

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **worker**



'Morning Star' editor, Ben Chacko: the left hasn't got an anti-Semitism problem; he has a Zionist problem

- Letters and debate
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- TAS won't talk to CPGB

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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PROVIDE BACKING FOR
CRYBULLYING ZIONIST
'SAFE SPACES' WHINGERS**

LETTERS



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

Faction nonsense

Andrew Northall of Kettering and the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain is, if he is anything, consistent. The problem is that he is consistent in being wrong. Take the question of factions (Letters January 4 and going back to November 16 and doubtless many times before that).

Basically, he thinks factions are divisive, dangerous and should be banned. He argues that while there will be "different tendencies and trends", to allow them to become "organised in any way" would mean that faction members "would start to put the interests of their faction above that of the party - as well as becoming more interested in faction fighting *within* the party, as opposed to building the party as a whole and the mass movement."

For him, the "whole point of a faction" is to try to win over the party "to the point of view - or even control - of that faction". By definition, he says, that means putting the faction "above" the party. That, heaven save us, inevitably leads to "splits and breakaways". This is how he explains Trotskyism in all its 57 varieties.

It is certainly true that the Russian Communist Party temporarily banned factions at its 10th Congress in March 8-16 1921. But this was supposed to be a temporary measure and was done under conditions of the Kronstadt revolt, peasant unrest and the danger of foreign invasion. Maybe this was a correct decision, though I doubt it. But what was definitely a wrong decision was generalising the ban on factions throughout the Communist International. A ban obviously thoroughly internalised by our Andrew.

Why do I think generalising the ban was mistaken? Well, for a start it prevented generations of communists, both official and unofficial, from learning the rich lessons of the Russian Revolution and its Russian Socialist Democratic Labour Party, which was, of course, rooted in the tradition of the Second International and the inspiration provided by German social democracy and its Erfurt programme.

As everyone knows the real foundation date of the RSDLP was 1902-03 and its 2nd Congress. The congress appeared, at the start, to be a triumph of the *Iskra* faction led by Lenin, Martov, Plekhanov, Axelrod and Zasulich. The economists were sent packing and the Bund walked. However the *Iskra* faction split into a majority (Bolsheviks) and a minority (Mensheviks).

Till 1912 the Bolsheviks operated as a faction. Yes, of course, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were *very* interested in fighting to win *within* the party. But did that mean that they failed to build the party or the mass movement, as implied by friend Northall? Hardly.

Both the *main* factions assumed mass proportions during and after the 1905 revolution. Even in 1912, when the Bolsheviks expelled the boycottists and liquidators and declared themselves the *official* leadership of the party with the Prague conference, there was no thought of banning factions. True, the Mensheviks were riven with all manner of factions, which ranged from near Bolsheviks to outright social imperialists. However the

Bolsheviks too had their factions. Nikolai Bukharin's comes to mind.

Indeed at the March 1917 all-Russia conference, their first since the fall of tsarism, delegates were asked by the chair, Lev Kamenev, to debate three factional positions vis-à-vis the Bolsheviks attitude towards the provisional government. There was a very small minority which wanted to support the provisional government. Most voted for *critical* support, that is support to the extent that the provisional government carried out the aims of the revolution (eg, peace, land and elections to a constituent assembly). In other words critical support was a tactic to expose the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, who really wanted to support the provisional government.

This is the conference where Lenin read his famous April theses, first to his Bolshevik comrades and then to his Menshevik factional opponents. Note, while in Petrograd and Moscow the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks operated as separate organisations, that was not true in much of the country. There were joint Bolshevik-Menshevik committees in Siberia and the east. Of course, in June 1917 the Mezhraintsy, including Trotsky, merged with the Bolsheviks (they continued to publish their own paper till September) and in October the Bolsheviks, in alliance with the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party, took power in the name of their soviet majority.

There is an obvious question to ask comrade Northall. Would the Bolsheviks have won if they had not formed themselves into a faction? Would they have done better if they had banned factions in 1903?

The monolithic party is a myth. The reality is that the Bolsheviks were a faction and fought as a faction.

Banning factions is, in fact, banning all factions but one: the leadership faction. That either dumbs down the membership to dumber than dumb (see the latest SWP pre-conference bulletins), or factions organise unofficially, even illegally. Does that prevent splits? No, of course not. On the contrary it guarantees splits. What differences might have been seriously debated, what differences might have been contained within, that is with minorities being given proportional representation on leading committees, who knows? But the claim that officially banning factions prevents splits and divisions is frankly risible.

When I joined the YCL-CPGB in the late 1960s there had already been a huge split over Hungary 1956. About a third of the membership resigned. That was followed by the anti-revisionist Maoists in the early 1960s and the Mao-Maoists in late 1960s. My YCL branch had gone with the Mao-Maoists just before I joined. The idea that Trotskyites are uniquely or especially prone to splits is nonsense.

I quickly discovered that the CPGB was riven with factions: Eurocommunists, McLennanites, Frenchites and Fergus Nicholson's party within the party (later known as the Straight Leftists). The difference between them and *The Leninist* was that we alone declared ourselves a faction - and conducted an open political struggle for the Marxist programme, against the hidden, opportunist, factions, in the spirit of the Bolsheviks from 1903 onwards.

Comrade Northall's own organisation comes from a split in the McLennan leadership faction and a

merger with various splits, including *Communist Liaison* (Andrew Murray, Nick Wright, etc). Today the CPB has hidden factions. There is the Robert Griffiths leadership faction, which bans anything smacking of Stalin worship (to little or no effect). But there are, too, the Zionist faction around Mary Davis - with its hooks into the *Morning Star* - the Stalinite YCL-origins faction now slowly working its way into leading positions, and others besides. All struggle for influence and control. The problem is that apart from the official leadership they all do what they do hidden from view, out of sight, not least from Andrew Northall, the *Weekly Worker's* resident CPB loyalist.

Jack Conrad
London

Faction again

Andrew Northall justifies a ban on factions by assuming that a group of people within a party putting forward a shared perspective will necessarily sacrifice the interests of that party if they do it openly (Letters, January 4).

