

weekly
worker



**Pumping out still more gas:
Sultan Al Jaber, just the man
to put in charge of Cop28**

- Letters and debate
- Zionist drives and divisions
- Hamas and martyrdom
- Normalisation of Le Pen

No 1470 December 7 2023

Towards a mass Communist Party

£1/€1.10



**Internal power struggles
Relationship to the state
Encounters with the left**

LETTERS



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

Twin trick unity

I'm afraid Mike Macnair's response article really was one of his poorer efforts ('Upfront, sharp and personal', November 30). I don't think anyone would agree that he actually engaged with many of the issues which have been raised - plus, he either basically misunderstands what has been said or blatantly misrepresents them. Overall, it was a very good illustration of why the *Weekly Worker* Group (WWG) is destined to remain a very small sect and to make zero contribution to either socialist or communist unity.

I do apologise if in my two letters on the subject I have failed to adequately distinguish between a socialist party (and socialist unity) and a Communist Party (and communist unity). I do not have the luxury of multi-page articles and thousands of words to go into any great detail.

The failure to understand the basic differences between a socialist party and a communist party is one of the principal failings of the WWG. It has led to a whole series of bitterly sectarian entryist adventures, including within the Socialist Labour Party, Socialist Alliance, Labour Party, Left Unity, etc. All ended in failure and left the WWG even more sectarian and isolated because of its conduct and behaviour.

One of the principal reasons has been the WWG's attempt each time, insofar as it had any political or organisational clout, to try and convert the host party or organisation into a *communist party*, when the vast majority of their members either did not identify as communists and/or fundamentally disagreed with the organisational model and discipline of a classic communist party. Having tried and failed each time, it then either got itself expelled or chose to break away.

The only strategic conception the WWG has ever got roughly right is in relation to the Labour Party where its aim of "transforming the Labour Party into united front of a special kind, open to affiliation by all working class and socialist organisations" is actually broadly in line with what communists have programmatically advocated since 1951.

I think there are two main issues, which are related to each other and the answers to which can help point the way forward. One: where do we think is the basic raw material from which we can identify partisans, activists and leaders of the broad working class and seek to develop as and ideally recruit as communists to a genuine Communist Party? Two: the extreme degree of fragmentation on the socialist left and the competitiveness, if not downright hostility (hatred even), between the socialist and left groups, is deeply damaging to any prospect of actually achieving socialism in this country.

Surely all that combined energy, talent, experience, resource and enthusiasm which (even if only pooled to a certain degree) could be better organised and focused on actually taking the fight to the enemy, and really attempting to engage with broader layers of our class - as opposed to merely preaching to their existing 'cadres' and being dedicated to maintaining

sectarian purity and separateness.

Advocating a mass socialist party which brings together the majority of socialist and communist parties, groups and individuals, *and* which is genuinely grounded and based in the real labour movement, in workplaces and communities, *could* be a necessary first step to overcoming the current fragmentation of the socialist left, and itself help build and develop the mass unity of the working class, as well as class and socialist consciousness within it.

It should be obvious that any such formation would obviously *not* be a Labour Party mark two. It would look extremely similar to the WWG's own strategic objective of "a transformed Labour Party as a united front of the working class". It would also obviously *not* be a Communist Party, as it would not be organised on the basis of Marxism-Leninism, on an agreed communist programme, or on democratic centralism.

Building such a mass labour movement formation is *different* from the independent need to build the Communist Party and communist unity - but they are not in contradiction either. Marxists, after all, see socialism as the first stage of communism after the overthrow of capitalism, which will transition over time to full communism, especially as socialist revolution spreads around the world.

I have been a communist most of my life and will be one until the day I die. I believe and support the concept of a communist party and believe that such a party is essential to the carrying out of a genuine socialist revolution. Others will have different views and I genuinely respect those. One can argue that building the Communist Party is also integral to building wider socialist and labour movement unity.

How can the concepts of socialist unity and communist unity relate to each other? The original Communist Party of Great Britain and its successor, the Communist Party of Britain, have had continuous programmatic aims since 1951 for the Communist Party to affiliate to the Labour Party - providing Labour remained the principal federal mass party of the organised working class, and the CP was able to retain its independent and programmatic identity within it. While rightly being critical of the sectarian nature and conduct of many of the ultra-left groups, the CP has always recognised there are good socialists within them and in the wider movement.

Those who believe in a politics and concept of a Communist Party would be able to argue our case, with the evidence and experience of struggle, within the democratic framework of such a federal working class party (proponents of alternative socialist politics, organisational forms and methods likewise). Theory, practice and experience will determine the outcome.

There are at least two ways of building communist unity and the Communist Party. One is for individuals or groups to join an existing Communist Party, agreeing to accept the current party programme and its organisational basis, including democratic centralism (and, no, factions are *not* compatible with democratic centralism). The second is for existing parties and groups to agree to merge on the basis of an agreed set of principles,

potentially a new programme, and, obviously, all agreeing to abide by the democracy and basis of the new organisation.

Jack Conrad's furious (and frankly hilarious) rant about Wrack and McMahon having not first approached the WWG ('Getting touch', October 19) in their quest for a mass socialist/communist party is extremely revealing in its complete lack of grasp of reality or any sense of self-awareness. It's as if Conrad has looked at his WWG (it is most definitely 'his') through a microscope, and mistook a pinhead for a mountain.

Wrack and McMahon, in advocating a mass socialist party of tens of thousands, bringing together many of the existing left, should be commended for their ambition and challenge to all of us. Conrad, having considerably less than thousands in his group, was left exposed and throwing a tantrum at feeling slighted.

Mike Macnair's formulation on whether "the CPGB-PCC faction can be the only organisational sieve or funnel for a future Communist Party" appears slightly more credible and acknowledging of concrete reality: "Other organisations would be in a much stronger position to take the sort of initiatives that would lead to a future communist party" ('Unity based on solid principles', November 2).

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Civility, please

I have read 'Upfront, sharp and personal' more than once to see if I understand it correctly. Are communists seriously advocating against civility? If so, what does this imply is acceptable: personal attacks, rudeness, insults?

I am unconvinced this is an appropriate response to opponents, let alone anyone else, as a means to achieve socialism. It isn't revolutionary, rigorous debate or enforcing discipline. It was bad when Lenin did it and it was bad when Marx did it. It isn't what Marx meant when he advocated "ruthless criticism of all that exists - ruthless both in the sense of not being afraid of the results it arrives at and in the sense of being just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be".

Workers suffer enough at work and those willing and able to spare precious time in the cause of socialism I would advise to run a mile away from any groups or individual openly and unashamedly defending incivility.

Jon D White
email

Ceasefire

The resumption of hostilities in the Gaza Strip ought to spur all people of goodwill to add their voices to the demand for a permanent ceasefire.

The United Kingdom is one of the five permanent members of the United Nations security council and has a responsibility to promote and facilitate peace. The government of the country in which we live is instead lending its support to the large-scale violations of international humanitarian law being inflicted upon the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip. This is a disgrace that brings shame on all who do not object. In my opinion, all those elected to public office in this country have a moral duty to speak out individually and collectively in favour of a permanent ceasefire

and against the UK's complicity in the war crimes being committed.

On Monday November 27 a full meeting of Oxford city council voted unanimously for a motion asking the council leader to write to Rishi Sunak, Keir Starmer and a local MP, demanding that they call for an "immediate, permanent ceasefire" in the Gaza Strip. Many other councils have also passed motions calling for a ceasefire, including Liverpool, Sheffield and St Albans. I hope that readers of this letter will contact their local councillors urging their councils to adopt similar motions.

Opinion poll surveys have indicated that a large majority of voters are in favour of a ceasefire. Councils should reflect public opinion on this issue and speak out against a British government that is actually giving diplomatic and military support to a state that is committing war crimes, rather than employing all the means at its disposal to stop those crimes.

John Wake
Harlow

Marginal theory

Paul Demarty's article, 'Don't cry for Milei, Argentina', is up to his usual excellent standard on the details of the crisis, but short of solutions (November 30). In dissing the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution he cites the examples of those Trotskyist centrists who have betrayed the revolutionary perspective as evidence that it cannot work. I say it worked in October 1917 and stand with those more consistent Trotskyist currents who have fought for it - including some in Argentina.

I came into opposition with the Cliff Slaughter-led Workers Revolutionary Party before the 1986 split precisely on this issue; Nahuel Moreno was indeed uncritically championing the cause of the nationalist bourgeoisie against the comprador bourgeoisie, as I learned from a Spartacist pamphlet detailing his appalling opportunism (such gross opportunism by Stalin led to the massacre of the Shanghai Soviet in 1927 and the defeat of the Spanish revolution in 1939, to mention a couple). Slaughter wanted to fuse with Moreno, but I made a strong speech at a WRP conference in 1997 denouncing him, Bill Hunter entered the room and spoke to the chair and then announced that Moreno had just died. Everyone looked at me as if I had killed him! (Details are in my *WRP explosion* book.)

I would also cite the example of those South African Trotskyists who fought for the Workers Charter in the trade unions, as against the Stalinist Freedom Charter. As they wrote in 1991, "The logic of the ANC leadership's position is quite clear. It is prepared to thoroughly compromise even its own bourgeois democratic programme, the Freedom Charter, to secure a negotiated settlement with the bourgeoisie."

Many of those comrades are still fighting for the perspective of the permanent revolution. Stalinism's two-stage revolution theory resulted in South Africa becoming the most unequal country in the world, with the black masses worse off now than under apartheid. Nelson Mandela has his statue in Parliament Square for counterrevolutionary services to British and global imperialism.

The point of the anti-imperialist united front was to

operate the transitional method, placing demands on the national bourgeoisie to consistently fight the conflicts with imperialism, which were forced upon them, in order to expose their vacillations and win the mass anti-imperialist base to the only programme that could ultimately defeat global imperialism: socialist revolution spread both regionally and globally - the world revolution of Leninist-Trotskyist-Bolshevik heritage.

Citing, as Paul Demarty does, those who capitulated to the "ayatollahs in Iran in 1979" (the WRP yesterday and today, etc) and the "Sinhalese chauvinists in Sri Lanka" leaves out those principled Trotskyists who fought for the correct perspectives against the 'socialism in a single country, two-stage revolution' grovel to the USA in the first place.

Telling us that actually existing Trotskyists "behave in quite the same way as 'official communists', with a few marginal exceptions" leaves out the obvious answer: were not those "marginal exceptions" the principled ones, and is not the CPGB theory of extreme democracy via parliament an even more marginal theory?

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Support DPRK!

On November 30 comrade Alejandro Cao De Benós, the president of the Korean Friendship Association (which our Korean Friendship Association UK is part of), was suddenly arrested in Madrid, at the request of the US FBI, and held for a number of hours before being released. Supposedly, he was arrested because he had broken US sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Those sanctions are illegal and have no validity outside the US.

The arrest and detention, as well as the threatened extradition to the US of comrade Alejandro, is most unjust. It is a politically motivated action and part of an intrigue by the deep state of the US and some other countries to destroy the Korean Friendship Association. They want to criminalise support for People's Korea! It is part of a wider agenda to shut down dissent against the status quo in western countries.

The incident shows how false the so-called 'democracy' and 'human rights' advocated by the imperialists and their liberal friends are. Supposedly we live in a 'democracy', but those with opinions that are different to the status quo are arrested or kicked out of jobs.

The allegations against comrade Alejandro are completely false. The US is a gangster state and the Spanish government is acting as its puppet. There must be full solidarity with him and the Korean Friendship Association!

Dr Dermot Hudson
Korean Friendship UK

Veganuary

I call on comrades to try being vegan this Veganuary (the month of January!). There is no such thing as a humane slaughterhouse, as anyone who has spent any time in one can attest. The experience for the animals (and workers in them) is anything but.

The suffering of both humans and animals on earth need not be forever.

Tom Taylor
Plymouth

CLIMATE

Blowtorching the planet

Despite carbon emissions hitting record highs, Cop28 has been yet another talking shop, writes Eddie Ford

Even by the low standards set by previous climate change conferences, Cop28 - this year's UN climate summit in Dubai - has been especially perverse. It is a living symbol of failure, when the headlines are increasing about extreme weather, record temperatures throughout the world and soaring greenhouse emissions.

According to data published at the weekend by the Climate Trace project, oil and gas production in the US, and electricity generation in China and India, have produced the biggest increases in global greenhouse gas emissions since 2015, when the Paris Agreement was signed to limit global temperature rises to 1.5°C above average pre-industrial levels - or, failing that, to 2.0°C. Emissions of methane - a greenhouse gas 80 times more powerful than carbon dioxide - have also risen, despite more than 100 countries signing up to a pledge to reduce the gas described as a blowtorch that is boiling the planet. If you can turn it off, then you immediately turn down the heat. Indeed, cuts to methane and other short-lived pollutants could reduce global temperature increases relatively quickly by as much as 0.3°C, yet the reverse is happening.

To no great surprise, CT's data showed that countries and companies are chronically failing to report their emissions accurately despite obligations to do so. On the other hand, CT uses satellite images and AI software to pinpoint the sources of emissions with a high degree of accuracy around the world, and has uncovered discrepancies between countries' and companies' reporting of emissions and their actual behaviour. Hence, we discover that coal mines from China were responsible for a large proportion of the increase in methane emissions between 2021 and 2022, though Beijing has signed a new pledge to include methane in its national climate plans for the first time. However, there was also some good news: deforestation is dropping in key regions, with emissions from the degradation and destruction of forests in the Congo Basin dropping by up to 19% in 2022, compared with the previous year.

But a report by the Global Carbon Project says that the world is on track to have burned more coal, oil and gas in 2023 than it did in 2022 - pumping 1.1% more planet-heating carbon dioxide into the atmosphere at a time when emissions must plummet to stop extreme weather from growing even more extreme. Yes, growth in CO₂ emissions has slowed substantially over the past decade, but the amount emitted each year has continued to rise and, if things continue at the current rate, in just seven years the world will burn through the remaining carbon budget that at least in theory gives us a tiny chance of avoiding the 1.5°C increase, and in 15 years the budget for 1.7°C will be gone too.

Even more alarming, another report says the planet is on the verge of five catastrophic climate tipping points and three more may be reached in the 2030s if the world heats 1.5°C above pre-industrial temperatures.¹ These include the collapse of big ice sheets in Greenland and the west Antarctic, the widespread thawing of



permafrost, the death of coral reefs in warm waters, and the collapse of one oceanic current in the North Atlantic. Yet everything indicates that the world faces temperature rises between 2.5°C and 2.9°C by the end of the century, with near immeasurable consequences.

