Asyut was briefly seized. But, apart from that essentially minor incident, there was a smooth transition from Anwar Sadat to Hosni Mubarak. A not dissimilar attempted putsch occurred in Syria - members of the Brotherhood seized Hama in 1982. Around 10,000 died, as the Ba'athists re-established control.

Not that the *jihadi* groups should be thought of as mere isolated fanatics. After Mubarak's forced departure many of them helped form the al-Nour party - an unstable combination of religious traditionalists, populists and hate-mongers. And, at least in terms of my initial expectations, they did shockingly well in the post-Mubarak elections: 27.8% of the vote. Other *jihadi* groups continued to target the Copts (the mainly poor, 10-20% Christian section of Egypt's population). Churches were torched, congregations attacked, etc. On new year's day 2011, for example, an Islamic suicide bomber killed 23 worshippers at the church of St Mark and Pope Peter in the Sidi Bishr district of Alexandria. Many other such horrors followed.

## Exiles

During the period of persecution under Nasser, a number of leading MB figures, such as Omar al-Talmassani and Said Ramadan, took refuge in Saudi Arabia. Thanks to the self-interested help from the royal house - terrified by Nasser's pan-Arabism - they became superrich. When Sadat turned his back on Nasserite socialism and the Soviet Union, and opted instead for US patronage, the so-called free market and rapprochement with the oil-rich kings, sultans and emirs, he found it expedient to gradually release MB activists from jail and allow exiles to return. Sadat counted on their support in snuffing out any remaining influence of his Nasserite and pro-Soviet opponents.

As a by-product, the returnees could only but transform MB. They might have been few in number, but they had the millions of dollars in bank accounts, real estate and share ownership needed to ensure social

leverage. Eg, thanks to their wealth and Saudi patronage, MB could provide the non-state, alternative system of healthcare, social security and education we have already mentioned.

Despite the embourgeoisification, MB agitators continued to condemn Israel, call for sharia law, target isolated apostates and encourage volunteers to join the holy war to 'liberate' Muslim lands such as Chechnya, Kashmir and Afghanistan. This, of course, is how Osama bin Laden and al Qa'eda were made.

The Muslim Brotherhood in the Arabian Peninsula recruited the son of one of the Saudi kingdom's aristocratic families, some time in the late 1970s. Religiously devout, studious, a little shy, bin Laden rejected the dissolute life of the typical Saudi princeling - Black Label whisky, snorting the best Peruvian, wrecking an endless supply of expensive cars, clubbing in Europe, having sex with high-class call girls - in fact, indulging every 'how to spend it' whim and fancy.<sup>22</sup>

Instead, determined to change the world, aided and abetted by both the Saudi royals and the CIA, bin Laden joined the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan in their fight against Kabul's communist government and its Soviet backers. He proved to be a Frankenstein's monster. He came back to Saudi Arabia a hero, but quickly fell out with both the house of Saud and the Americans. Banned from Saudi Arabia, bombings followed in Egypt, Kenya, Tanzania and most spectacularly in the USA on September 11 2001.

Yet, despite a \$50 million bounty on his head, bin Laden spent years after the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq living in a high-walled compound located just less than a mile away from the elite Pakistan Military Academy in Abbottabad. He was finally killed on the orders of US president Barack Obama by US navy SEALs on May 2 2011 - his body being buried at sea within 24 hours to comply with religious custom, but avoid a martyr's grave ●

## Notes

1. HR Niebuhr *Christ and culture* 1951 - see en-academic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/777605.
2. Helmut Niebuhr was a Protestant thinker of the Yale, or neo-orthodox, school that distinguished itself from liberal theology. When it comes to Niebuhr's classificatory methodology, the influence of Max Weber is all too clear.
3. news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4424118.stm.
4. P Mitchell *The Society of Muslim Brothers* Oxford 1993, p4.
5. SE Ibrahim *Egypt, Islam and democracy* Cairo 2002, p53.
6. Hassan al-Banna *The messages of al-Imam-u-shaheed*.
7. P Mitchell *The Society of Muslim Brothers* Oxford 1993, p7.
8. See N Mellor *Voice of the Muslim Brotherhood: Dacwa, discourse and political communication* London 2017.
9. P Mitchell *The Society of Muslim Brothers* Oxford 1993, p8.
10. Obviously no longer the case after the Sisi coup and the general crackdown on faith-based charities - see 'Egypt's war on charity' *Foreign Policy* January 29 2015.
11. AA Musallam *From secularism to jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the foundations of radical Islamism* Westport CT 2005, pxii.
12. Another translation would be *Mileposts*.
13. www.pwhce.org/qutb.html.
14. *Ibid.*
15. See G Kepel *The prophet and the pharaoh* London 1985, p43.
16. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 6, New York 1976, p508.
17. Quoted in P Mitchell *The Society of Muslim Brothers* London 1969, p253.
18. www.archive.org/web/20170228165510/http://www.tahrirdocuments.org/2011/04/the-muslim-brotherhood-one-hand-builds-one-hand-protects-the-revolution.
19. Hassan al-Banna *The messages of al-Imam-u-shaheed*.
20. See A Mehrdad *Radical Islam: a preliminary study* London, nd.
21. www.pwhce.org/qutb.html.
22. The best account of upper class decadence and profligacy in Saudi Arabia that I have come across is by the Palestinian-American writer, Said Aburish - see *The rise, corruption and coming fall of the house of Saud* London 1995.

**IRELAND**

# Media, migrants and mobs

People Before Profit says the state is soft on far-right groups, but failure to deal with the housing crisis is the main problem, argues Anne McShane

**D**ublin hit the headlines on November 23, when dramatic images of anti-migrant protestors on the riot in the city centre were beamed around the world.

The scenes were unprecedented in Ireland, although not unexpected, as tensions have been building in Dublin and nationally. The trigger was a knife attack on children and their crèche worker at an inner-city school earlier that day. The attacker, it was claimed, was an illegal migrant. Rightwing social media accounts were quick to call for revenge. Rumours and misinformation spread about an immediate threat to white Irish people. There were calls to take on migrants (and the police, who purportedly protect “foreign bastards”). One post demanded: “Blood needs to be spilt tonight.”

In response hundreds of young men and teenagers stormed through O’Connell Street. Garda patrol cars, buses and trams were torched. Local shops and major department stores had windows smashed in and goods looted. Hundreds of perceived migrants were verbally and physically abused and told to ‘go back where you come from’. Muslim women had their hijabs ripped off. A group of teenagers confronted a bus driver, demanding to know, “What are you doing here?”, before punching and threatening to kill him unless he got off his bus. An Asian shopkeeper and his staff were forced to hide in the basement, while upstairs the store was looted and smashed.