But there's an obvious contradiction in his argument: he assumes that, while communists in the workers' movement can put the interests of the class before the sectional interests of their party when undertaking trade union activity, communists within the party itself can't put their party's interests ahead of their openly-declared faction.

To this extent, the ban on factions mirrors the perspective of those who oppose the presence of communists in mass socialist parties: since we will put the interests of our openly-declared party before the federal party, we should not be allowed to affiliate or join as individuals. Or, if we give up organising an open party and merely group around a journal or paper, it can be argued that an expression of a line independent to the federal party would also constitute harmful activity.

A ban on open factions is not a prerequisite for the practice of democratic centralism. The reality is that factions will exist in any organisation regardless of the rules. If people cannot discern factional ties, because they cannot be talked about openly, they are powerless to hold leaders to account.

Ansell Eade
email

Faction ban

The question of whether factions should be allowed in a future Communist Party is one of the most important questions that communists need to address. I think that comrade Andrew Northall should reconsider his view on this issue. There is no law which says that only Lenin, who started a socialist revolution in a predominantly backward country with the support of Trotsky, is the only one who can make up rules for the communist movement.

Lenin's banning of factions in the Communist Party was at a time when he was making the transition from democratic socialism to totalitarianism. To think that factions, which is only another name for groupings of like-minded individuals, is opposed to democratic centralism is an argument against dialectical logic. In fact, democratic centralism - ie, freedom of debate and groupings, and unity in action in carrying out the majority line - was specifically designed to reconcile factional differences in the party. Factions don't disappear because you ban them. They simply go underground.

The suppression of factions

was the first step that Russian communism made towards totalitarianism, under the guidance of Lenin, albeit unwittingly. It was a perfect tool in the hands of the Soviet bureaucracy, which at the time had hardly changed since tsarist times in snatching power away from the working class. The left should support democratic socialism, not Orwell's 1984. The totalitarian banning of factions is just as harmful as unprincipled factionalism. We all know that banning factions in the Communist Party didn't stop the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Tony Clark

For Democratic Socialism

Hamas symmetry

Moshé Machover is angry about what I left out of an article about Hamas, Tony Greenstein is angry about what I put in, while Pete Gregson, chairman of a group calling itself One Democratic Palestine, is upset that I'm insufficiently critical of the Jews. Let me take them one at a time.

Machover is a man adrift. On October 8, he told an Online Communist Forum that he "sided with" Hamas. Perhaps chastened by the scale of atrocities, he wrote a few days later that Zionism cannot be overthrown without "the participation of the Israeli working class" and that "Hamas is leading away from this direction" ("Oppression breeds resistance", October 12). This was a bit of an understatement, given the savagery of the October 7 attack, but at least a sign that Machover has not entirely lost touch with reality. But now he's indignant about an article I wrote ("Far from pacified", December 7) concerning the hopelessness of a military solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on anyone's part - America's, Israel's or the Palestinians'.

As he put it in a letter on December 14, "Daniel Lazare is in denial. He is in denial of the colonising essence of the Zionist project; he is in denial of the

colonial nature of the conflict between the Israeli settler state and its colonised Palestinian subjects; he is in denial of the vast disparity of power between the nuclear-armed oppressor and its victims; indeed, he is in denial that the relation between Israelis and Palestinians is one of colonial-national oppression. None of these facts are hinted at, let alone mentioned, in his article."

But I'm not in denial at all. It goes without saying that Israel's power eclipses that of Hamas, that it is an expansionist state, that it is Jewish-supremacist, and that the international proletariat must defend Palestinians against the Zionist onslaught. So Machover's point about the asymmetrical nature of the conflict is correct.

But, if he were a better Marxist, he'd understand that symmetry can exist within an otherwise asymmetric framework. How else can we explain the striking ideological parallels between Likud and Hamas? The Netanyahu government has its Kahanist wing led by Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir, whose ideology, as the *World Socialist Web Site* recently pointed out, is based on a "theology of revenge" against the non-Jewish world for permitting the holocaust to occur in the 1940s. Do unto them, in other words, what they have done unto us. If a revenge fantasy like this isn't fascism, it's exceedingly close.

But Hamas also has its revenge fantasies. "Our struggle against the Jews is very great and very serious," its founding document declares. "... In face of the Jews' usurpation of Palestine, it is compulsory that the banner of jihad be raised." Hamas's 1988 covenant goes on:

"For a long time, the enemies have been planning, skilfully and with precision, for the achievement of what they have attained. They took into consideration the causes affecting the current of events. They strived to amass great and substantive material wealth which they devoted to the realisation of their dream. With their money,

Online Communist Forum



Sunday January 14 5pm
A week in politics - political report from
CPGB's Provisional Central Committee
and discussion

Use this link to join meeting:
communistparty.co.uk/ocf-register

Organised by CPGB: communistparty.co.uk and
Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk
For further information, email Stan Keable at
Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk

A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be
viewed at: youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain

they took control of the world media, news agencies, the press, publishing houses, broadcasting stations, and others. With their money they stirred revolutions in various parts of the world with the purpose of achieving their interests and reaping the fruit therein. They were behind the French Revolution, the communist revolution, and most of the revolutions we heard and hear about, here and there. With their money they formed secret societies, such as Freemasons, Rotary Clubs, the Lions, and others in different parts of the world for the purpose of sabotaging societies and achieving Zionist interests. With their money they were able to control imperialistic countries and instigate them to colonise many countries in order to enable them to exploit their resources and spread corruption there."

What is this other than a theology of revenge against the forces of modernity, which Hamas, in its benighted way, equates with Judaism, Marxism and Jacobinism (not to mention Freemasons and Rotarians)? If this isn't fascism, it's only because fascism is a 20th century ideology, whereas the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Hamas is a part, is still stuck in the 7th.

Machover wants us to adopt a policy of hearing, seeing and speaking no evil concerning such parallels. Yet they exist regardless. If Zionism's rightwing surge led to Kahanist pogroms in the West Bank, for instance, then Hamas's equally rightwing politics led to an even more massive pogrom on October 7. What is wrong with pointing this essential symmetry out? How is it possible to write about the conflict in a halfway honest manner without discussing the ideological convergence between two otherwise bitter enemies?