Meanwhile, more than 160 heads of state and government arrived at Expo City in Dubai at the weekend, with nearly 100,000 registered delegates. On top of that, almost 400,000 visitors with free one-day passes are expected at the "green zone" area of business and technology exhibitions adjoining the summit.

Our fearless eco-warrior, King Charles III, gave the opening speech about how the world has embarked on a "vast, frightening experiment" on the natural world. Rishi Sunak eventually decided to turn up after vowing to "max out" the UK's oil and gas reserves by granting new North Sea drilling licences and saying that his scaling back on net zero pledges showed he was "not in hock to the ideological zealots" - what leadership, Rishi!

Of course, the omens were bad right from the very start. Like holding the conference in the petrostate United Arab Emirates of all places, at a time when various states and oil companies are planning large expansions in drilling. This naturally includes Adnoc, the UAE's national oil company which is one of the dirtiest and least responsible on the planet, which, naturally enough, has massive expansion plans for its oil and gas reserves. As of 2021, Adnoc has an oil production capacity exceeding four million barrels per day, with plans to increase to five million by 2030, and is projected to emit over 11 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases by 2048. Yes, Dubai is the perfect venue for a conference which is supposedly about saving the planet and human civilisation from the ravages of runaway global warming.

Then there is the fact, as calculated by the Kick Big Polluters Out coalition, that at least 2,456 fossil fuel lobbyists have been granted access to the Cop28 climate negotiations. This is a record-breaking number ... and for many NGOs a clincher. The fossil fuel lobby has 'captured' Cop 28, not the green lobby.

As before, a major line of disagreement is on which formulation to use - do we want to "phase out" or "phase down" the use of fossil fuels? More than 100 African, European, Pacific and Caribbean countries already support a phase-out of "unabated" fossil fuels - those where the resultant emissions are not captured - but whether the final Cop28 agreement calls for this or uses the weaker phrase is one of the most fiercely fought

issues at the summit. Al Gore, the former US vice-president, has said that a commitment to phase out fossil fuels would be Cop28's only measure of success. The issue of 'phase out' or 'phase down' is complicated by the two terms not having agreed definitions and by the highly uncertain role of technologies to actually 'abate' fossil fuel emissions at all, such as carbon capture and storage (CCS) - which seems extremely dubious.

The UK, the US and the EU want relatively strong language in the final text on "phasing out unabated fossil fuels", which would allow a limited role for using CCS technology. Others, such as Russia, Saudi Arabia and China, reject the call - wanting to weaken the pledge to 'phase down'. Both options are on the table at Cop28, as well as proposals to only mention coal, or not say anything at all about fossil fuels. Cop26 in Glasgow in 2021 agreed for the first time to 'phase down' coal use, but this had been watered down from 'phase out' at the last minute, supposedly bringing the Cop26 president, Alok Sharma, to tears. But NGO climate campaigners would like to excise the word "unabated" altogether, as it muddies the waters - allowing companies to continue pumping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere on the basis that magical CCS technology will somehow make everything all right.

But at the end of the day it is just words. And what countries and companies say and what they do is often quite different. No less to the point, NGOs, such as Greenpeace, spectacularly fail to explain why this is the case. We are told, for example that the "causes and consequences of climate change have never been clearer." The main problem, they say, is that the cause of climate change is fossil fuels ... a circular argument which actually explains nothing. Nor does blaming hypocritical politicians and the army of fossil fuel lobbyists.

The root cause of climate change is the nature of the capitalist system itself. Unless capitalism, which by its very nature, is based on production for the sake of production, is superseded, the outlook for human civilisation is extraordinarily bleak.

The answer lies squarely with the left. We must break with the confessional sects and the politics of protest. Instead we must embrace the politics of power. The only way that can seriously happen is with the building of mass communist parties - real communist parties, that is, not Trotskyoid opinion poll driven name changes, or Stalinoid historical reenactment societies ●

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Notes

1. theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/06/earth-on-verge-of-five-catastrophic-tipping-points-scientists-warn.

ACTION

Full ceasefire now - stop the war on Gaza!

Saturday December 9, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble Bank Junction, London EC3. Israel has resumed the war that has already killed 15,000 Palestinians, including 6,000 children. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/events/198014913362043.

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.

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.

Poetry for the many

Saturday December 9, 4pm: Book signings by Jeremy Corbyn, Housemans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1.

Poetry for the many is an anthology selected by Jeremy Corbyn and Len McCluskey. Order in advance required. Organised by Housemans Bookshop: housmans.com/events.

The Israeli-Palestinian colonial conflict

Saturday December 9, 5.30pm: Online briefing to understand what is taking place in Gaza and across occupied Palestine. Speakers: Moshé Machover and Sumaya Awad. Organised by Democratic Socialists of America national political education committee: www.facebook.com/DSAPolEd.

Next steps for the peace movement

Monday December 11, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, Hill Street, Coventry CV1. To discuss recent developments in Palestine and Ukraine, and the siting of US nukes in Britain. Organised by Coventry Stop the War: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

What it means to be human

Tuesday December 12, 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: 'An Xmas fairytale: the shoes that were danced to pieces'. Speaker: Chris Knight. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/241737225506853.

Palestine: British colonialism in the Middle East

Tuesday December 12, 6.30pm: Public meeting, P21 Gallery, 19 Chalton Street, London NW1. The roots of violence and western support for Israel lie in British colonialism in the Middle East. Speaker: John Rees. Organised by Counterfire: www.facebook.com/events/768839045267509.

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.

Israel-Palestine: oppression and resistance

Online education and discussion series. **Thursday December 14, 7pm:** The bloody history of British imperialism in the Middle East. Speaker: Mike Macnair, author of *Revolutionary strategy*.

Thursday December 21, 7pm: The Ottoman Empire, the Balfour Declaration and Zionism before Israel's foundation in 1948. Speakers: Tony Greenstein and Thomas Suárez. Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: www.facebook.com/LabourLeftAlliance.

Israel, oil and climate destruction

Thursday December 14, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Pelican House, 144 Cambridge Heath Road, London E1. Israel presents itself as a leader in sustainability and climate technologies, but in reality it is crucial to controlling planet-destroying oil resources around the Middle East. Organised by East London RS21: www.facebook.com/events/309425601986017.

Say no to bailiffs

Monday January 8, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. Acorn has been demanding an end to the use of council tax bailiffs in Manchester. Hear how the city council has responded and discuss the next steps. Organised by Acorn Manchester: www.acorntheunion.org.uk/boot_the_bailiffs.

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.

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.

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.

PALESTINE

Zionist drives and divisions

Eradicating Hamas provides a useful cover, but everything points to ethnic cleansing, says Moshé Machover

Although it is painful to see the darkest predictions that I had made materialising, I am going to discuss what we can expect will occur in Gaza. Obviously, this is partly speculation - we can only predict the future, even the near future, with a degree of probability.

I am going to discuss the aims of this war as far as Israel is concerned. It is only Israel that is now the proactive agent in the current conflict and the Israeli leaders have made it clear that they are aiming for the war to be long, in order to achieve their goals. Apart from these goals, there is also a personal interest of the political leadership - primarily Benjamin Netanyahu - and the military top brass. Both have been exposed before Israeli public opinion.

The latter are very unpopular in Israel because they failed to prevent something that was predicted by their own on-the-ground observers: that Hamas was preparing a major attack. The (mainly female) soldiers who constantly viewed what is happening across the fence in Gaza had noticed for a long time what seemed to be preparations for such an attack. These were reported, but were dismissed because the military and intelligence leadership did not believe that Hamas was really serious and technically capable of doing what was predicted.

As far as Netanyahu is concerned, it is common knowledge that he had helped foster Hamas in the Gaza Strip for quite a long time in order to divide the Palestinian leadership and prevent even talk of a two-state so-called solution. Of course, that was only talk, because, as I pointed out long ago, it is a mere illusion, which people in the know realise is not going to happen. But Netanyahu wanted to prevent even talk of it within the American administration.

Military and political

This explains why both the military and political leadership are keen to delay as far as possible the day of reckoning, when a serious investigation into the lead-up to October 7 is launched. It is improbable that a commission of inquiry will be set up during the war, so it is in their interest that the conflict should last quite a long time.

As far as Israeli public opinion is concerned, the aim of the war is simply to satisfy the lust for revenge. Israel has been humiliated. The atrocities are bad enough, but have been magnified even more by propaganda, as happens in every war. A big section of the Israeli Jewish population is calling for the whole of Gaza to be annihilated - everybody there is responsible and there are no innocent people.

That is, of course, propaganda for internal consumption. But for international consumption the declared aim of the war is to eradicate Hamas. This is parroted by the mainstream media here in Britain, and elsewhere in the 'international community' led by the United States. This declared aim has several advantages: first of all, it is plausible - at least for people who do not look too carefully into the whole question. After all, Hamas is designated a 'terrorist organisation' by Israel's allies, which makes the aim of eradicating it acceptable. That is why the mainstream media, including the BBC, use the label 'Israel-Hamas war', as if it was really a conflict between these two parties. However, if you look beyond the mainstream media - for example, *Al Jazeera* - it is described more widely (and more correctly) as Israel's war on Gaza and the Palestinians.



Al-Shifa hospital: a hospital, not a Hamas command centre

An added advantage of Israel's declared war aim is that it is open-ended. For example, how can you tell when Hamas has been destroyed or completely annihilated? After all, it is not just a military organisation: it is a major political movement - one which heads a civilian government in the Gaza Strip. While a military organisation can be defeated, at least temporarily, it is questionable whether an entire movement and ideology can be eradicated. Moreover, Hamas is not only a major force in the Gaza Strip: there are plenty of Hamas supporters in the West Bank, throughout the Middle East and around the world. So it will require a very long war indeed to achieve this declared aim.

But soon after October 7 the Israeli leadership - the government, along with the main opposition party (there is now in reality a kind of 'national unity government') - seized the opportunity for what has become in my view the real main aim of the war: not simply to eradicate Hamas and certainly not just to exact revenge (although that would gratify a lot of public opinion); and not just to save their own skin in view of the impending investigation. That real aim is ethnic cleansing.

Predictions

As you may recall, I have been predicting that the escalating repression of Palestinians in the occupied territories would provoke growing resistance - which in turn would eventually lead to an Israeli way out of the spiral in the form of ethnic cleansing. This is predictable as a long-term aim of Zionism: to complete the Zionist project of a Jewish state across the whole of Palestine - from the (Jordan) river to the (Mediterranean) sea. This long-term aim of the Zionist project requires a stable and secure Jewish majority and this, of course, means that ethnic cleansing will be on the Zionist wish list.

However, as I have previously argued, ethnic cleansing can only take place at an opportune moment (*she'at kosher*, in Zionist parlance): in an international context which allows Israel to perpetrate this crime. This opportunity has presented itself at a time and place which nobody could predict: namely in Gaza in October. I did not expect (and I do not think anybody else did) that ethnic cleansing would start at this time and in this place, but here it is - it is impossible to deny that it is actually taking place.

If you watch the reports, even on the BBC, it is clear that ethnic cleansing is in operation. Military action against Hamas does not really require carpet-bombing huge parts of inhabited areas; it does not justify forcing a million people from the north of Gaza to the south, promising that they would be safe there; and then, when they are bombed in the south of Gaza, they are told to move from one place to another. They are destitute - without food or a supply of drinkable water, without medicine, without sufficient clothes and shelter, and with zero possibility of leading any kind of decent life. So what is this, if not ethnic cleansing?

But ethnic cleansing requires not just the pushing of people to the border: it requires expelling them across the border. This does not necessarily involve providing them with forced transport. It can be done by leaving people no other choice but to escape, by creating conditions whereby they must either run for their lives or die of hunger and destitution (not to mention the epidemics that are threatening to spread). This is what I predict is going to happen if Israel is allowed to continue this strategy (I do not think there is sufficient US pressure which might be able to prevent it, if it wanted to do so). It is likely that Palestinians will not wait to be forcibly transported out of Gaza: they will break out of their own accord.

This is in fact what happened in the nakba in 1947-49. True, there were occasions then when Palestinians were transported by Israel across the border, but for the most part they just faced conditions which made them choose to flee. That was later used by Israel to justify its claim that 'We didn't do it; they decided to leave themselves'. But, of course, Israel created the conditions during the nakba, just as it is creating the conditions now for the two and a quarter million Palestinians to 'voluntarily' leave the Gaza Strip. And they will not be allowed to return. This is the 'ratchet principle' of Israeli expansion and ethnic cleansing.

No-one will flee unless they are compelled to, which is why Israel is creating the conditions where Palestinians will have no alternative. Some of them will no doubt try to get into Egypt and the regime there will be faced with a dilemma: prevent them by brute force from getting across to the Sinai desert or allow them to do so. The Gaza Strip is literally squeezed 'between the devil and the deep blue sea'. If you look at the map, you will see that there is only one exit by land that is feasible for the population, which is precisely through Rafah to the Sinai desert.

But will Egypt prevent this by force? It may even massacre those who try to come across. Either way, it will be fine by Israel. Whether the Egyptians are forced into accepting hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees or use mass violence against them, Israel will have got rid of them. And who knows? Some may try the sea route of escape. The Israeli navy may oblige by lifting its blockade of Gaza's coast, and we may then witness Palestinian refugees trying to cross the Mediterranean in fishing boats (if they are lucky) or unseaworthy rafts.

But what lies beyond all this? I think it is becoming ever more clear that in the longer term Israel is aiming to recolonise Gaza with its

own settlers. Forget about the two-state illusion, which the Americans keep putting forward as their preferred outcome of the war: this is not going to happen. Once the Gaza Strip has been vacated - either totally or almost entirely - it can be reoccupied by Israel.

In addition to gaining the territory of the 'promised land', there would be economic advantages to be gained from incorporating the Gaza area into greater Israel: the land is fertile and it is an ideal place for tourism, with a beautiful coast. On top of this there are considerable deposits of natural gas in the sea just adjacent to the Gaza Strip. All this means that Israel has many reasons for wanting to incorporate Gaza - apart from that being part of the ultimate aim of Zionism.

As I have stated, nothing is certain, but I predict that this will be the probable outcome of the present war, as far as Gaza is concerned. However, although Israel may or may not overcome Hamas militarily, it is not going to put an end to the (so-called or real) terrorism against the Zionist regime. What is certain is that the present kind of operation will create greater and greater resistance. True, some people will be cowed into submission, but you can be sure that there will be enough people who will be infuriated by what is happening and resort to various forms of resistance, including terroristic activities. In particular, it is almost certain to increase both resistance and oppression in the West Bank, leading to the next phase of ethnic cleansing sooner or later - if Israel is not prevented by outside forces from carrying this out.