At least two direct provision centres (hostels for asylum-seekers) were attacked that night, and a hotel set on fire, because it was believed migrants were inside. A tiny group, the National Party, demanded that every DP centre be closed down. One post on its social media demanded: “Enough is Enough. Are you happy to sit back and watch Irish children stabbed, or will you man up and fight back?” Derek Blighe, leader of the Ireland First Party, warned: “Your children are in mortal danger and the Irish government are responsible.” He claimed the man who carried out the stabbing was a “fakugee” and that one of the children had died. Conor McGregor, Ireland’s champion cage fighter, tweeted: “We are not losing any more of our women and children to sick and twisted people who should not even be in Ireland in the first place.”

In fact none of those attacked have died, although one child remains in a critical condition. The man alleged to have carried out the attack is actually an Irish citizen, who was born abroad, but has lived here for over 20 years. The school where the attack happened has a large number of children of first-generation migrants, including at least one of the children attacked. The man who managed to stop the attack was also a migrant (a Brazilian Deliveroo driver). He used his bike helmet to batter and stun the attacker. But the irrational and false nature of the claims did not figure in the minds of those gangs driven on by social media.

The Movement of Asylum-Seekers in Ireland reported intense fear among the occupants of DP centres. These are mainly converted hotels, where asylum-seekers awaiting a decision on their claims are housed. Conditions are grim. Rooms are shared with up to 16 strangers and there is a diet of fast food from the centre canteen. But



**Buses, police patrol cars and trams torched**

if you refuse to live in a DP centre you are denied any state assistance, including medical treatment. And, because you are not allowed to work for the first six months, it is a case of ‘starve on the streets or live in a centre’. Even those who are granted legal status find it almost impossible to move out of a DP because of the lack of alternative housing. Yet now the government is forcing people to move out, relocating them to live in ‘tented accommodation’, which is often far away from where they are working and have begun to put down roots.

## Prime targets

As well as being treated like cattle, those living in DP centres are prime targets for chauvinists. It is not just the deprived and alienated working class of Dublin north-central who seethe with resentment towards migrants. The government isolates asylum-seekers even more by dispatching them to live in rundown hotels in rural areas and small towns, where the arrival of 150 asylum-seekers can significantly alter the make-up of the population. Xenophobic fears are stoked by opportunist local politicians and members of far-right groups. Black and Asian men are depicted as dangerous rapists who will terrorise the female population. Busloads of asylum-seekers are met with barricades when they arrive at centres throughout the country.

But these problems can be solved. Despite the hostility first shown, if efforts are made by government bodies and local residents, time and time again it has been shown that the situation will settle down. Asylum-seekers are keen to work and take part in voluntary activities. Their children go to the local schools, speak English with an Irish accent, and often excel. They become part of the local population despite remaining in DP. Positive stories of integration, despite the many structural barriers, show enormous potential. The DP system was to be closed down this year, and asylum-seekers given their own homes. But that commitment has apparently been ‘forgotten’ by the government.

Up to the 1990s Ireland had always been a place of *emigration*, but with the ‘Celtic Tiger’ economic boom that changed. Poles began arriving after EU membership was gained in 2004. Now there are approximately 100,000 first-generation Poles here. Other European nationals have followed, but in smaller numbers. In 2022, 67,448 Ukrainians arrived and there are now approximately 100,000 Ukrainian refugees here. They do not need to apply for asylum, as they are entitled to temporary leave to remain, with the right to work and receive all social welfare and medical benefits. There is therefore a two-tier system in operation, which seriously disadvantages refugees from other countries.

Since late last year significant numbers of asylum-seekers have been told that all DP accommodation is full. They are forced to sleep on the streets. Ireland is therefore in breach of the EU Directive on Reception Conditions for failing to provide accommodation. But, like many other EU countries, it has decided that it is better to break the law than continue to house asylum-seekers. Ireland apparently does not want to seem like a ‘soft target’.

## Private

One of the biggest problems is housing. During the Celtic Tiger boom, house prices soared and budgets for social housing were slashed. Then in 2008 the economy collapsed. Many families found themselves in negative equity. But house prices were kept artificially high, along with rents, which continue to increase.

At present nearly 12,000 Irish people are living in emergency accommodation - generally hotels and housing hubs. The government states that there is an immediate shortage of 250,000 homes, and for younger people this is a major problem, with 68% of those between 25 and 29 (73.9% in the case of young men) living with their parents. But the emphasis remains on private housing, with a paltry 9,100 social homes planned for 2023. The private landlord lobby is powerful and

includes some 80 TDs and senators.

For working class people in Dublin the situation is near impossible. Parents, their children and grandchildren have to live in extraordinarily cramped conditions, that or move to housing hubs. There is enormous anger and even despair - and clearly no intention on the part of the government to resolve the housing crisis. It is little wonder that so many feel they are being ignored.

According to Sinn Féin, “Since the government ended the ban on evictions in April 2021, homelessness has increased by 30%, pensioner homelessness has increased by 27%, and shockingly child homelessness has jumped by 43%.”<sup>1</sup> But its solution is entirely inadequate and entirely in keeping with capitalist economic logic. Its 2023 ‘alternative budget’ promised 20,000 social housing units - yes, double the government pledge. But it does not come near the 250,000 homes needed immediately, even according to government figures (the real requirement is undoubtedly much higher).

A Joint Oireachtas (both houses of parliament) report published on November 29 stated that the housing crisis has been a “key catalyst” for anti-immigrant sentiment in Ireland, because it had created the impression that resources are scarce and that people have to compete for services”. It calls for the state to investigate the availability of services in towns and villages before new DP centres are set up. It also suggests accommodation centres be spread more evenly across the country and that “the availability of services such as schools and GPs, among others, can be taken into account”.<sup>2</sup>

While the far-right groups in Ireland are small, the main parties of government and opposition are committed to running capitalism - a system which has created the conditions for these forces to grow. People Before Profit and other left groups have been organising counter-demonstrations against the far-right groups and they play an important role, particularly when defending migrants coming under attack. But

they have a key weakness, in that they focus on the far right as the source of the problem, rather than the system itself.