Whereas Machover is a leftwing apologist for Hamas, Greenstein has turned himself into a cheerleader of an even more embarrassing sort. His whirlwind of an article ('Not a religious war', January 4) is filled with mini-lectures about various historical details that I supposedly get wrong, about the real nature of the war, and so on. Most are too ridiculous to go into, so let me concentrate on the real issue at hand, which is, of course, Hamas.

"Despite their demonisation by the Zionists, Hamas's politics are not anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish," Greenstein begins. "They hold to the traditional line of Islamic religious groups who make a distinction between Judaism and Zionism." Really? If Greenstein had bothered to read the 1988 Hamas covenant, he would know that what it repeatedly emphasises throughout is that Judaism and Zionism are two sides of the same coin. "Their plan," it says of the Zionists, "is embodied in the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion,' and their present conduct is the best proof of what we are saying" (article 32).

If this isn't anti-Semitism, what is? Greenstein will no doubt reply that the covenant has been superseded by a seemingly more benign charter that Hamas issued in 2017. But it was not superseded at all, since Hamas pointedly refrained from repealing the old document. Indeed, Mahmoud al-Zahar, a co-founder of Hamas and still a member of the group's senior leadership, assured a reporter that the 1988 covenant was as relevant as ever: "... there is no contradiction between what we said in the [2017] document and the pledge we have made to God in our [original] charter," he told Reuters (May 10 2017). So we have no choice but to take al-Zahar at his word about

Hamas's arch-reactionary founding principles, even though comrade Greenstein clearly wishes he had held his tongue.

"The October 7 attack," Greenstein goes on, "was an audacious attack on the Gaza division of the Israeli army - and it is becoming clear that many if not most of the Israeli civilian casualties were caused by the trigger-happy murderers of the Israeli army." Yes, 10/7 "truthers" are hard at work trying to absolve Hamas of responsibility. But their efforts are no more impressive than in 2001, when they tried to absolve Saudi Arabia and al Qa'eda of responsibility and put the blame for 9/11 on Mossad instead.

Greenstein says that the fact that 85-year-old Yocheved Lifschitz shook hands with her captors before returning to Israel is evidence that she and other hostages were well treated. But others have had very different stories to tell, among them a Thai immigrant worker, who said that Jewish prisoners "were treated very harshly, sometimes they were beaten with electric cables" (VINnews, November 29). Why doesn't Greenstein mention that?

Lifschitz later told the press that she met Hamas chief Yahya Sinwar face to face three or four days into her abduction. "I asked him how he wasn't ashamed to do such a thing to people who for years support peace? He didn't answer. He was quiet." Lifschitz is obviously a racist colonialist pig for speaking in such a forthright manner. But she raises a question that should not be ignored, no matter how hard Greenstein might try.

Daniel Lazare
New York

Membership

Reading the letter of Talking About Socialism's Will McMahon and Nick Wrack on socialist-communist unity, what does it matter if even only one person runs the CPGB PCC ('Nothing positive to be gained', January 4)?

The politics are better than the those of the Socialist Workers Party. We are entering a period of reaction and need to prepare.

Frank Kavanagh
email

Scorned

As if made to order, certainly right on cue, in the very same edition as TAS's criticisms are let loose around what's considered to be *Weekly Worker*/CPGB's arrogance alongside more generalised shutting out of any fresh ideas and other such dismissive hubris, a pretty much pristine iteration of that very same syndrome popped up within the fighting fund report from a certain Robbie Rix.

Those folk who find it far more desirable to access the paper through cyberspace are labelled as mere "starkers" at screens, rather than the immeasurably more pure possessors of the physical printed edition - the fact clearly having become lost, somewhere along either fog-enshrouded or twisted lines of experience, how many of those selfsame derided and scorned then bring selected articles or letters from the paper to the attention of unlimited numbers of others, in attempts at development of their class and revolutionary consciousness (most poignantly, to anyone deemed open to the paper's sophisticated and mature Marxist-Leninist solutions to this grandest-calibre horror show that surrounds us all).

Not to suggest there are any easy answers to those problems and truths raised by TAS, but its criticisms strike clear as a bell with those who, like myself, don't find any

existing organisations on offer to be fully convincing and consequently attractive. However, and as already alluded been to, in my book the *Weekly Worker*/CPGB comes categorically closest to that sought-out Marxian Nirvana!

Having said all that, the comrades at TAS fall down badly when it comes to entirely sensible and valid arguments made around the futility - in fact the sheer laughableness - of forming just another 'Labour' party being flat-out contradicted by their attitude around whether to form a new and separate party of "communism". The most logical as well as most efficient pathway to be hacked out from that tangled undergrowth would be to fully engage with an already up-and-running *WW*/CPGB, even joining as an active member - ie, in order then to bring influence from within, to 'steer' things into what are seen as more vibrant directions, even with an aim of superseding its current main players.

In doing so, yet greater confusion to outsiders would be avoided, to potential new recruits, amongst other ingredients unquestionably required for the promotion and eventual establishment of a meaningful, potent socialist movement for purposes of conquering capitalism's only evermore filthy paradigm.

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

Contradiction

In the Provisional Central Committee's statement on the Israel-Gaza war (January 4) is this formulation: "Towards that end it is more than advisable to offer the Israeli-Jewish, the Hebrew nation, full national rights: ie, the right to join an Arab socialist republic and the right to self-determination up to and including the right to go it alone."

This raises a query. The Marxist minimum-maximum programmatic method champions a minimum programme that can *theoretically* be achieved under capitalism, but the very act of it being put into practice by the working class means the 'uninterrupted' process to our maximum programme is underway. The reality is that the implementation of the minimum programme in fact requires working class rule: socialism. In that sense, it is not the bogus 'transitional' method, nor is it the mechanical stagism of Stalinism.

However, when it comes to Israel-Palestine, the CPGB PCC statement rejects both a single-state and a two-state settlement as minimum democratic demands. Instead, it proposes national rights for the Hebrew nation within an Arab socialist republic.