Internal contradictions

I want to end by making a speculative prediction regarding Israel itself. It is very probable that internal conflicts will intensify. Normally wars are presented as being fought in the 'national interest', which has an effect of unifying the people and at least temporarily overcoming internal contradictions and conflicts. However, in this case Israeli public opinion remains deeply divided - not so much by opposition to the war versus support for it, but by widespread anger at the huge failure of the leadership to prevent this traumatic event from occurring.

The divisions within Jewish Israeli society that were evident in the period preceding this war will definitely re-emerge in some form. Essentially, this will intensify the contradiction between two camps within Israeli Jewish society - on the one hand, the messianic wing and, on the other, the modern, secular business section of the Israeli bourgeoisie. There will be moves by the messianic Zionists to annex the West Bank to Israel. But in terms of the regime that this will create, it will annex Israel to the regime of the West Bank: this repressive, authoritarian, theocratic regime would be extended in one form or another to the whole of Israel. But that would be inimical to the interests of the secular bourgeoisie, whose activities are essential for making Israel one of the world's modern, developed capitalist countries.

How this will be resolved is, of course, a matter for conjecture. I cannot predict what will happen, but there will be trouble ahead and I think this internal contradiction will be very difficult to paper over ●

This article is based on Moshé Machover's address to the December 3 aggregate of CPGB comrades

HAMAS

Far from pacified

There can be no possibility of a military solution in Gaza. October 7 was a death trip, argues **Daniel Lazare**

Like it or not, guns, bombs and artillery can be highly useful in politics. But there are times when their use value runs out, and today's Middle East is one of them.

This is true for all three of the key players in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the United States, Israel itself and Hamas, the so-called Islamic Resistance Movement, which, despite its name, is doing more to facilitate Gaza's destruction than stopping it. The result is 'MAD', which is to say 'mutually assured destruction' - to the nth degree. Yet none of the parties can extricate themselves from the downward spiral.

The US, for example, is desperate to maintain control of a region that has been a top priority for more than four decades. As Jimmy Carter announced in January 1980,

Let our position be absolutely clear. An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.

The Carter Doctrine, as it came to be known, thus laid down the law that the gulf was henceforth to be regarded as an American lake. The text, written by national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, was a response to the Soviet Union's incursion into Afghanistan a few weeks earlier. Washington interpreted Soviet intervention as a bid to gain control of the region's unparalleled energy resources, which, if successful, would have given the USSR a lock on the global economy, at a time when oil prices were shooting through the roof. America's goal over the next decade was therefore to topple the Moscow-backed government in Kabul and to rein in the new Islamic regime in Tehran as well.

Three major conflicts ensued - the Iran-Iraq war in 1980-88, the Gulf War in 1990-91, and the invasion of Iraq in 2003 - not to mention US proxy wars in Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen. In their 2007 bestseller, *The Israel lobby*, the foreign-policy 'realists', John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, argued that the Jewish state was a drag on US efforts to achieve regional dominance, since it merely saddled America with another client to protect at a time when its hands were full.

But the Mearsheimer-Walt thesis ran into a solid wall of opposition in Congress, the press and Washington's innumerable foreign-policy think tanks - all united in the belief that a close alliance with the region's strongest military power provided Washington with the comprehensive firepower needed to overawe the Middle East as a whole. Joe Biden summed up the neocon gospel in 1986: "Were there not an Israel, the United States of America would have to invent an Israel." Or, as he put it in 2007,

Israel is the single greatest strength America has in the Middle East ... Imagine our circumstance in the world, were there no Israel. How many battleships would there be? How many troops would be stationed? ... When I was a young senator, I'd say, 'If I were a Jew, I'd be a Zionist.' I am a Zionist.



Al-Qassam brigades: armed wing of Hamas

You don't have to be a Jew to be a Zionist.¹

Yet the White House now finds that same dominance unravelling, as the horror in Gaza intensifies. Prior to October 7, the White House had put all its energy into the Abraham Accords - a grand scheme for a Saudi-Israeli alliance that would rein in Iran and bury the Palestinian problem in an unbreakable security structure, stretching from the Mediterranean to the Arabian Sea. Earlier in the year, China had unnerved the Biden administration by negotiating a Saudi-Iranian rapprochement that established the people's republic as a major diplomatic player in what the US had regarded as its exclusive preserve. The purpose of the accords was to force China to back off, return Saudi Arabia to the American fold, and reinforce Zionist hegemony too.

Explosives

But, with Israel dropping an estimated 25,000 tons of explosives on Gaza to date² - two-thirds more than the US dropped on Hiroshima in 1945 - the Abraham Accords are effectively dead. Israel is so toxic as far as public opinion in the Middle East is concerned that the ever-shaky Saudi regime would not touch it with a 10-foot pole.

Hence the paradox: the more firepower the US pours in, the greater its loss of control. Yet, with border wars raging in Gaza and the Ukraine, the empire fears that it has no choice, since the slightest sign of weakness will cause more wars to erupt in the eastern Pacific, in the Bab el-Mandeb choke point, where Yemen's Houthis are threatening to cut off Israeli shipping, and so on. So it does not dare stop.

Then there is Israel. Last week, two closely linked Israeli news outlets, *+972 Magazine* and *Local Call*, reported that the Israeli military was using artificial intelligence to generate targets "at a rate that far exceeds what was previously possible". The result, the exposé said, is a "mass assassination factory" that allows Israel to zero in on the homes of even junior Hamas operatives and blow them to smithereens, along with everyone inside.

"We are asked to look for high-rise buildings with half a floor that can be attributed to Hamas," one source explained. "Sometimes it is a militant group's spokesperson's office or a point where operatives

meet." Indeed, under the 'Dahiya doctrine' - so called after a Shi'ite district in Beirut that the Israeli airforce razed during the 2006 Lebanon war - Israel has taken to bombing high rises, universities, banks and government offices merely to terrorise and demoralise and so bring 'civil pressure' to bear on Hamas.³ Killing 15,000 Gazans is good, because it tells Palestinians that Hamas must be overthrown. If they do not get the message, Israel will kill 15,000 more and then 15,000 after that.

But what can the result be, other than more hatred and defiance? The Palestinian-American scholar, Tareq Baconi, points out that "Gaza's defiant spirit ... did not begin with Hamas." Since 1948, in fact,

Israel has waged more than 12 wars on Gaza, reoccupied the territory, isolated its inhabitants, placed the enclave under siege, and unilaterally disengaged in attempts to rid itself of the challenge it presents. In the 1950s, decades before Hamas's creation, Israel designated Gaza a 'Fedayeen's nest' - a territory that merited constant isolation and military bombardment to break the resistance. In the late 1980s, with the eruptions of the First Intifada, Israel began restricting the mobility of Palestinians from Gaza into Israel through the use of a complex permit system.⁴

Yet Gaza has remained unpacified throughout. Why should this time be different?

Although some anti-Zionists may object to putting them in the same boat, there is not only the effect on Palestinians to consider, but on Israel as well. With Benjamin Netanyahu also egging on anti-Palestinian violence on the West Bank, how long can such methodologies continue before Israel lurches even further to the right? After fleeing the Nazis in the 1940s, Israeli Jews may well end up discovering that they have merely exchanged one fascist regime for another.

Finally, there is Hamas. Jihad is not merely a tactic as far as the organization is concerned, but a way of life. To quote Baconi:

Waging jihad was understood as a way of being, as existing in a state of war or espousing a belligerent relationship with the enemy. Jihad

was not limited to armed struggle, although this did comprise a central element of Hamas's mission. Even in the absence of military operations, evoking jihad conjured a sense of identity and purpose that reaffirmed the Palestinian rejection of Israeli control.⁵

More than the health of the state, war is the state, as far as Hamas is concerned. The fact that armed struggle had gotten the Palestine Liberation Organisation nowhere over the years is meanwhile deemed inapplicable, because the PLO is secular, whereas Hamas is Islamic. Baconi says:

For Hamas success was thought to be predestined. The movement's leaders believe that Hamas's Islamic character would offer a robust ideological framework through which to offset the worldly pressures that had hamstrung the PLO before it.⁶

The fact that 75% of the population has been displaced thanks to Hamas's provocations is immaterial, because god will prevail in the end.

Critics who label the results a death trip are not exaggerating. "We are a people who value death, just like our enemies value life," Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh told a mass rally in Gaza in 2014. "We are called a nation of martyrs, and are proud to sacrifice martyrs," Hamas spokesman Ghazi Hamad said in October.⁷

Given Hamas's arch-reactionary politics, words like these cannot help but summon up memories of the Francoist battle cry, *Viva la muerte* ('Long live death!'), or Hitler ranting in his bunker that "Germans deserve to perish" because they had betrayed him by losing the war (an incident brought out nicely in the 2004 movie *Downfall*).

But it is martyrdom for thee and not for me. Haniyeh, who reportedly made millions by taxing tunnel traffic at Gaza's Rafah crossing, now lives in comfort in Qatar, while Hamad applauds mass death from the relative security of Beirut.

The discrepancy is not lost on the Gazan rank and file. A video shot by Hamas's own TV's station captured dozens of civilians cursing the organisation, as they emerged from the rubble during the recent four-day ceasefire. Following an

Israeli air strike, a BBC clip showed a grieving Palestinian mother screaming in agony: "This is all because of Hamas's dogs." Another news clip showed a Palestinian man interrupting a Hamas press conference in order to blame the group, while an *Al Jazeera* reporter got an earful when he interviewed a civilian in the Al-Shifa hospital. "What's happening is criminal," the bystander said. "Why is the resistance hiding among us? Why don't they go to hell and hide there? They are not resistance!" Immediately following the October 7 attack, dozens of Gazans took to social media to express fear and horror over what Hamas had unleashed.

"Hundreds condemned Hamas's 'adventures' and reckless disregard for the wellbeing of its people in the coastal enclave," wrote Palestinian-American political analyst Ahmed Fouad Alkhatib. "They considered the attack a suicide mission that would inevitably result in the total and utter destruction of the strip."⁸

Consequences

An incident last week in which two Hamas fighters opened fire on an Israeli bus stop, killing three and wounding seven, was typical. Considering the tidal wave of deaths on the other side of the border, the murder of a few Israelis may seem insignificant. But what did Hamas hope to gain from such a criminal act, which it promptly endorsed,⁹ other than an end to the ceasefire and the death of thousands of Gazans more? War is its answer to all problems regardless of the consequences:

Jews and Arabs are drowned in a sea of chauvinist enthusiasm. Triumph on the one hand, rage and exasperation on the other. Communists are being murdered. Pogroms among Jews instigated. A tit for tat of murder and provocation. The 'strafing expeditions' of the Haganah are oil for the propaganda machine of the Arab patriots in their campaign to enlist the masses for more bloodshed. The military conflict and the smashing to bits of the workers' movements are a boon to the chauvinist extremists in either camp.¹⁰

So wrote the Revolutionary Communist League, the Palestinian section of the Fourth International, in 1948. Except for the size of the bombs and the number of deaths, the situation 75 years later is unchanged. A workers' state of Israel-Palestine in the context of a socialist Middle East will undoubtedly strike many as farfetched at the moment. But it is the only way out of the imperialist impasse - and the faux opposition of the Muslim Brotherhood that goes along with it ●

Notes

1. www.youtube.com/watch?v=86Nrv5izaTs.
2. www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/11/9/israel-attacks-on-gaza-weapons-and-scale-of-destruction.
3. www.972mag.com/mass-assassination-factory-israel-calculated-bombing-gaza.
4. T Baconi *Hamas contained* Stanford 2018, p225.
5. *Ibid* p24.
6. *Ibid* p28.
7. *Ibid* pxix; see also twitter.com/GreenblattJD/status/1730634781111603242.
8. forward.com/opinion/571232/hamas-unpopular-in-gaza-before-2023-israel-war.
9. www.cnn.com/2023/11/30/middleeast/hamas-jerusalem-bus-stop-shooting-intl/index.html.
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MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

ABCs of Muslim Brothers

Jack Conrad looks at MAB, its internal power struggles, its relationship to the British state and its encounters with the popular-frontist left. Last of three articles

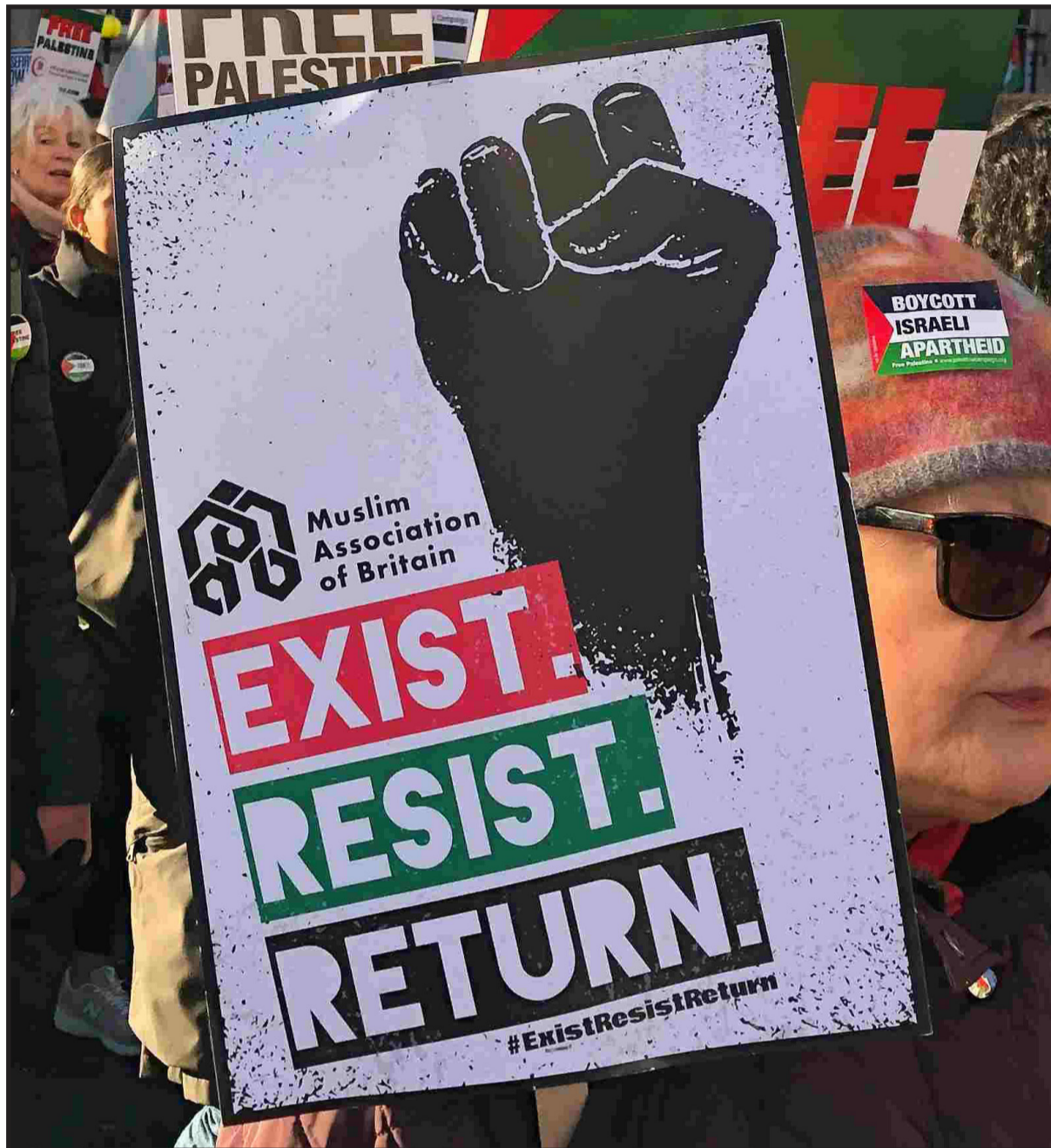
Beginning in the late 1950s and early 60s, the Egyptian Brotherhood provided the wherewithal needed to seed the organisation among the growing migrant populations of Muslims in western Europe and north America. This was done in the main through student federations, Islamic schools, special cultural and women's organisations and national associations. One of them, of course, being the Muslim Association of Britain, founded in November 1997, with Kamal El-Helbawy as its first president. He was, at the time, the London-based European spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood.