This makes it easy for the government to blame ‘rotten elements’ and to promise a greater clampdown on social media and protestors. Justice minister, Helen McEntee, has promised tough action against those who took part in the riot, along with increased policing. Mary Lou MacDonald, leader of Sinn Féin, argues that this is not enough. She wants tougher action and more police, and has called for McEntee’s resignation. Fully taking up the ‘law and order agenda’ she is adamant that “These hate-filled mobs have threatened and brought violence to our streets before. This shouldn’t have happened and - let me be very clear - it can never happen again.”<sup>3</sup>

Sinn Féin is, of course, the party that People before Profit is calling to unite with it and others in forming a ‘left government’ after the next election (likely to be held in early 2025). So does PBP agree with the SF ‘law and order’ agenda, with its call for greater police powers? You would not have thought so, given that the organisation is dominated by the Socialist Workers Network, which professes to be Marxist. However, a post on its website in the aftermath of the riot gives some cause for concern. It includes the following statement:

The truth is that the far right has been treated with kid gloves by the Irish establishment and media. They have been allowed to intimidate library staff and block airports, even while Gardaí stand aside. This has been in the name of ‘intelligent policing’. Behind it lies a political strategy from elements of the Irish establishment who fear the prospect of leftwing growth. They would far prefer to use racist sentiment to thwart any left advance.<sup>4</sup>

## Law and order

A quick glance at government statements will show you that this is not the case. All mainstream parties are united *against* the far right (while, of course, playing down or dismissing the reasons why it has become a factor in Irish politics). And if the right was treated with “kid gloves” before it most certainly will not be now.

The law and order agenda needs to be resisted. By arguing that the state is soft on the far right without opposing increased policing and surveillance, PBP is evidencing further slippage to the right. History has shown again and again how measures introduced to deal with the right have been used against the left.

We do not want an ever more tooled-up state. We want to win over the alienated youth, not demonise them as fascists, and allow the far right to become their voice ●

## Notes

1. [www.sinnfein.ie/files/2022/Delivering\\_Affordable\\_Homes.pdf](http://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2022/Delivering_Affordable_Homes.pdf).
2. [www.independent.ie/irish-news/housing-crisis-key-catalyst-for-rising-anti-immigrant-sentiment-in-ireland-dail-committee-warns/a228169779.html](http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/housing-crisis-key-catalyst-for-rising-anti-immigrant-sentiment-in-ireland-dail-committee-warns/a228169779.html).
3. [www.thejournal.ie/garda-commissioner-position-untenable-gary-gannon-6231938-Nov2023](http://www.thejournal.ie/garda-commissioner-position-untenable-gary-gannon-6231938-Nov2023).
4. [www.pbp.ie/dublin-riots-cynical-manoeuvres-by-the-far-right](http://www.pbp.ie/dublin-riots-cynical-manoeuvres-by-the-far-right).



## MIGRATION

# Battle for Tory soul

There is more trouble for Sunak, writes **Eddie Ford**, with record net figures - much to the anger and consternation of the Tory right

Things are just getting worse and worse for Rishi Sunak, who is facing a growing rebellion from the right of his party - especially on the "totemic" issue of immigration. The latest bad news for the prime minister comes with the net migration figures from the Office for National Statistics, which showed a record 745,000 coming to the UK in 2022 - three times higher than the level before Brexit.

But, as always, the devil lies in the detail. What needs to be emphasised about these figures is what has driven them - Ukrainians, Hong Kongers, people from the Indian sub-continent and elsewhere coming to fill low-paid jobs, particularly in the NHS and the care sector. However, provisional data for the year ending in June 2023 shows a lower net migration figure of 672,000, after 1.2 million people came to live in the UK for at least a year, and 508,000 left for sunnier climes. Though this was a year-on-year increase of 65,000 from the previous time period, it has led to speculation among statisticians that net migration may actually be on a *downward trend* - something that was drowned out by the hue and cry coming from the rightwing press and MPs, especially on the Tory back benches. But you cannot expect such people to grapple with statistical complexity or swim against the tide of right populism and national chauvinism.

Naturally, the ONS cautioned that its estimates could be revised again - whether upward or downward, given that migration patterns are currently quite volatile. Anyhow, the vast majority (968,000) arriving were from countries outside the European Union, with students accounting for the largest group of non-EU migrants (263,000). Then there were 322,000 work-related visas issued for this period, up from 198,000 in the year to June 2022 - nearly two-thirds went to Indian, Nigerian and Zimbabwean nationals, replacing EU workers in sectors of the economy that are struggling to recruit staff since Brexit. Then again, what do you expect when you have Sunak boasting about how successful he has been in keeping wages down in the public sector, forcing workers to look for other jobs to maintain living standards - hence the 132,000 NHS and 152,000 adult care sector vacancies.

Separate home office visa and asylum data showed there was little change in the total number of people seeking asylum in the UK - at 76,000 for the year ending in September 2023. There were 56,042 people in hotel accommodation. In the same time period, 25,000 people reached the UK in small boats, compared with 33,000 in the previous period.

### Dissatisfaction

Quick as a flash, regardless of what the ONS figures might actually say, former home secretary Suella Braverman described the numbers as a "slap in the face" to the British people, who have "voted to control and reduce migration at every opportunity". In order to combat the "unsustainable" pressure on public services, she has called for an annual cap on net migration, closing the graduate visa route and placing a cap on health and social care visas. According to her, "Brexit gave us the tools" and now "it's time to use



Migrants in small boats: Tory obsession

them" - though what exactly she means by that is slightly mysterious.

Of course, the row presents a perfect opportunity for her to advance her obvious ambition to become the Tory right's most prominent spokesperson and then party leader when Sunak falls on his sword after the near inevitable general election defeat next year. As part of this plan, she was quickly elevated to the status of a rightwing martyr after she got what she wanted and was sacked by Rishi Sunak for her various incendiary comments that delighted narrowminded bigots everywhere - the crunch possibly coming with the mad (but calculated) remark about Met Police "bias" towards the left and pro-Palestine demonstrators.

Indeed, in a bid to increase her profile on the right, Braverman has repeatedly threatened to release documents showing that Sunak had agreed to policy demands on migration before she backed him to become prime minister after the rapid collapse of Liz Truss's government. Coming to her assistance, *The Daily Telegraph* says it has a copy of the deal, which pledged to increase the minimum salary for a skilled worker arriving in the UK from £26,000 to £40,000, as well as ending extended visas for graduates, further limiting family members people can bring, and prioritising certain universities for student visas.<sup>1</sup>

Naturally, No10 has denied any formal plan and they might well be right - maybe some deliberate wishful thinking on the part of Braverman. But Kemi Badenoch, business secretary - another person on the hard right with leadership ambitions - hinted at the beginning of the week that the salary threshold could be increased anyway as part of "much, much tougher measures" that are supposedly being drawn up.