Therefore this minimum is not even 'theoretically' achievable under bourgeois rule. There seems to be a contradiction here. How do comrades account for this?

Martin Greenfield
Australia

Correction

In the obituary of James Creegan that appeared in the *Weekly Worker* edition of December 7, I mistakenly wrote that the League for a Revolutionary Party (LRP) participated in the smear campaign against Jim that was carried out by the Spartacist League, The International Bolshevik Tendency and the International Group.

This was not true. In fact I have since learned that the LRP was the victim of a similar smear campaign in which they were falsely accused by the Spartacist League of being scabs. My apologies for this factual error.

Alex Steiner
email

ACTION

Solidarity with the People of Turkey

Saturday January 13, 10am: Conference, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. Is Erdoğan's one-man rule the end of democracy in Turkey? Sessions will discuss struggles of workers in Turkey and how to build solidarity here. Registration free. Organised by Solidarity with the People of Turkey: spotturkey.co.uk.

Ceasefire now! Stop the war on Gaza!

Saturday January 13, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble Bank station junction, London EC1. As Israel continues its bombardment of Gaza, the call for a full and permanent ceasefire remains unwavering. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.facebook.com/events/7341142185929930.

What it means to be human

Tuesday January 16, 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: 'The story of the bird-nester: an introduction to the science of mythology'. Speaker: Chris Knight. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/368825328852650.

Why Palestine is a trade union issue

Wednesday January 17, 6.30pm: Online meeting for union activists. How trade unions can deliver solidarity to the Palestinian people. Speakers include Daniel Kebede (NEU) and Eddie Dempsey (RMT). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=744385171048395.

Israel-Palestine: oppression and resistance

Online education and discussion series.
Thursday January 18, 7pm: Zionism during the holocaust, the Nakba and Israel's foundation in 1948. Speakers: Tony Greenstein and Thomas Suárez. Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: www.facebook.com/LabourLeftAlliance.

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. Registration free. Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/447.

Arms dealers out of Twickenham stadium

Monday January 22, 1.30pm: Protest outside Twickenham rugby stadium, Whitton Road, Twickenham TW2. Weapons companies like Leonardo, Elbit and Raytheon - profiteering from over 23,000 deaths in Gaza - will take part in the International Armoured Vehicles event inside. Tell the Rugby Football Union to kick them out. Organised by Richmond and Kingston Palestine Solidarity Campaign: caat.org.uk/events/twickenhamarmsfair2024.

Arms out

Tuesday January 23, 7pm: National film and speaker tour launch, Scale Space White City, 58 Wood Lane, London W12 and online. Exposing the truth about militarism, the arms trade, and their devastating effects on communities and the environment. Registration free. Organised by Shadow World Investigations, Campaign Against Arms Trade, Declassified UK, Demilitarise Education and Forces Watch: caat.org.uk/events/arms-out.

Protect the right to strike

Saturday January 27, 12 noon: March and rally. Assemble Montpellier Gardens, Cheltenham GL50. Marking 40 years since Thatcher banned trade unions at GCHQ. Today the government is restricting the right to strike for over five million workers. Oppose the Minimum Service Levels Act, restrictions on trade unions and threats to the right to strike. Organised by PCS South West and TUC: www.tuc.org.uk/events/protect-right-strike-march-and-rally.

Palestine, internationalism and the left

Sunday January 28, 10am to 5pm: Day school, London (venue tbc). Panels and discussions exploring the history of Palestine, its place in wider anti-imperialist struggles in the Middle East and its political importance to internationalist politics today. Organised by Workers in Palestine: www.workersinpalestine.org/news/day-school.

Introduction to Living Rent

Wednesday January 31, 6.30pm: Online briefing. Living Rent is Scotland's tenant and community union. Learn about the history, vision, structure, campaigns and activities, which include securing home repairs, stopping evictions and preventing rent increases. Organised by Living Rent: www.livingrent.org/intro_to_lr_jan24.

Fighting for anti-racist workplaces

Sunday February 11, 12 noon to 4.30pm: Conference, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. To discuss strategies and actions to combat racism in the workplace and shed light on the challenges faced by marginalised communities. Registration £6.13. Organised by Stand Up To Racism: www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=705753268335746.

Revolution! Imperialism and the political crisis

Sunday February 18, 12 noon to 5.30pm: Conference, SOAS University of London, 10 Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Israel's assaults on Gaza and the West Bank have created a global crisis. Millions have taken to the streets and the risk of a wider war grows by the day. Speakers will discuss the causes and consequences of this crisis and how to strengthen resistance. Registration £15 (£5). Organised by Counterfire: www.facebook.com/events/235140999630540.

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.

FREE SPEECH

How crybullying works

Politics should have no 'safe spaces'. Sob stories about 'anti-Semitism' on campus strike at a weak point in contemporary left politics, argues Paul Demarty

Pity poor Tabytha Shapps. Not only does she have a name like someone out of a fifth-rate costume drama; not only is her father a certain inescapable Tory minister, Grant Shapps. (My own father mused the other day that perhaps she could take a page out of her daddy's book, and adopt a number of different names for her nefarious purposes.) Worse than all that: she just doesn't feel safe! As a Jewish student at Leeds University, the atmosphere is apparently quite chilling. A *Daily Telegraph* piece on her ordeal carries the headline: "Defence secretary's daughter felt 'unsafe' at university after anti-Semitic chants".¹

The details are quite disturbing (!): "she was intimidated by people marching through campus shouting, 'From the river to the sea' and displaying placards with the message, 'End Israeli state terror', in protest at the conflict in Gaza". How can a young woman ever feel safe if a faraway nuclear-armed country cannot pile high corpses supposedly in her name, eh? But if only it had ended at the door of the seminar room. She felt "compelled" to drop a module on the Israel-Palestine conflict when another student "talked about 'Israeli apartheid and Israel's agenda as a genocidal state'". It is certainly unfair, in today's university system, to expect a student to actually learn anything.

There is not much more to her case than that. We have had no end of such stories - mostly from the United States - detailing the suffering of 'Jewish students' (in reality, Zionist students) as they must find the inner strength to deal with the fact that the average college kid holds views on the Israeli occupation and now the butchery of Gaza diametrically opposed to theirs. Doesn't everyone deserve a 'safe' environment to learn? (Except the 9,000-odd dead Gazan children, of course, who somehow deserve instead the grave.)