Naturally, there have been divisions, even splits. We have already touched upon the departure and return of Anas Altikriti.¹ Together pragmatists and traditionalists thought MAB had gone badly wrong with his overt support for Stop the War and Respect communists. Traditionalists saw a dangerous deviation from the path of Allah, while pragmatists saw the golden opportunity to gain real influence in the corridors of power being squandered. A majority coalesced around those who wanted to end cooperation with the left and instead cultivate friendly relations with the Labour government. Their argument: the StWC has failed to stop the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Respect has not broken the mould of British politics and New Labour offers grants, consultancies and access to ministers. Altikriti would have found himself on the defensive.

Doubtless this account involves a degree of conjecture - after all, MAB keeps its internal workings tightly under wraps and so we are reduced to reading the tealeaves. Nonetheless, it seems clear that, under the banner of concentrating on religious and cultural issues, a bitter power struggle was fought out.

Hence this August 2005 missive issued by Ahmed Sheikh Mohammed: "in accordance with its constitution, the official spokesperson of MAB is the president" and that "the statements of any other individual are to be seen always as personal".² Presumably, a parting shot. Whatever the exact truth, MAB became largely moribund apart from in Scotland, till 2008, when its website was revived and a new president, Ahmed Al-Rawi, elected. However, Altikriti had already founded the Cordoba Foundation: "an independent research and public relations organisation", which promotes "co-existence and social dialogue". Moreover, the innovators, led by Anas Altikriti, Muhammad Sawalha and Azzam Tamimi, took over sponsorship of anti-war demonstrations in the name of the newly established British Muslim Initiative - unmistakably a turf rival to MAB. Altikriti justified the decision to set up BMI with exquisite diplomacy:

It became apparent that politics (home and foreign) and media could not be dealt with on a part-time basis, as was the case with MAB, which as a voluntary grassroots organisation has more than eight bureaus, including youth, women, education, etc, with which politics and media had to share attention and resources; something which was found inappropriate in the light of rising challenges of the time.³



MAB placards are back on the streets alongside the placards of the left

He insisted that BMI is "neither a split nor even an offshoot in the strict meaning of the word". On the other hand, Altikriti did not find the description of BMI as a "parallel" organisation "would work" either.⁴ With that in mind, that explains why I have called BMI an external faction of MAB - a redoubt from where, it would appear, Altikriti staged his successful 2018 comeback operation.

Class and community

How to categorise MAB? Undoubtedly it is pan-Islamic. Though it is extraordinarily coy about being a national section of the Muslim Brotherhood, MAB does not deny that amongst its members "are those who, back in their original countries, were members of the Muslim Brotherhood". MAB also says that it "enjoys good relation[s] with every mainstream Islamic organisation in the UK and abroad; among them is Muslim Brotherhood".

According to MAB, the Brotherhood is "well respected" not only by the Arab street, but also by "politicians, intellectuals and opinion-makers in most Arab countries". Again, according to MAB, the Brotherhood urges "dialogue" with others and respects "those who differ in views or opinions". Moreover, MAB stresses that, while it is "proud of the humane notions and principles" of the Brotherhood, it also reserves the right "to disagree with or divert from the opinion and line of the Muslim Brotherhood, or any other organisation, Muslim or

otherwise, on any issue at hand".⁵

MAB is also an *Islam of the transformation of culture* in Britain. Its 'aims and objectives' include affirming "the principles of Muslim citizenship and the firm and undeniable roots of Islam and Muslims within British society and to establish a relationship of cooperation and coordination with the other institutions and organisations in any activity which does not contradict with the aims and objectives of MAB". A notable feature of MAB is that it rejects isolation and consciously pursues engagement. Altikriti gushingly talks of MAB's "brilliant friends" in the Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, the trade unions and the Conservatives.⁶

Migrant organisations often have a strong material incentive to oppose integration. Especially under New Labour, national and local government hand-outs went to those who displayed their separateness, their distinctiveness from others. One of the consequences of multiculturalism was to engender a splintering range of rival supplicants, each waving a kow-towing grant application form before the beneficent state.

MAB wants to integrate Muslims into a *changed* British society that preserves them not as Arabic, Pakistani, Turkish or Nigerian Muslims, but simply as Muslims. This is underlined by other similar formulations: eg, to "broaden the scope of dialogue between the different cultures and faiths in order to serve society and humanity"; to

"improve the relationship between the Muslim community and the British institutions, on the one hand, and the Muslim world, on the other, so that their social, economic and political relationships shall be revived on a sound basis".⁷

Is MAB soft on terrorism? Despite changing presidents, MAB has consistently disassociated itself from individual acts of terrorism: eg, al-Qa'eda's 9/11. Ironically, in the name of its version of anti-imperialism, the Socialist Workers Party steadfastly refused to use the 'condemn' word, even when confronted by atrocities such as 9/11, Bali, Madrid and the 7/7 London bombs. The only significant al-Qa'eda action MAB has not denounced, at least to my knowledge, is the 2003 bombing of Jewish-Israeli holidaymakers in Mombasa - an understandable attitude that is, sadly, shared by many Muslims and secular Palestinians. After all, Israeli Jews are drafted into the armed forces from the age of 18 and remain on the reserve list till 40 (for officers 45). Islamists and Palestinian nationalists alike therefore consider all adult Israeli Jews legitimate targets. Strategically myopic.

What of the hijab? Naturally, MAB is in favour of women covering hair, neck and ears with a headscarf. While the hijab is not considered a "pillar" of Islam, it is still viewed as a duty required of every adult Muslim female. Women should be free to wear a mini-skirt or a sleeveless dress, says MAB, yet as a concomitant there should

also be the freedom to wear the veil. In short, MAB says that its struggle here in Britain today is not to "impose Islam", but to have the "freedom to live according to its teachings without infringing on the rights of others".⁸ Let us take them at their word. Muslim women should be free to wear what they like ... and, of course, most leftwingers would urge Muslim women to reject and discard those dress codes which symbolise their age-old oppression and patriarchal domination by fathers and brothers.

There are undoubtedly student, working class and petty bourgeois members of MAB: mainly asylum-seekers or the sons and daughters of asylum-seekers with origins in the Arab world. But, from what I can gather, those who form MAB's core leadership are jobbing academics, charity executives, members of the caring professions, property developers and merchant capitalists.

Like other such organisations based on a specific group of migrants, this MAB leadership must be seen to be useful to its claimed community. Typically such organisations lobby government departments and local councils, put on various educational courses, provide mentors, publish books and pamphlets, host inter-faith workshops, stage traditional celebrations and give a helping hand to those negotiating the labyrinthine complexities of the national and local bureaucracy.

With MAB we therefore have an organisation run by a bourgeois and middle class elite that delivers real benefits to its claimed community, reaches out to influence other British Muslims, lends support to co-thinkers in the Arab world, and fantasises about establishing an Islamic world state, but is also concerned with gaining the ear of and shaping the host society.

Extremism

Despite adhering to a mainstream version of Islam and wanting friendly relations with British governments, MAB fell foul of David Cameron's insistence that only "moderates" who "reflect mainstream British values" would receive government endorsement. In other words, MAB found itself branded a "non-violent extremist organisation" under the provisions of the "updated" Prevent strategy⁹ - a bombshell which would have thrown MAB's pragmatist camp into crisis.

Cameron's government vigorously pursued the unevicted logic that to fight terrorism the state had to identify and undermine extremist ideologies. So-called non-violent extremism being depicted as a conveyor belt which inexorably moved people along "into terrorist-related activity".¹⁰ Prevent not only disproportionately effects Muslims, especially in schools and universities: it serves to criminalise thought itself. Individuals who adhere to so-called non-violent extremism are therefore cold-shouldered by government, reported to the police, put on danger lists and can easily find themselves facing criminal prosecution.

Despite advice given for Muslims to vote Liberal Democrat or Green in the 2010 general election, MAB was charged in the court of public opinion with being "sophisticated, soft-soap fundamentalists". Behind its carefully constructed facade there lies a tightly knit group of fanatical Islamists who seek to impose clerical fascism - confirmation being

found in expressions of sympathy for Palestinian suicide bombers, phrases about “dismantling” the Zionist state, support for the hijab, website links to Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, the high regard for the writings of Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, etc. Over the years the most influential advocates of this sort of clerical fascism line have been commentators such as Melanie Phillips, Nick Cohen, Andrew Gilligan and Peter Hitchens ... with the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty providing a not so distant ‘leftwing’ echo.

There are passable similarities here to the stories we used to hear about Eurocommunism being a dastardly plot hatched in the Kremlin. Hence in 1977 Jacques Chirac warned that Eurocommunism was a “danger against which we must act”.¹¹ Publicly at least, Henry Kissinger was of much the same opinion: he refused to believe that “communists ... through some magic ... have become democratic”.¹² We all know now that the Eurocommunists proved to be more or less as they appeared - a bourgeois-socialist trend. In Britain they provided the ideological foundations for Neil Kinnock’s Labour Party and thus Blairism (mainly through the journal *Marxism Today*).

Nevertheless, while MAB is studiously liberal in Britain, the same cannot be said of the Muslim world. Azzam Tamimi, a Hebron-born academic, who has often spoken on behalf of MAB, innocuously fields the argument that “human experience has thus far shown that there can be no alternative to democracy other than revolutions, minority conspiracies and violence”. However, while favouring “giving everybody the freedom to choose, so that the majority elects those whom it deems fit and capable”, it is clear that “democracy” is not an “end in itself”. Instead, it is a “means” to what is the “most noble end, namely the implementation of Islam”. That is, “reaching the state of Islamic government”.¹³

What Islamic democracy turns out to be then is the kind of democracy practised in Iran. The logic is impeccable. The majority should decide. But, as the majority in Muslim countries are Muslims, it supposedly follows that there should be an “Islamic government”. The majority get to decide ... but only once. After the majority has voted in a referendum to create an Islamic state - there was a 98.2% ‘yes’ vote in Iran - the law becomes the exclusive preserve of the theocrats. The power of parliament is severely limited. Though there might still be regular elections, it is the clerics who have the ultimate say. Eg, they choose who can stand as candidates. Voting therefore becomes solely about legitimising the religious elite. So, while MAB proclaims its support for a “democratic, parliamentary system”, this is understood to be merely one of “many steps” towards *sharia* law and a re-established “Islamic government”: ie, the caliphate.¹⁴

Popular sovereignty, is, in fact, philosophically alien to “Islamic government”. Sa’id Hawwa, a Syrian Brotherhood disciple of Qutb’s, explains:

Democracy is a Greek term which signifies sovereignty of the people; the people being the source of legitimacy. In other words, it is the people that legislate and rule. In Islam the people do not govern themselves by laws they make on their own, as in democracy. Rather, the people are governed by a regime and a set of laws imposed by god.¹⁵

Nonetheless, it is clear that Tamimi and other MAB innovators want to distance themselves from Qutb’s *overt* rejection of democracy. Within the Brotherhood internationally this is alternately regarded as a clever pose, a thoughtful correction or a scandalous heresy.

Israel and Zionism

Hence, MAB wants it known that, no matter how highly it regards Qutb as a thinker, he is not beyond criticism. He is not accorded the status of a prophet, that is for sure. Indeed amongst those who have disagreed with Qutb is Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who took issue with him over the Arab-Israeli conflict. Whereas Qutb regarded it in essentially religious terms, Qaradawi saw things in terms of “oppressor against oppressed”, with little or nothing to do with either side’s faith.¹⁶ In other words, though al Qaradawi wants to dismantle the “Zionist entity” - ie, Israel as an expansionist, racist, colonial-settler state - this is no different, in the abstract, to the one-state ‘solution’ advocated by much of the left in Britain.

It is, incidentally, quite right to demand the end of Israel as a Zionist state. In essence, exactly the same as demanding the end of South Africa as an apartheid state. The idea, though, that the Palestinians can, through their own efforts, impose a one-state solution - in which Muslims and Jews enjoy equal religious, not national, rights - is illusory. The balance of forces simply do not allow for such an outcome. Inevitably, however, the Anglo-American establishment brands any call to dismantle the “Zionist entity” as anti-Semitic, abolishing Israel as a Zionist state being equated with removing - wiping out - the Jewish-Israeli population. Obviously, a nonsense that was not applied to apartheid South Africa (except by the far right, white supremacists, etc). Historically, it should be added that Jews lived side by side with Muslims in the Islamic-Arab world as *dhimmi* (‘people of the book’, who were legally protected, largely tolerated, but subject to additional taxation) for well over a thousand years.¹⁷

Either way, MAB is at pains to distinguish between Jews and Zionism and claims to hold the Jewish faith in high esteem - after all, both Judaism and Islam are Abrahamic religions, share similar ancestor myths and have much in common, when it comes to ritual purity, charity-giving and dietary taboos. MAB says it desires good relations with the Jewish community and Tamimi himself has shared platforms with Jewish intellectuals and figureheads. He urges them to disassociate themselves from Zionist Israel. However, he also forthrightly condemns as “racist, inhumane and, therefore, un-Islamic” those Muslims who insultingly describe Jews as “descendants of pigs and apes” - a common phrase on the Arab street (with origins in the *Koran*¹⁸). Moreover, surely in a spirit of atonement, Tamimi again and again insists that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are a crude “fabrication” - though widely circulated and believed in the Arab world.