With Tory dissatisfaction bubbling over, this week immigration minister Robert Jenrick appeared to distance himself from Rishi Sunak. It is widely reported that Jenrick - once seen as someone close to the prime minister - has presented his own five-point plan to No10, with Sunak looking more and more isolated, if not besieged. Answering an urgent question in the Commons about whether his plan would be in place

before Christmas, he craftily replied: "My plan would have been brought to the house before last Christmas if I could have done, but let's hope we can bring forward a substantive package of reforms very quickly". As you would expect, former cabinet ministers Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg and Sir Simon Clarke have also been very vocal in calling for more action to bring down migration.

Running out of patience, the New Conservatives group of diehard rightwing MPs said the migration issue was "do or die" for the party - issuing a statement saying that "each of us made a promise to the electorate" that cannot be ignored. In a rightwing pincer move, the Common Sense Group has written to Sunak pressing for "urgent" action on legal migration numbers, and seeking assurances that a promised bill to overcome the supreme court's rejection of the Rwanda plan is a "belt and braces affair" that can resist future legal challenges (that is, it can "disapply" some or all of the human rights law - international and domestic - on which that judgment was founded). This letter was triggered by recent remarks from the new home secretary, James Cleverly, urging people not to "fixate" on the government's Rwanda deportation plan or "prejudge" the content of emergency legislation on the scheme.

This did not go down well with many Conservative MPs, furthering reinforcing the impression that the prime minister is not going fast and far enough on immigration - that he is not really serious about the issue. Writing in *The Guardian*, the often perceptive centre-right journalist, Rafael Behr - long ago disillusioned with a Tory Party that has become too 'unconservative' - argued that Rwanda is "a proxy in the war for the Tory soul" and "it's a war Rishi Sunak is losing" (November 29). A pantomime show for a party heading to defeat.

Both the New Conservatives and the Common Sense Group want the government to come out with an *immediate* plan to reduce migration before the general election. But this seems very unlikely for the simple reason that the Commons recess is due to begin on December 19 and therefore - at least in theory - there

are not enough sitting days to ratify a new treaty with Rwanda before the new year under the current schedule, No10 stating that at least 21 days are required. How very convenient, some might say.

### Undeliverable

You can see why the right is up in arms over migration - and the general drift of the Sunak government - because it is a living symbol of *failure*. Back in 2010, David Cameron made the laughable pledge as prime minister to reduce net migration to "tens of thousands" - clearly a fantasy figure, as many people observed at the time. In fact, perhaps because Dodgy Dave could not deliver the undeliverable, we saw the result we did with Brexit. Theresa May too promised to bring net migration down to under 100,000 a year. In some respects, Sunak has made a similar albatross for himself in the form of small boats. Everyone knows, including himself, that he will not "stop the boats" carrying asylum-seekers across the Channel, even if we are talking about very small beer indeed, compared to the numbers coming legally.

Yet the Tories are still caught in that bind from which there is no escape. Yes, the party's post-Brexit 2019 manifesto vowed that "overall numbers will come down" and "we will ensure that the British people are always in control" - but without setting a specific target or any concrete plan of action. The ONS has painfully reminded them that no progress has been made. Quite the opposite, if anything. No wonder the Tory right is going through an existentialist crisis. It appears that the government is considering measures to reduce net migration, including limiting to *one* the number of relatives that health and social care workers are allowed to bring with them, abolishing the system allowing employers to pay less where there are recognised shortages and - as demanded by Suella Braverman - raising the minimum salary threshold for work visas. But it is all desperate stuff that is not going to work, even if the government tries to implement any of these measures before they are thrown out by the electorate.

Totally predictably, Sir Keir Starmer thundered about how the

"shockingly high" net migration represented "a failure not just of immigration, but also of asylum and of the economy" - the obvious inference being that Labour would crack down harder on migration than the weakling Tories. Darren Jones, the shadow chief secretary to the treasury, claimed that a Labour government would cut net migration to "normal levels" of a "couple of hundred thousand a year" within its first term. This sounds like another hostage to fortune, though he did add a qualification to the BBC's Laura Kuenssberg by saying Labour "probably would hope to do that", but, remember, "we've talked about a decade of national renewal", as it would take "some time to fix the deep structural problems" left by successive Conservative governments. At least he left himself a get-out clause, unlike David Cameron.

Rishi Sunak is a prisoner of his own policies. Unsurprisingly, the prime minister, backed by his new foreign secretary, Cameron, and his home secretary, James Cleverly, is believed to be very reluctant to give in to demands to block human rights laws, so that asylum-seekers can be sent to Rwanda. That would obviously undermine Britain's standing as a law-abiding member of the 'international community', making it a lot harder for him and his ministers to lecture the likes of Vladimir Putin on the sanctity of the post-World War II international architecture.

There is also the fact that pulling out of the European Convention on Human Rights, which the right dearly wants, could potentially sabotage the Good Friday agreement - Rishi Sunak having sweated blood over the Windsor framework. The same goes for the Rwanda scheme - the prime minister looking for some magical way of drafting a bill that sees the UK abiding by its international obligations, whilst at the same time also giving anti-ECHR Tory backbenchers what they want. An impossible trick, because you cannot hoodwink Suella Braverman and her fellow thinkers, who will always come back for more red meat, no matter how much you concede to their demands (as Brexit taught us).

No10 is also very aware that there could be a significant backlash if they did actually succeed somehow in reducing the numbers coming perfectly legally to Britain. As the ONS shows us, many of the arrivals have come to work in the NHS and care homes - so chucking lots of them out would only intensify the crisis in those sectors and make a lot of people even more unhappy with the Tory government, including potential voters. Similarly with the international student numbers. Clamping down on student visas could harm the finances of universities, which use overseas fees to cross-subsidise the studies of UK students.

That is something else that would seriously upset people in the run-up to a general election - how smart would that be? ●

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### Notes

1. telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/11/26/sunak-agreed-to-40k-salary-threshold-for-migrants-braverman.

**POLEMIC**

# Upfront, sharp and personal

Communist unity cannot come about through broad-frontism, safe spaces or tailing the existing left.  
**Mike Macnair** responds to three recent contributions

**O**n November 2 I wrote an article, 'Unity based on solid principle', in response to recent letters from Andrew Northall, Lawrence Parker and Caitriona Rylance. All three have since replied to my article: Lawrence Parker in his blog on November 11, titled 'Mike Macnair is talking bollocks about communist unity'; Andrew Northall in our letters column on November 16; and Caitriona Rylance on November 23 (also a letter). Here I offer a reply to all three - who have distinctly different things to say - in chronological order of their interventions.