In the States, this endless deluge of crybullying and whataboutery has reached its zenith with the ouster of Harvard president Claudine Gay, who had the temerity to not immediately outlaw Palestinian activism on her campus, and to not immediately capitulate to questioning of the 'When did you stop beating your wife?' variety at a ridiculous congressional kangaroo hearing in early December. The oppo researchers of the Israel lobby duly went to work, and found evidence of plagiarism in Gay's academic papers, which was duly used to force her ouster. They do, of course, have her bang to rights; but how odd it is that they have her so only *now*.

Purposes

These nonsensical non-stories have a couple of purposes. The first is to hijack the news agenda. The flattening of Gaza is pushed aside to make room for endless litigation of university politics, of all things; it is particularly egregious when the 'scandal' affects an elite school like Harvard, whereupon we are supposed to nod along sympathetically to the sob-stories of entitled, whining children. 'Never mind the thousands blown to pieces by 2,000-pound bombs; what about *my* pain?' they ask, before melodramatically dropping to the couch like fainting goats. Yes, Tabytha Shapps is the real victim here, having been given such a worthless moral education by



Ben Chacko and November's CAA march: problematic when it comes to Zionism

her grasping father that she is unable to conceive of suffering except in the first person.

Far worse than her, however, are her enablers. By degrees, some of the liberal media have been forced to acknowledge the painfully obvious reality that Israel's goal is rather grander in scope than the mere elimination of Hamas. Its ministers have too much a habit of stating plainly that they intend to, at best, ship vast numbers of displaced Gazans as far away as possible. Leaks suggest the perpetually war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, about which Shapps *père* knows a thing or two. For those who cannot satisfy their purported vocation as journalists, and first of all describe accurately and in due proportion the things going on in the world (*Torygraph* hacks very much included), there is only one option available: talk about literally anything else, and make the Gaza massacre a mere background rattle to the 'real' story of our own national psychodrama.

There is a more insidious purpose, of course. It has not escaped the notice of leftwing commentary that the very same people denouncing the 'outrages' at Harvard, Leeds, etc, powerhosing us with crocodile tears, have spent the last years ranting about cancel culture, liberal intolerance, and similar pathologies of the left. The hypocrisy is as astounding as it is obvious; but, as we have had cause to argue recently, explicable in terms of the way ruling ideologies work under capitalism.²

Yet, supposing the hypocrisy causes no cognitive dissonance against the erstwhile defenders of free speech on campus - which it clearly does not - it is a very *useful* argument, precisely because the liberals and the left *really* have embarked on a political course that leaves them vulnerable to this kind of political ratfucking. The view is very common nowadays that a non-negotiable political requirement

is the 'safety' of participants, and that such safety is to be measured by the subjective feelings of the alleged victim. Of course, we have only the word of the 'victim' to go by, and in the course of history people have been known to lie from time to time. They have also been known to be wrong: the question of whether someone's 'safety' is *really* threatened is bracketed by this procedure.

Back in 2016, we recall, Imogen Wilson - a sabbatical officer for Edinburgh student's union - was denounced by leftwing fellow students for throwing up her hands in exasperation during a debate. At that time, it had become common practice to ban clapping and all demonstrative hand-gestures during debates because these could be conceived as threatening in some way. (We seem to recall that this in turn led to a backlash, since it was also the cresting wave of autism activism, and the autists objected that this amounted to a ban on stimming; but leave that aside.) We pick out this incident because the meeting went on to discuss a boycott, divestment and sanctions motion, and indeed did adopt it - over the objections of Wilson, who was a Zionist.³

Now the boot is on the other foot, it is profoundly difficult for the left to argue convincingly on the ground of procedural democracy. In adopting this politics of deference to people's (alleged) feelings, the left exposed *itself* to symmetrical accusations of hypocrisy. My own sarcastic remarks on the anti-cancel-culture crowd above are mirrored exactly by many a centrist and rightwing commentator - 'Oh, *now* you lefties decide that cancel culture exists; how convenient!'

Yet more insidiously, given the choice between fighting the oppression (and now mass murder) of the Palestinian people and bureaucratic safetyism, many choose the latter. They take claims of 'feeling unsafe' as *dispositive*

evidence for the supposed scourge of "leftwing anti-Semitism". This was already the case back in 2016. A couple of months after Imogen Wilson's ordeal, Ken Livingstone was suspended from the Labour Party for asserting that Hitler supported Zionism for a time. This is incorrect in detail - Hitler showed no interest, but many senior Nazis did, including even Reinhard Heydrich, later the architect of the holocaust. It was not on the point of fact that he was 'cancelled', however, but on the sheer 'offensiveness' of bringing up this discreditable episode.

Zionism problem

The left did not universally rush to Livingstone's defence, despite the obvious stakes - that he was a major scalp in an attempt to render pro-Palestinian politics inadmissible in the Labour Party. The *Morning Star* published many articles of, at best, equivocal character. Liz Davies and Sue Lukes accused him of "victim-blaming" - another identitarian cardinal sin that, at this point, has basically reached the point of total meaninglessness. Editorials pulled their punches.⁴

At some subsequent point, the Communist Party of Britain, which in effect publishes the *Star*, began to mandate 'anti-Semitism awareness' training. Some of its members, notably Mary Davis, are clearly soft-Zionists of some description - apparently not a problem in this monolithic 'party of a new type'. Though the *Star* in the present situation supports the Palestinians on its standard social-pacifist lines, it also continues its panic-mongering about anti-Semitism.

An editorial of November 2 urged the left to "confront surging anti-Semitism", citing without any critical analysis figures from the Community Security Trust, which reported 900 incidents in the month of October. Around 200 of these concerned somewhat concrete categories of attacks, including

assaults and property damage. The rest were indeterminate "abuse" (which, to organisations like the CST, *certainly* includes the sort of stuff Tabytha Shapps is currently whining about). To be blunt: no paper that considers itself an opponent of imperialism should be taking seriously these kinds of entirely unverifiable shock statistics, which are invariably wheeled out whenever Israel is a matter of public controversy.