Hamas’s original 1988 covenant was, by way of contrast, definitely anti-Jewish: it even cites the *Protocols* as “proof” of Zionist plans not only to take the whole of Palestine, but their coveting expansion “from the Nile to the Euphrates”.¹⁹ Tamimi called for a rethink. It should be emphasised, therefore, that Hamas has indeed undergone change. Whereas it once advocated establishing an Islamic state, the 2017 covenant now places the stress on religious toleration and how Hamas is against the “Zionist project”, not Jews:

Hamas does not wage a struggle against the Jews because they are Jewish, but wages a struggle against the Zionists who occupy Palestine. Yet it is the Zionists who constantly identify Judaism and the Jews with their own colonial project and illegal entity.²⁰

One does not need to take such statements at face value. That would be naive. But there has undoubtedly been a rethink.

As for MAB, it hardly displays the features that one might expect from a clerical-fascist organisation. Plans for a global caliphate there undoubtedly are, but its leaders are perfectly aware that at the moment, and for the foreseeable future, that hardly amounts to realistic politics. Rather, what we have with MAB is surely something much more mundane - a pressure group which speaks in favour of Islamic universalism and yet practically seeks to advance its specific ethnic-class interests within British society.

Basically that is all MAB can do, and all it can really ever expect to do. The project of building a Muslim Brotherhood in Britain which can seriously contend for power is quite simply a non-starter. In that sense, MAB’s promotion of Banna and Qutb in their educational and historical material should be treated as akin to the sale of works by Mao Zedong and Kim Il Sung by Stalinists in the Indian Workers Association (IWA). In each case, the social and economic conditions simply do not exist in Britain for anything like the *full* implementation of the political programmes that these figures advocated in their own particular countries. None of these programmes can *seriously* hope to win through and become a social reality in Britain. They have no possible traction, when it comes to *conquering* state power, because there is no possibility of such organisations contending for state power.

Should MAB’s ideas be described as progressive or treated as harmless or irrelevant? When we read in MAB’s paper *Inspire*, in an article on ‘Islam and human rights’, that apostasy from Islam is “a religious offence punishable by death”, it is definitely right to treat such backward-looking statements calmly and with a large pinch of salt.²¹ Not least given the growth of anti-Muslim bigotry, it would be grossly irresponsible to in any way suggest that *in Britain* MAB assassins are just about to be given orders to hunt down and eliminate secular Muslims. Does that mean that MAB’s ideology has no practical effect? Like the IWA, it certainly does - albeit to a very limited extent - for good and ill.

MAB, as should be clear, is a highly contradictory political formation. On the one hand, MAB marches with the left and calls for mutual toleration. On the other hand, MAB defends religious hatred laws and stands alongside Christian fundamentalists in opposing abortion, blasphemy and “age-inappropriate”, mainly LGBTQ-inclusive, sex education in schools. A censorious MAB welcomed the forced closure of Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti’s play *Behzti* by Birmingham Repertory in 2004.²² Likewise it demanded that BBC2 should cancel transmission of *Jerry Springer - the opera*. With good reason, it has been said that “between conservative Catholics, the expanding Muslim community and growing numbers of evangelical protestants, an alliance is being forged”.²³ Here we have *one* of the negative outcomes of the doctrines of Banna and Qutb in Britain.

Put another way, MAB has two souls: one besieged, reactionary and

fearful; the other liberal, flexible and ostensibly democratic. Yet these opposing souls inhabit a single body and have certainly exerted a palpable *rightist* pull on a cluster of leftwing individuals and revolutionary groups, most notably the SWP.

Respect

Unity with MAB encouraged, excused SWP fudging and outright betrayal of professed principles: republicanism, open borders, secularism, defending women and LGBTQ people. For example, desperation to get MAB on board the Respect project had Lindsey German saying that gay rights should not be treated as a “shibboleth”.²⁴ And, lo and behold, Respect election manifestoes “failed to include” a commitment to LGBTQ liberation.²⁵

As a result of this crass opportunism, the SWP’s number two theorist, Chris Harman, was made to look either like a Clifffite museum piece or a snivelling coward. Actually he was both. After all, in the name of an “independent, revolutionary socialist perspective”, he had explicitly stated that if socialists “find themselves on the same side as the Islamists” they would be obliged “to argue strongly with them, to challenge them - and not just on their organisations’ attitude to women and minorities, but also on the fundamental question of whether what is needed is charity work from the rich or an overthrow of existing class relations”.²⁶

Finding themselves in Respect - that is, in the same party - as Islamists, the SWP dumped its professed “independent, revolutionary socialist perspective” and refused to challenge its MAB, Birmingham Central Mosque and British-Asian bourgeois and petty bourgeois allies on anything whatsoever. In fact accommodation ruled all along the line. Harman himself opted for a culpable silence - that or Aesopian polemics (usually in the form of book reviews).

When it came to Iran, the John Rees-Lindsey German SWP outdid the Islamists in Islamism. Eg, on StWC platforms praise was heaped on Iran’s theocratic regime by an SWP-promoted Somaye Zadeh.²⁷ She lauded Iran’s “female race driver” and an “all-female fire brigade unit”, its “overwhelming popular support”, and, most bizarrely, the widespread provision of “sex changes”, “seven times” on a scale to “that of Europe” (to avoid execution on sodomy charges gay men ‘willingly’ take up the option of undergoing the surgeon’s knife and feminising hormone treatment).²⁸ To criticise an Islamist organisation or an Islamist country was deemed *tout court* Islamophobic and therefore racist by the SWP. An utterly fallacious argument which served the SWP - with Andrew Murray of the *Morning Star*’s CPB doing the front work - in getting Hands Off the Peoples of Iran disaffiliated from StWC in 2007²⁹ - Hopi being opposed to both the theocracy and imperialism.

As for Respect, the SWP’s unpopular popular front, it inevitably spiralled into disaster. The last coda being when John Rees fell out with George Galloway and George Galloway not only took the name and a clear majority of Respect’s 20 councillors, but also took the SWP’s pro-Respect right wing of Rob Hoveman, Nick Wrack and Kevin Ovenden.³⁰ Not that this saved his faction of Respect (it finally dissolved in 2016).

Within the SWP, understandably, John Rees got the blame. Rather than fight things out, however, which would have been the right and proper thing to do, even if he had to settle for being in a minority, he preferred to

walk. Along with Lindsey German, Chris Nineham and Chris Bambery, he formed Counterfire. Soon afterwards the SWP split and split again over the Delta rape scandal: International Socialist Tendency, RS21, Salvage, etc, etc.

In short, unity with non-working class organisations on a temporary, contingent basis can be perfectly principled ... as long as criticism is not suspended, not suppressed. However, unity with non-working class organisations which involves the suspension, the suppression of criticism, especially unity in a party project - ie, a proto-government - that is the road to disaster ... even when played out on the diminutive scale of grant supplicants and small businessmen, a disorientated confessional sect and a flotsam and jetsam of so-called independent socialists ●

Notes

1. J Conrad ‘ABC, of Muslim Brothers’, part 1 *Weekly Worker* November 23 2023: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1468/abc-of-muslim-brothers.
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3. Private communication with author.
4. *Ibid*.
5. web.archive.org/web/20050414151002/http://hurryupharry.blogspot.com/2004/08/13/the_muslim_association_of_britain_reponds.php.
6. M Fisher ‘Rees comes out for Blair’s laws’ *Weekly Worker* November 24 2005: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/594/rees-comes-out-for-blairs-laws.
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11. *Newsweek* June 20 1977.
12. *Newsweek* January 23 1978.
13. A Tamimi ‘Democracy in Islamic thought’ - paper based on a talk given to the Belfast Mosque in October 1997.
14. web.archive.org/web/20110518135145/http://www.msnbc.msn.com/80/id/43028312/ns/world_news-mideastn-africa.
15. Quoted in A Tamimi ‘Democracy in Islamic thought’.
16. SE Baroudi ‘Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi on international relations: the discourse of a leading Islamist scholar (1926-)’ *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol 50, No1, January 2014, pp2-26.
17. See B Lewis *The Jews of Islam* Princeton NJ 1987.
18. The background to this widespread taunt lies in Saura 7:163-166 and the story of Jewish fishermen setting their nets on Friday, before the Sabbath, and collecting the fish on Sunday. Allah cursed them as evildoers: “Be you apes, miserably slinking!” Saura 5:61-71 accuses *most* Jews of being ungodly. Adherents of the prophet’s party are told to reply to those “who take your religion in mockery” with the following rebuff: “Whomsoever god has cursed, and with who he is worth, and made some of them apes and swine, and worshipers of idols - they are worse situated, and have gone further astray from the right path” (AJ Arberry [ed and trans] *The Koran* Oxford 1998, pp163, 107-8).
19. avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp.
20. web.archive.org/web/20170510123932/http://hamas.ps/en/post/678.
21. *Inspire* was handed out by MAB on the September 28 2002 demonstration in London protesting against the impending Iraq invasion.
22. Something the SWP disgracefully kept quiet on, till eventually it was forced to publish a desultory apology of an article - see *Socialist Review* February 5 2005.
23. *New Statesman* November 15 2004.
24. M Fisher ‘Rees comes out for Blair’s laws’ *Weekly Worker* November 24 2005: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/594/rees-comes-out-for-blairs-laws.
25. *PinkNews* February 21 2006.
26. C Harman ‘The prophet and the proletariat’ *International Socialism* No64, Autumn 1994, p58 (reissued undated as a pamphlet under the same name in 1999).
27. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=desktop&v=1Hq5HkZx600.
28. See T Becker ‘Don’t confuse the poor workers’ *Weekly Worker* January 11 2007: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/695/dont-confuse-the-poor-workers.
29. See J Taylor ‘Anti-war activists do battle over intervention in Iran’ *The Independent* November 8 2007.
30. See M Fischer ‘Drawing the pro-Tehran line’ *Weekly Worker* October 17 2007: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/693/drawing-the-pro-tehran-line.

FRANCE



Presidential campaign, March 2017

Whitewashing Marine Le Pen

Italy and Giorgia Meloni provide the model. David Broder asks what lies behind the 'mainstreaming' of the far right

Speaking to the radio station *France Culture* on December 4, businessman Alain Minc spelled out what Marine Le Pen, parliamentary leader of the far-right Rassemblement National (National Rally), needs to do to gain mainstream respectability. A former advisor to Nicolas Sarkozy, and often called a mentor to president Emmanuel Macron, Minc sought to cast Le Pen's "moderation" as incomplete, by comparing her to the supposedly more honourable example set by her Italian counterpart, Giorgia Meloni.

While the Italian prime minister "comes from a fascist universe" - the post-war neo-fascist party, Movimento Sociale Italiano - he went on:

It's fascinating what's happened in Italy. Mrs Meloni has fallen in line. She does things on symbolic matters and moral questions that I don't love. But otherwise she's done nothing to shift Italy's position. So the thing to ask Mrs Le Pen if she wants to reach power is: do you, like Mrs Meloni, agree to say that the Atlantic alliance is fundamental, the European project is fundamental, and budget policy must remain reasonable?

Minc is not a Le Pen ally - he has urged 'moderates' to forge an alliance against her, and warned

that Macron is not doing enough to make sure that she does not succeed him at the next presidential elections in 2027. Yet, his remarks follow a familiar pattern of liberal and centre-right commentary on the far right - observable not only in France, but also in Italy and many other western countries. On the one hand, we have the call to stop the threat banging on our door: all others must rally against the demagogic, anti-democratic menace.

Such 'anti-fascist' appeals have often been used to guilt leftwing voters into supporting the likes of Macron - though Minc is among the many bourgeois pundits in France who today paints 'far-left populism' (in the form of Jean-Luc Mélenchon of France Insoumise) and Le Pen as equal dangers. But this apparent despair at the far right's rise is also strongly qualified: Meloni has, he claimed, "entered the circle of reason", and it seems Le Pen could do so too, should she meet the mentioned conditions.

In a recent review of European politicians and opinion leaders' flattering of Meloni, *Le Monde Diplomatique's* director, Benoît Bréville, defined "what it takes to earn the European badge of respectability": "the recipient must adhere to the two cardinal values of austerity and Atlanticism". Having done so, Meloni was thus free to

step up her xenophobic remarks, stigmatise LGBT people, stir up the 'great replacement' fantasy, restrict access to abortion, attempt to change the constitution in an authoritarian direction, rein in the media and shut down cultural institutions.

It would seem that a decade of think-pieces about the new political divide between 'Europeanists' and 'populists' were all so many wasted pixels. Whoever would have guessed? The disciplining of Muslims and immigrant labour, and damnation of the 'cultural Marxists' accused of letting them run riot, is compatible with a host of 'normal' rightwing policy positions - notably compliance with Euro-Atlantic foreign policy.¹

Hillary Clinton

If Meloni is today embraced by Rishi Sunak, Ursula von der Leyen, European People's Party chief Manfred Weber, etc. as a 'woman we can do business with', Le Pen has not yet achieved this standing. When Hillary Clinton commented, ahead of last year's Italian election, that she did not know much about Meloni, but it would "always" be good to see a woman elected, it seemed unlikely this was just an unguarded slip. There was no chance that the former US secretary of state would have said this about Le Pen, known

for her relations with Vladimir Putin and long record (up till 2017) of calling for 'Frexit'. France is not Italy and has much more potential power to disrupt the Washington-Brussels alliance. Still, even leading figures in Rassemblement National - notably president Jordan Bardella - have pushed in the direction of greater foreign policy conformism, notably over Ukraine. Paying back a €6 million loan from a Russian bank in September - and making a big deal about it - RN seems to be shifting toward the warm embrace of the Atlanticist right.

One oft-reported aspect of this turn, painted in the redemptive tones of breaking with the past, is RN's pro-Israel line. Some far-right militant groups retain a 'neither-nor' position or a pro-Palestinian stance coloured by claims of global Zionist conspiracy. Yet Le Pen's party is an enthusiastic supporter of Israel's war, with the campaign to wipe out 'terrorists' painted as a defence of civilisation from Islamist barbarism. This has encountered many gullible responses. A *Guardian* headline on November 6 proclaimed (before online uproar) "Marine Le Pen's support of Israel seen as move away from party's anti-Semitic past"; in the *Financial Times*, Leila Abboud noted that Le Pen's argument that Israel "must be permitted to eradicate Hamas" marked a "striking change from the days when the party

was run by her openly anti-Semitic father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, who was convicted for calling the Holocaust gas chambers a 'detail' of history". It would seem that support for Israel equalled repudiating anti-Semitism - although Le Pen père, for all his convictions, has often praised Israel as a plucky outpost of the west, and even boasted of his fight alongside it in the Suez War.