**Parker**

Comrade Parker asserts - quite rightly - that he is not a broad-frontist. On this basis he accuses me of making "a crude amalgam" between him and comrades Northall and Rylance (the expression is Trotsky's characterisation of the Moscow Trials, his point being that the prosecutors stuck together to construct a fantasy conspiracy). I do not accept this argument. In his original October 12 letter comrade Parker wrote:

I was quite surprised with the Labour Party Marxists (LPM) enterprise (which had, of course, been founded long before the Corbyn movement) that the CPGB-PCC, to all intents and purposes, ran as a front. It seemed to function either as a mere subcommittee of the faction or an alternative badge for CPGB-PCC members who were working in the Labour Party. There was an attempt by some members to involve other Marxists in LPM in 2016, but this idea was quickly sat on by others. LPM ended up as an unattractive and sterile front ...

My article replied to this claim with the point that the CPGB's view - discussed at a members' aggregate and not just on the PCC - was that the nature of the intervention in the Labour Party made it inappropriate to "involve other Marxists" in LPM. That is because Labour is a deeply hostile environment for communists - its left is far more dominated by broad-frontism than is the (quite broad-frontist) left outside Labour. To do so would inevitably have produced just another far-left fake broad-front project (like the Labour Left Alliance, which comrade Parker rightly decries as "blessedly short-lived" in his November 11 posting). It is not an 'amalgam' to make this point about the *common* logic of 'opening up' LPM (given the character of even the best elements of the Labour far left) with broad-frontism.

In that posting comrade Parker reduces the point from this larger claim to "why I was told that I could only get involved if I joined the CPGB-PCC - which I found sectarian and uncomradely". The context of this decision is that *because of the character of operating within the Labour Party*, we chose not to 'open up' LPM. We can (and I do) admit that this policy did not save us from the influence of broad-frontism (witness the Labour Left Alliance). But that is what it was about, and it is therefore not an 'amalgam' to link comrade Parker's criticisms of LPM to the issue of broad-frontism: in Moscow Trials terms, this is not a



**Boris Kustodiev 'The Bolshevik' 1949**

'bloc of the lefts and the rights'.

In relation to the question of CPGB recruitment, comrade Parker said in his October 12 article that "Removing Jack Conrad from the membership 'hotline' would most probably be a positive move." And in his October 17 blog post: "I've seen some of Conrad's gnomish and unintentionally hilarious replies to actual membership enquiries, which have a distinct undertone of Basil Fawlty telling guests he can't help them because he's too busy running a hotel." I responded to this in my article by saying that the PCC sees all the email membership enquiries,

which makes comrade Parker's claims seem implausible, and that "if he wants us to believe him he needs to prove it by producing what he calls 'gnomish and unintentionally hilarious replies' and identifying the dates and recipients".

Comrade Parker responded to this by saying:

Comrade Macnair obviously doesn't keep up with the various Discord channels his members use. If he did, he would know that some recent recruits to the CPGB-PCC voiced certain dissatisfaction with the way their

recruitment was handled.

To be blunt, I take the political or factual content of what people say on Discord channels no more seriously than I take the political or factual content of what people say in pubs when they've had a few. I have no problem with comrade Parker's "deliberately rude article". But if CPGB comrades are being told that we are lying to the membership (and/or to ourselves) about what happens to email membership enquiries, we need harder evidence than hearsay from unidentifiable sources on Discord channels.

It is not his rudeness that is objectionable, but the untruth of comrade Parker's factual claim. If we are doing something wrong, we may be able to correct it. If we are accused of doing something wrong that we are not doing, that leads nowhere.

Comrade Parker writes that "comrade Macnair's faction doesn't own principles such as the democratic republic/the workers' militia/the main enemy is at home and so on". I agree entirely; though the other organised factions of the far left in their large majority want to downplay the democratic republic or oppose it in the name of the 'workers' council state', and are extremely coy about the militia question.

He concludes:

Principles and the need to organise will live on because they are powerful and true. Who gives a fuck if existing far-left sects and factions with their silly tin-pot leaders and internal idiocies get a bashing in the meantime? Not me.

Not me either. But "existing far-left sects and factions" have a fundamental strength over sects and factions of one member who accept no discipline (like comrade Parker): that is, precisely, acceptance in effective practice of the *need to organise*.

**Northall**

Comrade Northall's letter illustrates *my* point, rather than countering it. Because he clings to the ban on factions ("I do disagree that 'permanent' (or any) factions are in any way compatible with genuine democratic centralism," he writes), the only *form* of communist unity he can imagine is the creation of a Labour Party mark two, on the political basis of the "commitment to replace capitalism with socialism and mass democratic action to bring that about" rather than anything more; and on the organisational basis that the groups "could affiliate, retaining their distinct identities, traditions and contributions, alongside ideally at least some trade unions, trades councils, anti-cuts/anti-austerity campaigns and groups, progressive community groups and movements, etc" - that is, the structural *form* of the Labour Party.

The effect would quite inevitably merely be yet another of the left's repeated attempts to recreate the Labour Party in a slightly more leftwing form, whether within Labour itself (John McDonnell and others' Labour Representation Committee) or outside it (Socialist Labour Party; Socialist Alliance; Respect ...).

The Bolsheviks who led the Russian October were the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party 'majorityites': that is, a permanent faction (since 1903) of the RSDLP. Had the RSDLP banned factions, the temporary capture of a majority by the Mensheviks in 1904 and 1906 would have barred the Bolsheviks from organising. Had the split from the Mensheviks into fully independent parties been fully completed by autumn 1917, the *common action* of the Siberian RSDLP to secure grain supplies for Petrograd and Moscow at that time could not have happened

and the cities would have been quickly starved into surrender.<sup>1</sup> The Bolsheviks, now a party, continued to have open factions throughout the 1917-21 civil war - the ban introduced in 1921 being addressed to the needs of the New Economic Policy. Whatever one thinks of Trotsky's ideas in general, he was certainly correct to argue, in *The Third International after Lenin*, that banning factions is inevitably *not* banning all factions, but banning all factions except one - the faction of the party's full-time staff.<sup>2</sup>

Trotsky in fact fails to draw the correct conclusion from his analysis: that the 1921 ban on factions was already *juridically* the political expropriation of the proletariat; though this was not *carried fully into practice* until the double police coup against successively the lefts in December 1927 and the 'rights' in April 1929. The proletariat as a class is compelled to organise in order to defend its interests; it is this fact that makes proletarian organisation *potentially* the core of a road to the communism which is posed as the necessary future by capitalist decline. But then the consequence is that the proletariat cannot control its own organisations without the right to organise within them; without this right, the organisations become the private property of the staffers, and there is a gradual tendency for their base to be hollowed out.