A later editorial (of November 26), on the occasion of the Campaign Against Anti-Semitism march in late November, further urged the left to take this 'problem' seriously. It acknowledged that the demonstration was rightwing in its politics, especially in the context of the Gaza slaughter. Yet "we must reject any hierarchy of racisms" - another vacuous identitarian cliché, which is ultimately ignored in practice (see the adoption of the term "black and indigenous people of colour", or 'BIPOC' in the US, to address the gaping disparity of interests between, say, the black people of Detroit and the elite-professional South Asian immigrants in the north-east and Silicon Valley, but without mentioning *class*).

The *Star* editor writes:

The left must also work to earn the confidence of Jewish communities that we will not tolerate any expression of anti-Semitism. That does not mean failing to challenge malicious accusations like so many levelled at Corbyn and his supporters. It does mean calling out conspiracy theories, rejecting any conflation of Jewish people with the actions of the state of Israel, and confronting those who from ignorance or prejudice perpetuate tropes about Jews' supposed financial or political influence.

On the face of it, this is reasonable - banal, even. The problem is that "malicious accusations" very frequently *consist of* false accusation of conspiracy theorising, conflation of Israel and Judaism, and so forth. The idea that people attached to the Israeli embassy played a key role in witch-hunting the National Union of Students is easily presented as a conspiracy theory; but it also happens to be true, as demonstrated by *al-Jazeera* later.

You can only stand firm by *rejecting* the right of Zionist lobby groups to set where the line is, and by extension, you can only do so by *rejecting* the idea that self-appointed representative organisations of the oppressed have an inviolable right to narrate their own oppression. That idea is nowadays summarised in the slogan, 'Nothing about us, without us': the left's inability to resist the Zionist ideological assault is where that slogan leads ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

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USA

Showing exceptional weakness

Claudine Gay wants to defend the status quo against the radical right. But since the status quo is indefensible, it's a lost cause, says Daniel Lazare

The rightwing offensive that brought Claudine Gay down as president of Harvard shows two things. One is that Donald Trump's 'Make America Great Again' movement continues going from strength to strength. The other is that liberals are powerless to stop it. Everything they do seems to make matters worse.

This became clear on December 5 when Gay, a 54-year-old sociologist who had acceded to Harvard's top role only five months earlier, testified before a House of Representatives committee about campus anti-Semitism. With her were two other university presidents, Liz Magill of the University of Pennsylvania, who would also be forced to step down, and Sally Kornbluth of MIT, who is so far holding onto her job.

The setting could not have been more hostile. Just a few hours later, the House would approve by 311 to 14, with 92 Democratic abstentions, a resolution equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. After calling for a minute of silence in behalf of "all the Israelis and others who have been killed, injured, or taken hostage by Hamas terrorists," Virginia Foxx, the ultra-right Virginia congresswoman in charge of the hearing, informed the witnesses that they would get "a chance to answer to and atone for the many specific instances of vitriolic hate-filled anti-Semitism on your respective campuses that have denied students the safe learning environment they're due."

"Institutional anti-Semitism and hate are among the poisoned fruits of your institutions' cultures," she went on, in her best hanging-judge style. As one might expect, no mention was made of the thousands of Palestinian civilians who have perished from Israeli bombs.

Bad as this was, the three university presidents made matters worse by agreeing at the outset that "Israel has a right to exist as a Jewish nation" - not as a Hebrew-speaking people, that is, with all the democratic rights any such population is entitled to, but as a religious state.

Theocracy

This placed anyone who dares question Israeli theocracy beyond the pale. Pro-Palestinian protesters are thus guilty before they even take to the streets because they oppose the Jewish supremacy that Jewish statehood necessarily implies. Or so both sides seemed to concur.

Things went even further downhill an hour and a half later when Elise Stefanik, a Republican congresswoman from upstate New York, got five minutes to question Gay head on. The results were not pretty:

Stefanik: Dr Gay, a Harvard student calling for the mass murder of African-Americans is not protected free speech at Harvard, correct?

Gay: Our commitment to free speech ...

Stefanik (raising her voice): It's a yes-or-no question. Is that ... OK for students to call for the mass murder of African-Americans at Harvard? Is that protected free speech?

Gay: Our commitment to free speech ...

Stefanik: It's a yes-or-no question.

Did we mention that Gay, the 53-year-



Claudine Gay: plagiarism

old daughter of Haitian immigrants, is black? The racially provocative nature of Stefanik's questioning was all too apparent. The interrogation went on:

Stefanik: You are president of Harvard, so I assume you're familiar with the term "intifada", correct?

Gay: I've heard that term, yes.

Stefanik: And you understand that the use of the term *intifada* in the context of the Israeli-Arab conflict is indeed a call for violent armed resistance against the state of Israel, including violence against civilians and the genocide of Jews. Are you aware of that?

Gay: That type of hateful speech is personally abhorrent to me.

Stefanik: And there have been multiple marches at Harvard with students chanting, "There is only one solution, *intifada* revolution," and, "Globalize the *intifada*". Is that correct?

Gay: I've heard that thoughtless, reckless, and hateful language on our campus, yes.

Stefanik: So, based upon your testimony, you understand that this call for *intifada* is to commit genocide against the Jewish people in Israel and globally, correct?

Gay: I will say again, that type of hateful speech is personally abhorrent to me.

Stefanik: Do you believe that type of hateful speech is contrary to Harvard's code of conduct or is it allowed at Harvard?

Gay: It is at odds with the values of Harvard.

And so on, as Gay conceded point after point while falling back on the constitutional formula that pro-Palestinian speech is protected, no matter how offensive, abhorrent, etc, until and unless it crosses over into outright harassment.

So while calling for rebellion or uprising, the literal meaning of "intifada", threatens Jews worldwide, it is still permissible - if barely - only because the US constitution says so. Otherwise, it's not the sort of thing that any decent person would want to hear, especially a president of Harvard. Instead of standing up for the rights of the oppressed, Gay

through Charlottesville, Virginia. It was just three years after Robert Gregory Bowers blamed the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society for the same thing, before killing eleven people at a Pittsburgh synagogue. "HIAS likes to bring invaders in that kill our people", he posted minutes before the assault. "I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in."