As the *Guardian* headline just mentioned suggests, what matters is what is 'seen' to have changed, and by whom: why a French far-right leader can be excused for "historic" errors, while in the name of fighting anti-Semitism Jewish pro-peace activists are no-platformed in Berlin and Vienna, and liberal outlets continue to smear Jeremy Corbyn as a modern-day Hitler.

It is clear that Marine Le Pen has already gone a long way to achieving establishment respectability. Telling was her attendance at the March against Anti-Semitism held in Paris on November 12 - an event organised at the instigation of parliamentary president Yaël Braun-Pivet. Many attendees, including Braun-Pivet (a member of Macron's party) criticised Le Pen's presence, with bodies like the CRIF ('Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France') declaring that they would not be marching "next to" her, but merely at the same rally. Yet this also marked a contrast with recent similar pageants

of republican unity, where Le Pen was more effectively blocked from attending. Her appearance, like that of rival far-right leader Eric Zemmour, was widely taken for granted. The only force to boycott the march was France Insoumise, which variously called this a pro-war demo, or else rejected marching alongside what it heatedly called “Nazis”; the other leftish parties (Greens, socialists, communists) did turn out.

The media hubbub surrounding the November 12 march clearly demonstrated that the allegation of anti-Semitism is today much more widely and consistently levelled against the left than the far-right parties. Mélenchon’s party has in recent weeks refused to call Hamas a ‘terrorist organisation’ and various centrist and rightwing figures, including sitting ministers, today routinely demonise France Insoumise in the language of an ‘Islamofascist’ threat. As Le Pen’s RN seeks its own place in the republican, secular mainstream, it is evidently useful for it to wield the language of ‘reverse racism’, suggesting that anti-Semitism is a Muslim import to France. Interviewed ahead of the march, Bardella, who is head of the RN list for the European elections, insisted that Marine Le Pen had broken with her father precisely over the issue of anti-Semitism, and that many “French Jews today see the Rassemblement National as a shield against Islamist ideology”. Asked whether the party founder is indeed an anti-Semite, Bardella resiled: “I do not believe that Jean-Marie Le Pen was anti-Semitic”.

One could quibble over the verb tense (Le Pen *père* is still alive) or note that some minor RN figures like Mathilde Paris MP do “personally” call him anti-Semitic. In Marine Le Pen’s own 2017 memoir, she distances herself from her father’s provocative language about the Nazi gas chambers but added that despite a tendency to “relativise” things, he did “not mean to hurt anyone”. The PR aim is thus to reject the damning label of anti-Semitism, and pull off the bid for mainstream respectability - while also suggesting that there was never anything so inexcusable to begin with, and that it is moderate conservatives who are discovering

the RN rather than the other way around.

Speaking the day after Bardella, Marion Maréchal (Marine Le Pen’s niece, and a leading candidate for Zemmour’s Reconquête outfit) argued that the question was wrongly posed, since the threat to French Jews was an imported problem: “If Jean-Marie Le Pen had been more listened to on immigration and Islamisation 40 years ago, there would certainly be less anti-Semitism today.”

Just in the past?

The so-called ‘new anti-Semitism’ thus turns out to be the *only* anti-Semitism: one promoted by Muslims and leftwingers and directed against Israel. What I have said thus far amounts to a critique of the low threshold that Le Pen has had to meet in achieving mainstream respectability - not least given that (judging by her own memoir) she faults her father more for jeopardising this PR campaign with provocative outbursts than for actually harbouring anti-Semitic views. But clearly, there is more to this problem than that. Is the RN indeed an anti-Semitic party, or has this in fact been cast aside by its preference for stigmatising Muslims? What necessary or important role does anti-Semitism have in far-right politics, and how far can such ideas actually be politically effective? Is this issue well presented as a “legacy” to get over, an artefact of a 20th-century far-right culture that jars with these post-cold war, post-9/11 times?

One useful reading of this question is provided by the Italian researcher, Valerio Renzi, who argues that there is today a distinction between two different figures of Jewishness, which play opposed roles in far-right discourse. On the one hand, there is the “cosmopolitan Jew”, much like the one that figured in older theories of ‘Judeo-Bolshevik threat’ - the anti-national outsider who promotes abstraction and ideological schemas in order to disrupt the rooted, natural, national community. On the other hand, there is the “sovereignist Jew” - in essence the ethno-nationalist Israeli posited by Netanyahu-style propaganda: the militarised defender of civilisation against barbarism, a ‘western’ state in the Middle East, defender of a national community

based on heredity. Insofar as far-right parties rooted in Nazism and fascism (Fratelli d’Italia, Vox, Rassemblement National, Alternative für Deutschland) can today pose as opponents of anti-Semitism, it is because they choose the “sovereignist Jew” over the “cosmopolitan” one.

Some such far-right leaders have actively sought endorsement from Israeli political figures in order to excuse them of anti-Semitism. In 2003, Alleanza Nazionale leader Gianfranco Fini (who led this Italian party’s transition from open neofascism to its ‘national-conservative’ post-fascism) visited Jerusalem and declared the events leading to the holocaust as the “absolute evil”. Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán has excellent relations with Benjamin Netanyahu, even as his own government routinely demonises financier George Soros as the puppet-master of an elite plot to destroy western civilisation by importing Muslim and African immigrants. Yet also worth noting is that these far-right forces have organisational ties: in one famous article² Hannes Grassegger shows the decisive role of PR men George Birbaum and Arthur Finkelstein as advisors first for Netanyahu’s Likud party in the 1990s, then for Orbán’s Fidesz a decade later, building up Soros as a hate-figure for the Hungarian right before he was demonised as the sinister visage of the ‘great replacement’ internationally.

Marine Le Pen has in the past cited this theory, which speaks of an elite ‘replacist’ conspiracy to use (especially African and Muslim) immigrants to undermine the national community and create a reign of the atomised and indistinct. Meloni - today hailed in mainstream outlets as a defender of ‘Europeanism’ - has in the past gone further in this direction, citing the collaboration of the “usurer Soros” and the left in undermining the continent’s identity through non-European immigration.

Today, both women avoid using the phrase, ‘great replacement’, though in a book released this September Meloni revived the idea of the “manoeuvrers” who import non-European immigrants in order to dilute the continent’s culture. Yet Michel Eltchaninoff argues in his *Inside the mind of Marine Le Pen* that the French far-right leader routinely alludes to such conspiracist framings of elite capture - “unfree” politicians “waiting on the credit agencies’ words like the Messiah”, the “hyperclass” or, for that matter, references to Alain Soral’s idea of “the bank” lording it over society - to flatter anti-Semitic listeners, while dancing around explicit reference to Jewishness as such.

The ‘cosmopolitan’ trope is deep-rooted in what Eltchaninoff calls the legacy of the “social anti-Semitism” of the 19th and 20th centuries. In essence, capitalism is assumed as a quasi-eternal economic order, yet its ill effects are damned on the “distortions” and “manipulations” by financiers and ideologues which harm the “national producers” - labour and capital alike. One need not go as far as anti-Deutsch style hysteria, in which all personifications of capitalism are deemed “structurally anti-Semitic” to see that the far-right treatment of Soros or the Rothschilds as avatars of “disloyal”, “globalist”, etc interests is a modern-day continuation of this anti-Semitic tradition, with due adaptations made for the need to reject the charge of racism. Also striking in this unradical critique of parts of capital is its continual recasting of the ‘normal’ national capitalism to which it seeks a return. We see this in the way in which the RN - a party created some

five decades ago, in rebellion against the France bequeathed by Charles de Gaulle - today speaks of the period from 1945 to 1968 as if it was some sort of golden age of social harmony.

Indeed, the defence of what Renzi calls the “sovereignist Jew”, the ally of the Christian west, over the “cosmopolitan” who threatens it, is not just a matter of solidarity with Israel: it also demands concessions from French Jews. In pledging its allegiance to state-secularism, known as *laïcité*, Le Pen’s party often speaks of a “Catholic country”, “secularized by the Enlightenment”. Removing the history of overweening church power throughout much of 19th-century France (notably its classrooms), and the intention of the 1905 *laïcité* law in undermining it, Le Pen paints recalcitrant Muslims as a threat to the social harmony achieved by a supposedly age-old Judeo-Christian civilisation.

But there is a catch: RN favours the banning from public space not only of “Islamist ideologies”, burqas, niqabs and veils and Muslim headscarves in general, but also the yarmulke or skullcap worn by Orthodox Jews. Le Pen has presented this in terms of a “sacrifice” Jews must make in the higher political cause of suppressing Islamic garments: as she commented in 2021,

I have asked the Jews to make this sacrifice because we have to do something about the headscarf; there are so many of them here now. And in France you can’t legislate against a particular religion. I know that what I’m asking for is a sacrifice for some Jews.³

Not enemies

The integration of Le Pen into the republican mainstream - with her 89-strong cohort of MPs in the national assembly no longer treated as pariahs by their centre-right colleagues - has not met with universal enthusiasm. The country’s closest thing to the Board of Deputies, the CRIF, is today headed by Yonathan Arfi, who accused Le Pen of “instrumentalising” the November 12 March Against anti-Semitism and insisted he had not agreed to her party’s presence.

Last April he called for a vote for Emmanuel Macron in the presidential election run-off, casting Le Pen as an “existential threat to Jews in France”. In this same address he compared her idea of making Jews into subjects “without the kippah and without Jewish schools” in the name of fighting Islamic anti-Semitism to a “marranisation” (here referring to the Iberian *marranos* of the 15th and 16th century - “crypto-Jews” forced to show allegiance to Catholic society, while practicing their faith in secret). Still, not all signs from CRIF figures have been negative: previous leader Roger Cukierman suggested in 2015 that Le Pen led a party including Vichyites and holocaust deniers, but could “not be faulted personally”.

This distinction between the ‘reforming’ leader and the deplorable far-right party’s tradition and activist base has become a common theme of the normalisation of former neofascist Meloni in the EU, and the same distinction appears to be taking place with regard to Marine Le Pen. In an interview last month for conservative daily *Le Figaro*, Nazi-hunter and historian Serge Klarsfeld spoke of her steps forward with respect to her party’s “DNA” - indeed, he “rejoiced” at seeing the far-right leader “abandon anti-Semitism and negationism and march toward republican values” by joining the November 12 demo.⁴

He has reportedly spoken of “dividing” the RN between good and

bad - notably in a controversy last October where he accepted a medal from the RN mayor of Perpignan, Louis Aliot.⁵ While SOS Racisme (an anti-racist campaign historically close to the Socialist Party) damned Klarsfeld’s appearance alongside Aliot - mayor of the largest French city headed by RN - for “legitimising” the far-right party, Klarsfeld insisted that this was an “enemy of anti-Semitism”: a political “adversary, but not an enemy.”

It is quite obvious from recent election results that the idea of a ‘republican front’ against RN is all but over. While some sort of Macron-style candidate (former prime minister Édouard Philippe, interior minister Gérald Darmanin or education minister Gabriel Attal) may well try and build a centre/centre-right coalition in 2027, a host of studies show that voters for the bourgeois centre-right Republicans have become increasingly less troubled by Le Pen’s supposed economic radicalism - in particular given that Frexit is no longer on the agenda. Events like the November 12 march or recent demos by police unions show that France Insoumise, not the far right, is being pushed out of the hallowed republican mainstream.

The second round of the 2022 parliamentary elections (where RN won 89 of the 208 contests it qualified for), as well as recent polls, suggest that centre-right voters will abstain or directly vote RN in much greater numbers than they would back leftwingers. Several recent polls have Le Pen above 30% in the first round of the next presidential election (much higher than Macron achieved in either 2017 or 2022) and on course for victory in the run-off.

In a hypothetical second round between Le Pen and a candidate of the bourgeois centre or centre-right, the latter may well evoke her residual extremism or at least that of her party, in order to mobilise voters. The endless laundering of Islamophobic talking points by the current government; the intense use of state force to crush protestors, even by a so-called liberal president; and the use of Nato and EU loyaltyism to set the boundaries of legitimate politics - all serve to normalise and mainstream Le Pen and undermine the call to rally against the “barbarian at the gates”.

Her ‘mainstreaming’ is not so much a matter of her changing the bad ideas that militants have in their heads, but of the adaption to her by bourgeois political forces who want to ensure that RN rule is not a shock to French and European capital. The ‘social anti-Semitism’ of her economic discourse; militants’ or candidates’ use of conspiracy theories and connections with further-right subcultures; or indeed, leftwing attempts to reassert the anti-fascist unity of decades past - all represent increasingly less important obstacles to her rise ●

This article is based on a talk given to the December 3 Online Communist Forum

Notes

1. In ‘The future is Italy, and it’s bleak’ (*New York Times* July 22 2022), I noted how Meloni’s foreign policy conformism was used by conservatives to excuse her other ills, including her neo-fascist inspiration. That article is today widely cited as evidence of ‘alarmism’ at Meloni - an observation inevitably coupled with the conclusion that she has indeed pledged her loyalty to Nato and the EU, so cannot be so awful.
2. ‘The unbelievable story of the plot against George Soros’, translated for *Buzzfeed*, January 20 2019.
3. ‘The headscarf is a violation of public order’ *Die Zeit* May 6 2021.
4. ‘Il faut se réjouir que le Rassemblement National participe à la marche contre l’antisémitisme’ *Le Figaro* novembre 9 2023.
5. Cited in ‘Quand Serge Klarsfeld, à propos du RN Aliot, suscite incompréhension et tristesse dans la communauté juive et bien au-delà’ *La Revue Civique* October 21 2022.

Online Communist Forum



Sunday December 10 5pm

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

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OBITUARY

A Marxist seeker

From Maoism to the Sparts and beyond their sordid detritus. Alex Steiner remembers his friend and comrade Jim Creegan

James Creegan, a lifelong revolutionary socialist and a good friend and comrade, died on November 23 at the age of 76, following a lengthy illness. I had the good fortune to know Jim and I collaborated with him on educational and political projects over the last 10 years.

Over time, I learned something about where he came from and the forces that shaped him. Much of the material I present is taken from a memoir Jim wrote and circulated among a few friends. All quotations are taken from his memoir unless otherwise indicated.