As far as the modern left is concerned, the ban on factions operates to raise the stakes in every political difference. This results in splintering almost as soon as a difference appears, as with the Trotskyists, Maoists and anarchists: but also, as I said, reflected in the inability of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain to draw towards unity groups like the New Communist Party and Socialist Action, which have very similar politics to the CPB's (let alone communists more generally). It also results in clinging desperately to dogmas disproved by experience, like insisting on endlessly rebuilding papier-maché road-bridges (eg, broad-front parties that repeatedly fail) in the hope of avoiding splintering: this one *definitely* including 'official communists' like comrade Northall.

His original October 26 letter called for treating the left groups - or at least the "significant" ones - "with respect and on the basis of equality". In my November 2 response I said:

... "respect" is a weasel word, which too frequently expresses a demand for deference. Acting on the basis of equality with others, including those with whom we disagree, is entirely correct. But that means making clear where we agree and where we disagree. To defer is not to act on the basis of equality, but to assert subordination (and to promote damaging groupthink). To make diplomatic agreements behind the back of the class is not to act on the basis of equality, but to treat the people outside the group that made the agreements as subordinate to that group.

I cross-referred in a footnote to Left Unity's attempt to enforce 'respectful' debate through a 'safe spaces' disciplinary code in 2013-15, and my own arguments against this policy (there was a lot more by other authors in this paper at the time).

Comrade Northall's November 16 letter wanders around this question, but does not offer a clear answer on what "respect" requires - other than his proposal for unity through a new broad-front federal party. Such a party would, of course, be highly 'respectful' of the rights of

full-time officials to freedom from interference in their baronies. But the issue of 'respectful' debate - or at least opposition to excessive sharpness of polemic - is also posed by comrade Rylance's November 23 letter.

## Rylance

Comrade Rylance complains that the CPGB is affected by a "defensive political culture" and "a culture of defensive, brittle and personal responses". What is meant by either of these formulas is very unclear. She gives as an example the fact that she claims I misinterpreted her earlier (October 12) letter. In fact, however, this claim does not respond at all to the question of the right interpretation of the fairly extensive passage I quoted from it, which I will do once again now:

A more active orientation towards the left in a real day-to-day way is part of what is needed (eg, attending events and discussing widely with others, engaging in joint activities like strike fundraising, etc). At the very least this would provide a richer knowledge from which to make developed analysis of the left. Further it would allow estimation of the particular pressure points to push at in particular contexts to advance the development of the left as a whole and, further still, it is precisely to be a living, breathing part of the left in this way which gives polemic traction and meaning...

... we are surely served best not by "banging away" with the same approach in the same form with no ready example of its meaningful success, but instead by an approach and process of questioning, humility, reflection, creativity and experimentation.

Nor does it respond to the context I placed the issue in: that is, that the CPGB has limited resources and chooses to devote most of them to publishing a weekly newspaper. Hence, arguing that our resources should be directed more towards "engaging in joint activities like strike fundraising, etc", so as "to be a living, breathing part of the left in this way", would precisely imply that we reduce the resource given to publishing. I argued at length that, however much its proponents might *want* open discussion, that choice would imply acceptance of the Bakuninist project of the far left in general, and hence work in practice against open discussion.

Rather than explain why my argument on this point was wrong, comrade Rylance *avoids attempting to answer it* by complaining that it is "defensive" or part of "a culture of defensive, brittle and personal responses". "Defensive" appears only to mean that I do not accept comrade Rylance's arguments.

"Brittle" I take to be meaningless in this context. An argument is 'brittle' (according to those who use this criterion in methodological arguments) if the whole argument will fall to the ground if one component of the logical chain is defeated.<sup>3</sup> But comrade Rylance does not offer any *argument* that *any* of the components of my argument fail. She claims, rather, that the CPGB's failure to grow is evidence against our arguments as a whole. That is not a critique of the internal logic of my argument ('brittleness'), but *extrinsic* evidence that, even if my argument is right, it proposes an impossible course of action; and it offers evidence that in fact relies on the relative success of the larger existing far-left groups.

But, as I said in my November 2 article, I do not in the least deny the relative success of the larger far-

left groups; indeed, I *expect it*. The evidence of the whole period since 1945 is that many such groups have temporarily outgrown their rivals, but none has succeeded in radically outgrowing the rest by this sort of recruitment. My point is that the way in which this relative success is achieved leads both to failure to perform the *political* tasks of a party and to the practical impossibility of unity beyond the endless repetition of forms of broad-frontism that each time fail.

## Impersonal?

Why "personal"? I take it that what drives this is partly that I polemicise directly with the individuals who have written to our letters column about this issue, including comrade Rylance. It may partly be that the polemic is sharp or violent. It may also be that I criticise the Socialist Platform in Left Unity, LU's safe spaces policy, or that Jack Conrad criticises both as well as Chris Strafford, since he was a party to the witch-hunting of CPGBer Laurie McCauley in Manchester Left Unity (for publishing a report of branch discussions in the *Weekly Worker*).<sup>4</sup> It would be helpful to have a clear idea of what the objection actually is.

That said, in the first place these 'personal' criticisms relating to the conduct of the Socialist Platform or in relation to Left Unity's 'safe spaces policy' and the witch-hunting of comrade McCauley (and, it must be said, various others) under it, are not at all personal issues. They are live political differences. Is the adoption of unamendable statements of aims constructed by diplomatic agreement democratic practice, or not? Is the creation of intra-party speech controls in the name of 'safe spaces', and the construction of an apparatus of 'confidential' disciplinary proceedings, democratic practice, or not?

In our view both these methods, though by different means, deprive the membership of the right to information and the right to choose between competing ideas, and are therefore anti-democratic. We do not want comrades to personally abase themselves over these issues, but we do want clarity on democratic procedural principles for the future.

Secondly, the fundamental problem with *non*-personal or 'impersonal' polemic is that it utterly obscures what it is about. Comrades may imagine that they are targeted when they are not; who and what are targeted become the subjects of 'Kremlinological' speculation. Thus, again, non-personal polemic deprives the membership, the readers of any paper, the voters, and so on, of information that they need in order to make decisions between competing points of view. It is thus an inherently anti-democratic procedure.

Thirdly, sharp 'personal' criticisms are the *tradition of our movement* before a rather recent date. Consider Karl Marx's 1847 *Poverty of philosophy* - a critique of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's 1846 *System of economic contradictions, or philosophy of poverty* that was sharp enough to break Marx's personal relations with Proudhon. Consider Friedrich Engels' 1878 *Anti-Dühring* (partly co-authored by Marx). Consider any number of personal polemics in Lenin's *Collected works*. This method continued down to the 1980s - outside the milieu of the gnomish internal exchanges of 'official communist' parties.