Calling for *intifada* is impermissible because it makes Zionists nervous. But trumpeting the "Great Replacement" is fine, even though it makes Jews dead.

Finally, there's a third reason why Gay's downfall was such a triumph: Harvard. It would take yet another volume to fully explain why Harvard offers such rich pickings for the radical right. The oldest university in America, it's not only an intellectual powerhouse but, with its \$50.6 billion endowment, a key element in the US class structure. Students who achieve the near-impossible feat of getting in - the admissions rate is a scant 3.2% - earn a median salary of \$129,000 a year within a decade of receiving their baccalaureate, 58% more than what other college grads make.³ Once on the job market, they're able to tap into an ultra-powerful network that includes four Supreme Court justices, seven members of Joe Biden's cabinet, plus 41 Fortune-500 CEO's, nearly twice as many as that of any other university.⁴

Elitism

If Harvard elitism didn't exist, Republican populists would have to invent it. Harvard is also a liberal stronghold, which makes it a near-irresistible target as well. According to a 2018 survey, 83% of Harvard faculty describe themselves as liberal or very liberal, while only 3% thought Trump was doing a good or even a passable job.⁵ Democrats, of course, will reply that all this means is that Harvard professors are smart enough to recognize presidential incompetence when they see it. But it doesn't explain why 73% supported Hillary Clinton, according to the same survey, even though she's been a marvel of incompetence ever since voting for the invasion of Iraq in 2003, for military intervention in Libya in 2011, or for military aid for Syrian rebels led by Al Qaeda beginning in 2012.

It also doesn't explain the many "woke" excesses that play straight into Republican hands. In 2019, Harvard dismissed law prof Ronald Sullivan as dean of Winthrop House, a famous residential dormitory, merely because he had joined a legal team defending Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein against sexual-assault charges. (The dismissal earned a sharp rebuke from the American Civil Liberties Union.)⁶ In 2021, a director of a Harvard "diversity and inclusion task force" denounced an evolutionary biologist named Carole Hooven as "transphobic and hateful", after she declared in a TV interview:

The facts are that there are ... two sexes ... there are male and female, and those sexes are designated by the kinds of gametes we produce ... The ideology seems to be that biology really isn't as important as how somebody feels about themselves or feels their sex to be, but we can treat people with respect and respect their gender identities and use their preferred

pronouns, so understanding the facts about biology doesn't prevent us from treating people with respect.⁷

Ostracized by her fellow researchers and all but abandoned by the university, Hooven resigned. In January 2023, Harvard withdrew a fellowship offer to Kenneth Roth, former executive director of Human Rights Watch, because he had criticised Israel. (The decision was reversed following an outcry.)⁸ How could Republicans resist sailing into an institution like this? And how could growing numbers of Trump supporters resist cheering from the sidelines?

But while Gay might have been able to survive the episode, what brought her down in the end was the question of plagiarism, ie, the fact that she had used entire blocks of text without attribution and with only minimal word changes. John McWhorter, a Columbia professor of linguistics, wrote in the *New York Times* that her use of unattributed material "qualifies less as stealing argumentation than as messy." But he argued that she should still go because the "problem runs through about half of Dr Gay's articles, as well as her [PhD] dissertation."⁹

Perhaps. Still, it's clear that if Gay got into trouble for three reasons - failure to crack down on pro-Palestinian protests, failure to footnote, and standing for an institution that Americans increasingly resent - the first was the real reason for her dismissal, the second was just an excuse, and the third is why her performance on December 5 was so dismal. It's difficult to imagine her not agreeing that the Jewish state is sacrosanct. After all, a Harvard president's duty is to shore up the imperial line. But after offering her head in such a fashion, it was inevitable that Republicans would tighten the noose.

"My hope is that by stepping down I will deny demagogues the opportunity to further weaponize my presidency in their campaign to undermine the ideals animating Harvard since its founding: excellence, openness, independence, truth", Gay wrote in a farewell op-ed in the *Times*. "... This was merely a single skirmish in a broader war to unravel public faith in pillars of American society."¹⁰

But that's the problem. Faith in American institutions is rapidly unravelling. Claudine Gay wants to defend the status quo against the radical right. But since the status quo is indefensible, it's a lost cause ●

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POLLS

Preparing for disillusionment

Losing ground badly in the polls, facing more by-election defeats, and with Reform UK breathing down his neck, it is not surprising that Rishi Sunak wants to go for a late election, writes **Eddie Ford**

Not astonishing many people, during a visit last week to a youth centre in Mansfield, Rishi Sunak told journalists that it was his “working assumption” that the general election would be held in the latter part of the year - not the spring, as some want or hope. Looks like Suella Braverman or one of her co-thinkers on the Tory right will have to wait a bit longer to have a stab at becoming the new Conservative leader.

Of course, as all readers know, the exact date of the election is entirely in Sunak’s hands after the repeal in 2022 of the Fixed-Term Parliaments Act. Technically speaking, with December 17 2024 being exactly five years since parliament first met after the last general election, the latest date possible for the next general is Thursday January 23 next year.

Emily Thornberry, Labour’s shadow attorney general, has been going around recently saying a May election was “the worst kept secret” in Westminster. But she is just playing political games, of course, presumably trying to embed the idea that an earlier election was inevitable, so Sunak could then be accused of ‘cowardice’, should he go for a later election - which he appears to be doing. On the other hand, some conspiracy theorists believe the “working assumption” is a deliberate bluff to catch Labour out! The recent decision to hold the spring budget on March 6 inevitably excited speculation about an early election. Yes, it is true that 10 of the last 11 general elections have taken place in spring or early summer, six of these held jointly with local elections, thus reducing the costs. On this basis, the august Institute of Government claims that spring is the “likely date” for a general election.