Jim was a red-diaper baby, born on June 27 1947. Unlike many baby boomers, he did not rebel against his parents, but learned from them. Both were in the Communist Party in the 1930s and 40s. His father, Bernard ('Barney' to his friends), was more political than his mother, Selma. Bernard came originally from what is now Northern Ireland and joined the CPGB in Scotland in 1923. He came to the US in 1930, where he worked as a union organizer for the CP, but he fell out with the party in 1945 and was not active politically after that, though he maintained his sympathy for the party.

When the international Stalinist movement went into crisis, beginning with Khrushchev's 'secret speech' in 1956, when the crimes of Stalinism were revealed (first to a select audience, and eventually to any CP member who had eyes to see), Jim's father reacted by adopting a left-Stalinist orientation. His position was quite different from that of other former members disillusioned with the CP, who were turning to liberalism and anti-communism. When the Sino-Soviet split happened, he sided with China.

It was therefore no accident that Jim's earliest political orientation as a young man leaned toward Maoism. His first political affiliation was at Penn State in 1965, where, as a convinced Maoist, he entered the network of the Progressive Labor Party. He was for two years chair of the campus Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) during the headiest days of the student anti-war and radical movements. In *If I had a hammer*, Maurice Isserman, a historian of the American left, argues that the children of communists were a more essential element of the New Left than is generally recognized. Jim's experience bears this out.

He had his 'road to Damascus' moment in his senior year, when he read Isaac Deutscher's Trotsky trilogy at the suggestion of a fellow member of SDS. As he put it years later, "This biography changed my political views more than any single work I've read, and I began to take more of an interest in Trotskyism." This newfound interest, however, did not immediately translate into a political affiliation.

After graduating college in 1969, Jim returned to his hometown, Philadelphia. He remained there for two years, during which he became active in the local chapter of the New American Movement (basically a grouping of New Left refugees trying to reconstitute themselves politically). He entered graduate school in philosophy at the University of Colorado Boulder in 1972. He belonged to the NAM chapter there as well, but his main emphasis was on study - deepening his understanding of classical philosophy, Hegel and Marx.

Jim returned to Philly in 1977 as a more educated and convinced Marxist



In front of the Athens memorial to Byron in 2018

than before. He had it in the back of his mind that the next phase of his life had to include organized politics. He always believed abstractly that any Marxist worth his/her salt must belong to a party-type organization. In his own words, Jim wrote about this period of his life:

I felt somewhat guilty about not having acted upon that belief by following the more serious refugees from the New Left, who joined various parties in the early 70s. But I felt the need for more knowledge at the time, so went to grad school instead. And I hadn't burned my bridges to academia even after I left Boulder. I enrolled in the political economy grad program at the New School (which, as it turned out, was like what people often say about communism: appealing on paper, but disappointing in practice), and moved to NYC in 1979.

Spartacist League

It was in this period that Jim began reading the newspaper of the Spartacist League (SL), *Workers Vanguard*. From the start Jim felt a kinship with its polemics. He wrote of his engagement with the SL publication:

... it reinforced much of what I felt about the rest of the left circa 1980: that most individuals and organizations had moved markedly to the right along with ruling-class-generated public opinion and emerged in far too flaccid a state to meet the challenges of the Carter/Reagan years.

Jim's reaction was understandable. As a revolutionary socialist in formation, he had a gut reaction against the abandonment of radical politics by many of his contemporaries from the 1960s generation. The fact that his reaction coincided with his introduction to the Spartacist League is one of those contingent events in a life that nevertheless expressed a certain logic. The SL was vociferous in its denunciation of what they considered opportunism on the left - more so than any other organization claiming to be Trotskyist - and it very much was in consonance with Jim's uncompromising convictions as a Trotskyist. He later explained his affinity for this side of the SL:

I am by temperament a controversialist, who relishes the clash of ideas, the cut and thrust of polemic. The witty, pugilistic style of *WV* seemed to me to partake more of the authentic

spirit of communism in its early pre-Stalinist incarnation, much of which my father had retained from his youth and passed on to me.

Once he became convinced of the correctness of a political stance Jim would brook no apologies for those misguided individuals on the wrong side of that issue, and he did not suffer fools. However, after a while Jim did have second thoughts about the Spartacist style that attracted him initially. He pointed to its "acerbic style" and "excessively abrasive and hectoring 'interventions' at the political meetings of other groups". Such interventions often degenerated into what he described as "the accusation and insult that had become an SL trademark".

Jim's initial deep commitment to a political organization that gave expression to his revolutionary impulses certainly had its admirable side. But it also harboured a fundamental problem. Once he became convinced of something, it was exceedingly difficult for Jim to pause and retrace his steps and consider that he may have been mistaken. That was my judgment, based on many discussions I had with him. No matter how much his original enthusiasm for the SL changed into a deep opposition - both to its policies and its internal regime - he always looked back to the SL of the 1970s as their golden age.

To cite one example, Jim indicated more than once that a fundamental issue which cemented his sympathy was the full-throated support the Spartacist League provided to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

Jim and I never agreed on this issue. I found the SL's slogan, 'Hail to the Red Army', repugnant. It created the pretence that the Russian tanks that went into Afghanistan in 1979 had a direct connection to the heroic Red Army of 1919 that defeated the counterrevolutionary forces arrayed against the newly established Soviet state. The Spartacist League, and Jim, had this notion that any military intervention by the Soviet Union was an expression of the Stalinist bureaucracy defending the gains of the October Revolution.

While it was true that the forces arrayed against the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul were reactionary Islamists backed by the CIA, it was also true that the Soviet-backed regime did not come into existence as a result of a popular uprising. Rather it was the inheritor of a series of coups backed by Moscow and had little popular support.

The SL by this point in its political evolution had elevated the Stalinist bureaucracy at the expense of the international working class. While it was incumbent on Trotskyists to defend the Soviet Union, despite the bureaucracy, against imperialism, it did not follow that the Stalinist bureaucracy had somehow become a progressive factor in world politics and it certainly did not follow that Trotskyists were obliged to support whatever global political manoeuvre the Stalinist bureaucracy involved itself in. Once you substitute a bureaucracy for the revolutionary potential of the masses, as the SL did, you wind up with some very bizarre - for a Trotskyist - positions. The most notorious expression of this was the publication by *Workers Vanguard* in 1984 of a black-bordered death notice on its front page, marking the demise of former KGB and Soviet party chief Yuri Andropov.

However, even when Jim was an enthusiastic supporter of the SL's perspective, he never became an apparatchik who failed to question the leadership - the kind of person that inhabits every group, one who is content to follow orders. Exactly the opposite was the case. Jim always had a mind of his own and refused to become an obsequious follower, as other members of SL did.

Jim's description of his duties when he was a member of the Spartacist League testifies to his unselfish spirit, sacrificing much of his personal life and income as a soldier for the cause of the revolution. Even years after he had left Jim still thought that those onerous work assignments were legitimate - though he also became angered by the unequal treatment meted out to different members. Jim was assigned numerous duties on a daily basis, involving sales of newspapers and literature, and meetings with fellow SL members - in addition to a regular and much-dreaded early-morning sale, where he had to arrive at 7am at a remote location in Brooklyn. By way of contrast, the head of the Spartacist League lived like a king.

Listen to Jim's depiction of the corruption of the Spartacist leader, James Robertson, and the regime of exploitation built around his needs:

Maybe now you can better appreciate why those of us who joined the [Bolshevik Tendency] later on were so enraged that Robertson, however greatly he had sacrificed to build the SL in the past, was then having a basement playroom built with our labor for his nocturnal escapades, flying Concorde - many times more expensive than a regular passenger jet - having a hot tub installed (again with organizational funds and labor) in his NYC apartment, and demanding a special contribution over and above dues to buy himself a house in the Bay Area.

When Jim joined the SL, he came as part of a wave of new recruits inspired by their campaign for a victory for the Salvadoran rebels and opposition to a compromise with leaders of the death squads that had plagued El Salvador. But from the start the SL never fully trusted him, because he came to them as already formed politically instead of one of "the preferred *tabula rasa* minds, upon which the leadership could effortlessly inscribe its wisdom and 'organizational norms'".

As a result, Jim was given tasks that mostly segregated him from other comrades lest he 'infected' them with his independent spirit. He wrote:

... because of my reluctance to join full-throatedly in Robertson's amen chorus, I was shunted off into the lowly position of lit director ... isolated from other members on the second floor of the SL compound, where I occupied the only permanent work station. The other members were assigned to the upper floors, only passing on occasion the lit shelves where I worked.

The SL never recognised the asset they had in Jim and, instead of encouraging his political and theoretical development, they kept him occupied with lots of make-work tasks. In retrospect, the worst crime they committed was undoubtedly their refusal to allow him to contribute to their publications, given Jim's enormous talent for political-historical analysis.

Afterlife

Jim remained in the SL for five years, from 1981 to 1986, until his inevitable break with them. He thereupon joined the Spartacist spawn known as the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT). Jim had developed differences with the SL position on various questions (the details are unimportant), but the real driving force for his break was undoubtedly his disgust with the cultish behaviour of its leadership and the endless series of purges of members who came into conflict with Robertson.

He thereafter found a home in the IBT, where he remained for the next 10 years. Like the SL, the IBT was obsessed with the 'Russian question' and felt that one's position on the Russian question was the litmus test for whether one was a genuine Trotskyist. The IBT accused the SL of deviating from the "correct" position and the SL likewise made the same accusation against the IBT. In many ways the IBT led a parasitic existence off the SL. But Jim found a more congenial home with it, since he was finally able to publish, giving vent to his polemical talents.

In time Jim became disenchanted with the IBT. Years later he explained: "They believed that the program remained valid, regardless of what happened in the world. They had no clue in terms of analyzing newer developments in the class struggle and in politics."

It troubled Jim that, although the IBT had at that time existed for 20 years, it had failed miserably to attract members and was the same tiny group that it was at its inception. One would think that if your goal were to change the world and you remained a tiny group that had absolutely no influence on the working class, you should ask, why this failure? - and critique whatever practices you have engaged in that led to this sterile abyss. One would think that, but only if one were ignorant of the ways of the various grouplets that populate the extreme left. Such questions never occur to them, as they blithely ignore reality.

One incident stands out during Jim's tenure in the IBT. He had worked for a number of years as a clerk at the office of the *Village Voice*, a famous New York weekly that featured some of the best journalists in the country. In

1996 the maintenance workers at the building went on strike - part of a city-wide action against the companies that were contracted by the building owners to do their maintenance. Jim was the shop steward of the United Auto Workers branch that represented *Village Voice* employees. The striking maintenance workers belonged to a different union and made it clear that their strike was against the company that employed the maintenance workers, not the *Village Voice* itself. The *Voice* employees, with the assent of management and the local UAW, took out the trash themselves.

The striking maintenance workers did not object to this accommodation - the only other option would have been to allow the building's maintenance contractor to bring in scabs to do that job. The *Village Voice* owners also stopped all payments to the maintenance contractors for the duration of the strike. In addition, the UAW local, largely because of Jim's efforts, raised \$3,000 for the striking maintenance workers in an unprecedented show of solidarity.

The Spartacist League newspaper, *Workers Vanguard* - always ready to find something with which to trash their IBT rivals - said Jim was a "scab" for participating in the *Village Voice's* attempt to keep their operations going. The IBT put out a pamphlet with the title, 'Sectarians, "scabs" and socialists', which defended Jim against the slanderous 'scab' charge. The union local also put out a bulletin, titled 'Support to strikers, so long to scabs', which explained that the actions taken by the *Voice* workers were in support of the strike. The management also came to an agreement with the union to stop paying the building maintenance fee until such time as the maintenance workers' strike was settled.

This was back in 1996. Move forward 20 years to 2016. Jim is suddenly confronted with the news that the IBT, which had defended him in 1996, had now "repudiated" the pamphlet defending him and had concluded that Jim had been a scab after all. The IBT further (falsely) claimed ignorance of the details at the time as their rationale for having defended him in 1996! Jim responded to these slanders with a brilliant piece that skewers the IBT and the SL. It is

worth quoting the beginning of Jim's response to give you a flavour of his inimical polemical style:

The principal service that the microscopic and pompously named International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) has performed for the left was to expose the Spartacist League (US) and its affiliates in the International Communist League (ICL) as the personality cult that they are. Unable to answer the truthful testimony of the IBT (and its predecessors, the External Tendency and the Bolshevik Tendency), the Spartacists fired back with a cascade of lies about their accusers, worthy of the vipers' nest this organization had become.

Now, in a turn more pathetic than pernicious, the IBT has taken to retailing one of the lies directed against me when I was a member of their group over 20 years ago. I hesitate to reply only because I fear that I might make myself look ridiculous by expending so many pixels over something that won't matter a tinker's damn to anyone outside the time capsule inhabited by the Spartacist League and its derivative groupuscules. But, as Trotsky said, the historical record should be accurately maintained, even in its minutest details.²

Jim was denounced not only by the SL and the IBT, but also by another Spart spawn, the Internationalist Group, as well as another groupuscule, the League for a Revolutionary Party. Anyone who could earn the wrath of all these small-minded sectarian outfits deserves a medal!

Without a party

After leaving the IBT in the mid-90s, Jim was finally able to flourish as a writer, an educator and a trenchant critic of contemporary culture. And, as I later learned, he was also a great raconteur, a poet and a competent singer. Yet ironically, in this most productive period of his life, Jim was not affiliated with any political group. For someone who always believed that "any Marxist worth his salt should be a member of a party" this was undoubtedly a bittersweet period for him.

As a result of Jim's work as an

activist in the UAW local and his outspoken politics, he was forced out of his job at the *Village Voice* in 2002 after new owners took it over. His next job was that of a substitute teacher in the New York City public school system. This was often very gratifying work, as Jim's talents as a teacher made him an instant favourite in practically every school to which he was assigned. However, as much as Jim enjoyed teaching, the earnings of a substitute teacher in the New York public school system are quite meagre and the benefits even worse. But the job suited Jim, insofar as he often had the afternoons free to read or write.

It was in this period that Jim's literary and polemical talents shone, as he became a regular contributor to the UK-based newspaper *Weekly Worker*. He wrote dozens of articles for the paper, starting in 2007 and ending in June 2022. Jim's *oeuvre* was not confined to strictly political essays, which he did masterfully enough, but also touched on history and culture. One notable example was a review of a film by Ken Loach about the Irish war of independence and subsequent civil war.³

When the pandemic hit, Jim was assigned to the well-known science-oriented high school, Stuyvesant, where he made a huge impression on his colleagues and students - the students knew him as the teacher who sang the attendance call. He worked at Stuyvesant until several weeks prior to his death.