Such polemics are also the common coin of discussions among scientists, classicists, historians and so on, as well as of political exchanges *outside* the narrow circle of the far left. They are necessary in order to draw lines between what is really presently debatable, on the one hand,

and what are attempts to resurrect flat-earthism or phlogiston theory, on the other.

Comrade Rylance argues that "a defensive political culture results, in practice, in the closing down of discussion, criticism, questioning, etc - and so a weakening of political clarity", and that

... opportunistic self-censure<sup>5</sup> (in which open expression of difference is discouraged on the basis that it appears disloyal, weak and disunited) is a very different thing to giving consideration as to how differences and criticism can be expressed in a way that encourages others to engage in this exchange rather than disengage.

This would be a plausible argument if it were not the case that the left, when 'personalistic' polemics were normal, displayed *more* debate and *more* ability of the youth and of newer members to engage in that debate than is true of the present left.

The reality is that the demand for 'civility' in the form of rejection of sharp personal polemics is, along with 'safe spaces' in general, part of the political culture derived from western 'soft' Maoism after its 'long march through the academy'.<sup>6</sup> And like that culture in general, it does not promote debate, but has *dumbing down* effects.

The demand for civility in polemic also promotes the protection of the right wing of the movement from sharp criticism. Thus German pro-war ex-leftist Heinrich Cunow in 1915, on opponents of the SPD's support for the war:

The opposition to our Reichstag fraction's vote on August 4 and December 2 last year is assuming ever more obnoxious forms. Those who do not agree with the vote on war credits undoubtedly have the right to criticise it, in an objective, party-comradely fashion, of course - although even on this condition one could be of the view that for certain reasons it would be better to postpone criticism until after the war. Yet when the German social democratic working class and its leaders are accused by opponents in Germany and abroad of cowardice, betrayal, a lack of principles, abdication, collapse and so on then surely there can hardly be any talk of objective criticism.<sup>7</sup>

Arguments need to be personal in order to be precise. They also need to be as sharp as is needed to make the real nature of the differences clear. The demand for civility and respect in arguments is as much tied to opportunism today as it was in Heinrich Cunow's hands in 1915, even if comrades do not *intend* that consequence ●

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## Notes

1. RE Snow *The Bolsheviks in Siberia 1917-1918* Cranbury NJ 1977.
2. Pathfinder 1970, pp147-54.
3. Eg, the discussion in M Canda *Comparison in anthropology: the impossible method* Cambridge 2018, pp156-60. I have to say that I am somewhat sceptical of 'brittleness' as an objection to arguments in general. The reason is that to make an argument less 'brittle' in this sense is to make it less testable as a scientific argument.
4. 'Getting in touch' *Weekly Worker* October 19: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1463/getting-in-touch.
5. Meaning 'self-censorship' presumably - 'self-censure' would mean self-condemnation.
6. See M Macnair, 'Intersectionalism, the highest stage of western Stalinism?' *Critique* vol 48, pp541-58 (2018).
7. *Partei-Zusammenbruch? Ein offenes Wort zum inneren Parteistreit Berlin 1915 (The collapse of the party? an open word on the controversy in the party)*, p3 (Ben Lewis's translation).

# 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.

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# weekly worker

## Workers will have to fight

# Don't cry for Milei, Argentina

The election of an anarcho-capitalist eccentric as president is the latest example of bourgeois politics descending into irrationality, argues Paul Demarty

In the great Argentine caper movie, *Nine queens*, two conmen set out to sell a fake set of rare stamps for vastly more than they are worth. By the end, they need only get their money from the bank - but they discover that, as a result of the disastrous financial crisis that afflicted the country at the end of the last century, the bank itself has collapsed, robbing them of their bounty.

A rather different sort of conman is now president-elect. Javier Milei is, by all accounts, an odd bird. A ferociously *laissez-faire* economist by background, he is given to the mystical - by his own account in the process of converting to Judaism, his interest in it (beyond a geopolitical bias in favour of Israel) seems mainly to be in the gnomic sayings of the *kabbalah*; he is also apparently a trained tantric sex instructor, who proudly boasts that he can go three months without ejaculating.

He has busied himself in recent years building a media profile, with endless television appearances and a regular radio show, from which he launched his presidential campaign. He has created a superhero alter-ego, 'Captain Ancap' (anarcho-capitalist), complete with ridiculous latex costume, and has posed waving a chainsaw around to illustrate his intentions towards the "socialist" Argentine state.

He presents himself as utterly sincere about this anarcho-capitalism, repeatedly citing the ideology's greatest proponent, Murray Rothbard (pupil of Ayn Rand). His concrete proposals for Argentina, beyond selling off what remains of the family silver and tearing apart what remains of its welfare state, include notably ditching its peso currency altogether in favour of the dollar. He has won, remarkably, without the support of either of the major parties - the Peronist Justicialists and the conservative coalition, *Juntos Por El Cambio* (Together for Change, abbreviated to JxC). Some reports suggest that his candidacy was not intended to be serious, but rather a stunt, perhaps to put pressure on JxC.

But we will never know: JxC's candidate, Patricia Bullrich, was knocked out in the first round, and the last president to have emerged from that big tent, Mauricio Macri, all but openly campaigned for Milei throughout.

Milei thus found himself in a runoff with the Peronist, Sergio Massa, outgoing minister for the economy. On paper, it was an easy brief, with the Argentine economy once again floating in the toilet - inflation is running at 140%, with poverty at 40%. Massa, nonetheless, is no lightweight. He is a sharp critic of the recent Peronist dynasty, including former presidents Nestor and Cristina Kirchner, and even called for criminal investigations into them a few years ago. In head-to-head debates, he is generally

considered to have the better of it (Milei is a little too fond of Margaret Thatcher for the tastes of ordinary Argentines, who remember the humiliation of the south Atlantic war). All that counted for little in the end; in the second round, as a better fit for those conservative Bullrich votes, Milei won by more than 10 percentage points - the most convincing victory for the right since the end of the military dictatorship in 1983.

### Greatness?

Comparisons between Milei and Trump have piled up in recent weeks, though the stated politics of each differ considerably - dollarisation of Argentina versus steep tariff barriers, libertarianism versus vague authoritarian populism. Both share the aforementioned rumour that they did not really want the job of president, but "had greatness thrust upon them"; and both share an essentially opportunistic adoption of certain cultural-conservative shibboleths. Both, above all, share their status as real outsiders - men who muscled the prevailing party machines out of the way.

Both, moreover, capped long periods of dysfunction. Trump rode to victory after 15 years of slow-motion military disaster in the Middle East and Afghanistan, and eight of 'jobless recovery' from the 2008 financial crisis. The Argentine backstory is more 'economic', and more complicated. The 1990s saw the presidency of Carlos Menem - Peronist by party affiliation, but a good neoliberal soldier even by the standards of that decade. He implemented large-scale privatisations, and pegged the value of the peso to the dollar.

The resulting picture was one of superficial economic success, but the peg demanded large dollar reserves for it to work. When a series of crises afflicted emerging markets in the far east, and later Russia, international investors got spooked, and began to pull their reserves out. This resulted in a series of mass bank runs and the effective collapse of the Argentine financial system. The US succeeded, as it often did in that period, in offloading the cost of an investors' 'haircut' to the periphery.

The successive presidencies of the Kirchners stabilised things, and a relatively strong economy based on raw material and agricultural exports was duly built. Things were good for a while, and the Kirchners popular, until commodity prices crashed in the 2010s. Various efforts to manage this problem, from both the Peronists and conservatives, have resulted in enormous debts, and then the collapse of the peso and widespread **p e n u r y**. Various epic

corruption scandals have come to light; and the Kirchners are also widely accused of covering up a terrorist attack in the mid-1990s, to the point of having a prosecutor murdered before he could lay out evidence against them in 2015. How real all this is hard to grasp at a distance, but it is always a danger for a political dynasty to start to look like a mafia family - the two being quite closely related social phenomena.

Peronism is a phenomenon given to such dynamics, starting of course with Juan Perón himself to say nothing of the cult of personality around his first wife, Eva 'Evita' Duarte. The movement founded around him has long been the bane of academic political scientists, who cannot make up their minds whether he was a fascist, a social democrat or a run-of-the-mill third-world nationalist. In all fairness, the Peronists have been unable to make up their minds either - they have long been divided left versus right, with the infamous dirty war starting as a conflict between these two poles, before the military took over and made the killings altogether more efficient.

Perón favoured a corporatist regime, with managed relations between labour and capital that were redistributive towards labour. Argentina under his rule notoriously became the home of a number of Nazi war criminals, but he did not rule as a fascist dictator, won elections handily, and indeed was overthrown by the military in 1955. Corruption plagued his regime, as it has plagued 'justicialist' administrations since - and for that matter other administrations.

Javier Milei:  
Captain Ancap



The attraction of his quasi-social democratic nationalism to the left should be no surprise to those familiar with the history of the 20th century 'official communist' movement especially, which strove for alliances with the 'national bourgeoisie' against the *comprador* classes. In Argentina, as in many other countries, this phenomenon spread to the Trotskyist movement, with the followers of Nahuel Moreno forming a significant faction of left Peronism in the run-up to the dirty war.

### International

The most minimal account of why we have just seen a total clown appear as the chainsaw-wielding 'saviour' of Argentine prosperity is just that, in the long run, Peronism - like left nationalism - just does not work. We ought to have learnt that already from the rise and fall of Menem, of course, and the bloody disasters of the 1970s and 1980s. (At least Milei's chainsaw is, for the time being, metaphorical.) The economy *just is* international: an extractive economy like Argentina needs buyers, but if it succeeded in controlling more of the supply chain, it would still need imports. Those structures of trade are governed globally. Punishment beatings are always possible.

The decision of the left to make itself *partisans* of these forms of nationalism is therefore always an opportunistic and, in time, disastrous error. There is always the possibility of some tactical arrangement, of course; but the idea that socialism lies the other side of a prolonged alliance with the 'national bourgeoisie' leads only to defeat, because the bourgeoisie *is an international class*, just as much as the proletariat.

The Trotskyists posed against this idea the theory of permanent revolution, that in pre-capitalist or (later) subordinated countries the proletariat needed to pursue both the 'bourgeois-democratic' and proletarian revolutions. Yet the record of actually-existing Trotskyism is to behave in quite the same way as 'official communists', with a few marginal exceptions; to Morenista Peronism one could add support for the ayatollahs in Iran in 1979, for Sinhalese chauvinists in Sri Lanka, and so on. Permanent revolution versus socialism in one country turns out to be a distinction without a difference. Why? Because the bourgeoisie *is not a democratic class*. The 'bourgeois democratic revolution' is a misleading name for revolutions in which the subordinate classes

- above all the proletariat - force democracy on a reluctant bourgeoisie.

T h e

trouble with Milei is that he is, again, an odd bird; and so it is difficult to miss how *normal* he is. He accuses the pope of being a communist, and people mock him for it; but the entire British press more or less did the same thing to Ed Miliband, with no more justification (indeed, there was only slightly more justification in the case of Jeremy Corbyn).

Some parts of Milei's programme will be difficult to achieve for merely practical reasons - the fiscal disasters of recent years have left Argentina rather short of dollars, which you would think would be necessary for dollarisation. For all the chainsaw stuff, he may well have enough support in the legislature, since, after all, this is merely the sort of thing that Macri and even Menem were up to before him. A few culture-warrior gimmicks may be easily done in the same way. He may rant, and rave, and don a leather cape, but at the end of the day, Milei is just a relic of the 1990s.

It is too early to pass judgment on the 'meaning' of his election. There is certainly a discernible drift towards the right in global politics. Yet Milei is not exactly *that* kind of rightist, in terms of political substance: he is more like Republican rival Ron DeSantis than Donald Trump, in all respects except his success. Perhaps he is a beneficiary of more diffuse forms of political ferment instead. Only two of the last 20 or so elections in central and South America have returned the incumbent party or president to power.

### Pink tide

We are not in the second pink tide, as some say (or a vast black tide, as others do), but in a situation where the power of the global hegemon is unsettled, but as yet not seriously threatened by rivals. It is not clear, in this context, where to jump, or even what exactly obeying the existing regime entails. After all, adding the US to our tally of recent electoral results would only further reduce the incumbent 'advantage'; stability is not exactly the thing people look to Washington DC for nowadays.

In the meantime, the workers and oppressed of Argentina will have some fighting to do, and starting from much the same kind of reduced condition as the rest of us. The age of Milei will pass, one way or another, and it would take a fool, after 80-plus years of Peronism, to pronounce it dead after this reversal. But getting out of the Peronist-conservative death spiral takes more than Milei (thank god), more than the pope, and more than a fitter, stronger Peronism. It takes a far wider approach that at least looks to political unity across South America - and ultimately victory in the belly of the beast itself.

Nationalism has failed a thousand times already ●

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