Ironically, Jim outlived the Spartacist League. The SL's founder-leader, James Robertson, died in 2019 at the age of 90. The cult he began did not survive his passing. Its newspaper, *Workers Vanguard*, ceased publication for over a year following his death. Eventually a group based in the UK attempted to revive the corpse of the SL. They held an "international conference", where they attempted to diagnose the ills of the SL that led to its demise. Jim was following these events and noted wryly, that for all their "self-criticism", the self-appointed resurrectionists of the SL never said a word about the corruption of the Robertson regime.

The International Bolshevik Tendency suffered a major split in 2018. The issue that precipitated it was, as you may have guessed, *the Russian question*. Following the split, the IBT was left with fewer members than it had when it started out almost 50 years ago. As Jim explained at a Left Forum panel in 2019, "Now the IBT, which was fewer than 20 members, has the rare distinction among Trotskyist grouplets that they managed to split over the Russian question 30 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union!"⁴

I met Jim 10 years ago in a seminar on the Russian Revolution organised by the Brecht Forum. When the Brecht Forum dissolved the following year, both of us continued with its successor organisation, the Marxist Education Project. Although we did not agree on every political and philosophical question, we had enough affinity on basic issues to collaborate on a number of projects. Among these was a walking tour in New York inspired by Trotsky's nine-week sojourn in that city prior to his arrival in Russia in 1917. We also worked together, along with Marilyn Vogt-Downey, on a special broadcast on radio station WBAI commemorating the 100th anniversary of the October Revolution.

Jim was also a participant - and often a co-facilitator - in a series of classes on Hegel that I taught through the Marxist Education Project. Among his many contributions to that series, one that stands out for me was his masterful lecture on the French Revolution. I will certainly miss our back-and-forth sparring over our

different interpretations of Hegel.

In addition to our political collaboration Jim and I developed a personal bond. Both of us came out of the 60s generation and both of us joined small Trotskyist groups following a flirtation with the New Left. It turned out that we knew several people in common. I learned that Jim had known my first wife before I met her, when they were both members of SDS at Penn State. It also turned out that the groups we joined - in Jim's case the Spartacist League, in mine the Workers League - began life in the same opposition faction of the Socialist Workers Party in the early 1960s. And we both witnessed the toll that the years of Reaganite reaction inflicted on the 60s generation. Many did not survive the trauma when the optimism and utopian spirit of the 60s clashed with the dismal, self-centred culture of the 80s and 90s. We both knew people whose lives were cut short by mental illness, alcoholism, drug abuse and suicide.

Any account by me of Jim's political life would not be complete if I did not mention that Jim and I had a fundamental disagreement about the very basis of Trotskyism. Jim, in his later years, had come to the conclusion that the premise behind the launch of the Fourth International by Trotsky in 1938 was a mistaken assessment of the nature of the epoch. Trotsky thought that we were living in a period of the decay and terminal decline of capitalism and that therefore the objective conditions were ripe for socialist revolution. He felt that Trotsky's assessment of capitalism in the 20th century was mistaken and cited the post-war boom as evidence of that.

For my part, I thought that Jim was being too literal in his interpretation of Trotsky's intent. While it was true that Trotsky did not anticipate the post-war boom (not that anyone else did either), his pronouncement on the nature of the epoch was not meant to only apply to the immediate situation capitalism faced in the 1930s and the decades following, but was a judgment of an entire historical period, whose length could not be predicted in advance.

I also felt that, while Jim's commitment and active participation in the struggles that emerged in the last sixty years were second to none, he was at the same time overly pessimistic about the potential for the rebirth of a militant working class. Jim would undoubtedly have retorted that he was a realist, not a pessimist, and that my optimism was based on illusions I inherited from the Trotskyist groups with which I had been associated (Jim provided a detailed presentation on this topic in a panel at the Left Forum⁵). Yet, no matter how strong our disagreements I knew that with Jim I was dealing with an intellectual giant who was not easily dismissed.

I should also mention that he was a wonderful raconteur who had mastered the art of storytelling. I always enjoyed going to an Irish pub with him.

Jim's memory will be cherished by his friends and colleagues, some of whom knew him since childhood, others more recently. He leaves a legacy of commitment and independence tempered by his wit and good humour ●

Notes

1. *Beyond sect or movement: What is a political center?* (Platypus Affiliated Society, panel at Left Forum, June 30 2019: platypus1917.org/2019/09/01/beyond-sect-or-movement-what-is-a-political-center).
2. Excerpt from a private email from Jim Creegan (October 3 2016).
3. 'Ken Loach's use of Irish history' *Weekly Worker* April 18 2007: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/669/ken-loachs-use-of-irish-history.
4. *Beyond sect or movement: What is a political center?* (see note 1).
5. *Ibid*.

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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Fighting fund

Do much better!

Readers may recall that last week I reported in the November 30 issue that we needed another £416 before the end of that day! But, not surprisingly, we didn't reach our £2,250 monthly fighting fund target - only one comrade read my appeal in time and was able to transfer a fantastic £100 before the end of the day. Thank you, comrade JC!

On top of that, there were two standing orders that landed in our bank account before the deadline - thanks also to comrades VP and MD, who both contributed £10. So we ended November with £1,929 in the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund - a deficit of £296.

So now we really need to make up for that in the final month of the year. Can we not only break through that £2,250 barrier, but raise just short of an extra £300? That's quite a challenge, but I'm confident that some comrades will rise to the challenge and at least give us a chance of making it.

After, as I write, the first six days of December, we're not

far behind the going rate, with £421 already in the kitty. A lot of that came in the shape of all those standing orders that land in our account at the very start of the month, combined with a few bank transfers.

The most generous donor was comrade AC, who contributed £100, and the others were EW (£55), ST and CG (£30 each), AM (£29), MS, BK and TW (£20), BG, MT and RG (£15 each), TM (£13), MM (£11), AN, YM and DI (£10), plus £6 each from JS, CP and DC.

But, unusually, there were no donations by cash, cheque or PayPal last week - maybe this week comrades will make up for that! See below for the link if you want more information on how to donate. Let's make sure we do much better in December! ●

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

weekly worker

Global empire
needs justifying
ideology

Monarchy and mystery

Omid Scobie's book suggests that the king may be a racist. Why wouldn't he be? asks Paul Demarty

For the British royal family, 2023 has turned out to be a year bookended by - appropriately - two books, and even more uncannily, by the apparently botched release of those two books.

The screw-up seems to have been quite genuine in the case of *Spare*, Harry Windsor's tell-all - or at least tell-much - memoir. The Spanish book trade was unusually keen to get the thing out of doors, which led to a scramble among tabloid newspapers to find competent translators to get the money-shots ready for the morning proofs. There was not much more time to wait for the English publication, and so we got the whole shaggy-dog story, with its dead Afghans, frozen toddlers (and still more frozen filial relationships), broken dog-bowls, and mystical communions with dead mothers in due course. We thereby got a picture of the overall state of the royal cult, and its by now utter hatred of the wayward duke of Sussex and his American wife.

One event not mentioned in *Spare* was the "concern", as the Sussees put it in an earlier interview with Oprah Winfrey, with the skin colour of the scion then soon to be born of Meghan Markle - who is, of course, herself mixed-race. They then refused to name the individual, and have always since maintained a dignified silence on the question. The palace issued an equally "concerned" press release, saying it would be dealt with privately, which we can assume it indeed was.

This strained moment was brought back to the surface by the release of Omid Scobie's *Endgame*, which - in the course of its general argument that the monarchy is potentially facing crisis - does mention the event. (From the commentaries available in the press, it is clear that Scobie is on Team Sussex - perhaps unsurprisingly, since he came to the royal beat initially via celebrity tattle for US outlets.) The original English text does not mention the name of the alleged palace racist, or *racists* as it turns out. However, some bright spark noticed that Dutch readers saw something different: Charles himself apparently expressed such "concerns", and so did the Princess of Wales, whom we now discover is to be referred to as 'Catherine', and never again by the dowdy, common 'Kate'.

Exactly how this error came to be made is an enticing mystery - as cosy as a Balmoral sitting room. Scobie vaguely referred to the possibility of errors in translation, swearing blind that in no version of his own text were these people mentioned explicitly (the Dutch had the titles rather than the names, but - since there can literally be only one king and one princess of Wales - it was hardly much of a shield). The problem with this account is obvious: which English words and phrases exist that may be *erroneously* translated as 'king', or 'princess of Wales'? The one translator tracked down by our doughty yellow press professed her innocence.



Poppycock: House of Windsor claims to date back over a thousand years

Having denied all knowledge, Scobie went on to note that the identities of these individuals was a common trade secret among the palace Kremlinologists of Fleet Street. This is not exactly a *confirmation* - circumspection is prudent, given the likely legal proceedings. In any case, the original allegation is essentially impossible to corroborate, since Charles and Kate - sorry, *Catherine* - are unlikely to bawl out a confession like some cancelled influencer and promise to 'do better'. Much has been made of Scobie's previous indiscretions - in particular an incident in which he baldly lied about his age. Yet, once the identities are purged, he was merely repeating public allegations already made.

Dutch version

We may assume that he did in fact specify the persons involved in a fairly late draft of the book, and these were purged from most versions by wise legal minds, but inadvertently left in the Dutch version. Some have raised the delicious theory that this was all done on purpose by the publishers, but HarperCollins is a tediously conservative outfit in its operations; this is not like the rabble-rousing Tory vanity press, Biteback, promoting Michael Ashcroft's book on David Cameron and the story of the newly-made baron's sexual congress with a dead pig. We are happy to call it a screw-up, though it has at least a chance to be a very profitable one.

The question arises, inevitably, regarding the *plausibility* of the idea that some royal - indeed, the family's very *capo di tutti capi* - might have been so "concerned" by the outward ethnic appearance of the future prince Archie. (An even commoner name than Kate - a real 'John Lewis nightmare', as Carrie Symonds might put it.) There is a rightwing version of this: the media and many other

professional spheres are dominated by 'woke ideologues' who have been brainwashed by gender-studies academics to hate Britain and believe it to be an irremediably racist, heterosexist (etc) society. Thus they will latch onto any old innuendo and run with it, meaning the royals are the victims of cancel culture. (Having made their point, these blowhards will return to their other hobby of demanding the suppression of the pro-Palestinian movement, which is not cancel culture, but good old British 'common sense'.)

The trouble with this version is that one does not have to be a 'woke ideologue' to see the royal family as a racist institution. Charles was raised, so far as men of that class bother themselves with such work, by a father whose utterly overt racism was treated as a kind of whimsical character quirk by the press. His mother cheerfully joined in her uncle's Hitler salutes.

Until the late 1960s, the palace operated an explicit colour bar for employees - hardly atypical for the time, but the times were, let's be honest, quite racist. Today's royals inherit a set of attitudes shaped by Britain's former imperial greatness: Elizabeth's reign covered most of the decolonisation, but she seems to have regretted it and remained very attached to the Commonwealth, whereby she could play-act as the Empress of India.

We should not ask the question, 'Is the royal family racist?' It would be quite astonishing on the whole if it was not. It has always embodied a certain very exclusive vision of fitness for the throne - after all, it is still technically illegal for the king to be a Catholic. Its rules of primogeniture ensure inheritance by some member of a very small number of northern European families. It preserves a particular model of natural hierarchy that, given the admixture of colonial empire, could not but be racist. What

is remarkable - especially given his military service delivering remote-controlled bombs to 'Terry Taliban' - is that Harry should have wound up a run-of-the-mill American liberal. Much as we are irritated by such people, given the starting point, it is a quite remarkable improvement.

The controversy thus needs to be placed in the context of the role the monarchy plays in British society. It represents the sublime continuity of our society over thousands of years - a myth, that takes us from Alfred the Great and the various noble souls enumerated in Bede's *Ecclesiastical history*, via a few regrettable moments of turbulence, in 1066, 1649 and 1688, to name only the most obvious examples, to our present uncertain condition. In order to do that work, the counterexamples - the *transformations* of our society - need to be frosted over.

Reaction

That accusations of *racism* should be so traumatic has to do with very recent history, from the 1960s (and especially the 1980s) to the present, in which substantial immigrant populations from the former colonies had to be integrated under the uneasy rubric of multiculturalism. The tentative and tactical character of this approach tended to bury antagonisms, rather than truly resolving them; which in turn demanded political regulation of the responses. Anti-racism thereby had to be incorporated into the national tradition, as part of an ancient Anglo-Saxon commitment to liberty, fairness and respect.

Yet we had the same royals at the end of this process as the beginning; the same products of a Potemkin village version of reality, where Britain mattered as much as it had when Victoria was crowned Empress of India for real. The socialisation process of these poor souls is rather as if they were living in a version

of the film *Goodbye Lenin*, when a young East German attempts to keep the Democratic Republic going just a little longer, to save his incorrigibly Stalinist mother's ailing heart. Charles's outlook, to be sure, is an odd Tolkienesque variant of it - his country is a huge Shire, ever at risk of the scourings of modernity. His racism is perhaps romantic-Orientalist rather than malicious. Yet it is not unprecedented in the British imperial canon - one need only think of TE Lawrence, or Lord Frederic Leighton, whose Kensington house was partly decorated like a Levantine palace.

Thus they remain prone to occasional embarrassments - we could mention, along with 'black-baby-gate' and Philip's embarrassing uncle outbursts, the Lady Susan Hussey debacle ("No - where are you *really* from?") and many other incidents. What is notable now is how much defence the royals get. It is as if the wider forces of Toryism - always a creed based on intolerance and the brutalisation of out-groups, from religious minorities in the 17th century to ethnic minorities today - sense an opportunity. It may seem odd to say, with Labour's poll lead looking unassailable, but Sir Keir Starmer will jettison any commitments he thinks awkward, and the best bet the Tories have is bludgeoning him with culture-war hysteria.

Rival blocs

Moreover, these dynamics are not strictly national. We have never had, as we supposed, an island story and least of all now, as a pliant appendage of the United States in global politics and a tenuous position as an international money laundry to set as collateral against our obligations. Today the drift is away from the cosmopolitan utopianism of post-cold war liberal globalisation, towards protectionism, and the division of the world once again into rival blocs. A more astringent national chauvinism is a better fit for the age than the pieties of liberal anti-racists. One of the many grim features of the present onslaught on Gaza is how it *inspires* people; Hindutva zealots in India admire Israel because they see its actions as the right way to deal with their own Muslim 'problem' - and so it is for a certain kind of culture-warrior creep on our and many other shores today.

The monarchy's role in all this is primarily institutional - it offers constitutional mechanisms for political leaders to rule like the kings and queens of old. Yet it is also ideological. Truly dangerous reaction in this country was never, as frequently suggested by panicked anti-fascist activists, going to be carried out by small neo-Nazi sects. It will instead be the work of respectable ladies and gentlemen, in the name of king, country, Anglo-Saxon liberty and good old British common sense ●

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