Pompous

Yet this is a slightly daft argument, as it leaves out the role of *politics* - quite an oversight for a body concerned with governmental matters. Naturally, various Labour shadow ministers have levelled rather pompous accusations against Sunak for his seeming decision to hold a late election - “running scared” “taking fright”, “hiding”, being “weak”, and so on. But why would a prime minister that some bookies currently rank as having a 10-1 chance of retaining his office voluntarily cut short his premiership by six months? Sounds like a pointless gamble - just look at the recent polls. For example, in a pretty representative survey taken only a few days ago. Labour was on 46% (+3), Tories 22% (-2), Lib Dems 10% (no change), Reform 9% (-1), Greens 7% (-1).¹ Nearly all other polls have consistently shown Labour having a 20-point or more lead for quite a while.

At the end of the day, Sunak has not been in office very long and is clearly hoping Micawber-style that something will turn up, even if it has to be something fairly miraculous at this stage. What else can he do? More to the point, Labour would probably do exactly the same if it was in a similar position - ditto the Liberal Democrats. Making matters worse for Sunak, his election announcement could not have been timed worse, as he was speaking exactly one year after he declared his five pledges to the British people: halving inflation, growing the economy, reducing national debt, cutting NHS waiting



Rishi Sunak meets Italian PM Giorgia Meloni: both far right

lists and stopping small boats. Not going so well, is it, Rishi? Only one of these has been met, with the inflation rate falling from 10.7% to 3.9% in November, but that would almost certainly have happened anyway - nothing to do with governmental policy or the brilliance of the prime minister. Given these circumstances, over *what* would he call a snap election?

Meanwhile, in a desperate attempt to force events, Lib Dem leader Ed Davey said at a rally in Surrey that his party would put forward a bill to reinstate legislation that requires a general election to be held on the first Thursday in May in the fifth year after the last polling day. Even Davey though has conceded that this attempt was a “long shot” - as in ‘never going to happen’, as it would require the backing of both the Tories and Labour.

Adding to the woes of the prime minister is the fact that he faces the possibility of three difficult by-elections. Last week Chris Skidmore, the Tory MP for Kingswood and party whip, announced his resignation in protest over Sunak’s bill over new oil and gas licences, describing it as a “tragedy”. Labour looks likely to chalk up another victory in a seat that had an 11,220 majority in the last general election. Sunak also risks losing Blackpool South, as a by-election looks very likely, with the sitting MP, Scott Benton, facing a Commons suspension for a “very serious breach” of standards rules - meaning that Labour should easily reclaim a seat that has a majority

of less than 4,000 votes. A third by-election also hands Sir Keir another chance to win a seat that would have been beyond his party’s reach until recently - this time in Wellington, where Peter Bone was the subject of a recall petition after he was suspended from parliament (he was found to have bullied and harassed a member of staff). In its wisdom, the party chose his partner, Helen Harrison, as the candidate to replace him. Should Labour win Wellingborough where Bone had a 18,540 majority at the last election, which seems possible, it would immensely boost Starmer’s argument that he is cutting deep into Tory territory and on course to become the new prime minister.

Furthermore, even before those by-elections are held, Sunak will be plunged back into a new row this week over his flagship Rwanda bill - now redesigned, at least allegedly, to ensure he can deport asylum-seekers to the east African state designated by the government as a ‘safe country’. Votes and amendments will take place later this month, and it might not go well for the prime minister - the bill could be voted down by members of the ‘five families’ stretching from the right to the left of the Tory Party.

Reform UK

If that was not enough for Sunak, he now has the looming shape of Reform UK - Nigel Farage’s Brexit Party in a new guise. As the above YouGov shows, it has the potential to eat badly into the Tory vote. In fact, some polls have had Reform hitting the

11% mark - more than enough to do serious damage to any chance that the Conservatives might somehow get re-elected by an astounding quirk of the first-past-the-post electoral system.

Actually, when you look at Reform UK, the polling is quite remarkable in many ways, given that its chairman/leader, Richard Tice, is hardly a household name - unlike Farage, the party’s honorary president and recent participant in *I’m a celebrity, get me out of here!* That is why, when YouGov asked voters how they would vote if Farage was Reform’s leader, rather than Tice, the number went up to 14% and the Tory vote share went down by 1%. Of course, Reform - just like the Tories - is not a democratic organisation even on the most basic level: it operates as a *limited company*: hence whoever has the most shares calls the shots. That is why Nigel Farage can stage a comeback, as he does not have to rely on the rank and file, who no doubt would greet him with open arms anyway. But he has made a considerable investment in the party, just like Tice, who is a multi-millionaire businessman. As for the Tories, just look at their conferences - when has there ever been a vote? Indeed, you can say exactly the same about the bourgeoisie as a whole. The idea that it supports one-person-one-vote is entirely risible, no, it is one-share-one-vote.

Logically enough, this brings us to the *Morning Star*’s recent comments on Reform UK. Strangely, it tells us that the reason why Reform is doing

so well is because of Sir Keir. Come again, do they ever look at the opinion polls or recent by-election results? This is all part of the silly leftwing narrative about Starmer being useless, which in its most extreme form says that he does not want to win the next election or become prime minister. Wake up, comrades - Labour is on 46%! As an analysis, blaming Starmer for Reform’s comparative success does not work. Yes, undeniably, Labour is furiously triangulating away, therefore broadly following the Tory agenda - especially on the migration question, which the Tories are pushing hard. But this is fertile ground for Reform, which has an easy reply to the Tories - you claim to be clamping down on the small boats, but look at the results. OK, they have gone down a bit recently, but historically they are at the highest levels ever. Of course, the real reason for this is that people used to come over by other means - such as on the back of trucks, or whatever. But never mind the facts.

Star turn

Again, in the context of Reform UK, the *Star* worries that Britain is not immune to the far-right “contagion”. Look at the government: it *is* the far right! Have they not seen the pictures of Rishi Sunak and Giorgia Meloni embracing in a “love-burst” because they have so much in common, particularly when it comes to immigration - with the Italian prime minister gushing to the British premier about how “your priorities are also mine”.² She is a former fascist who is *proud* of those origins. Nor should we forget good old Call Me Dave Cameron in 2009 leaving the centre right bloc in the European Union parliament to set up a hard-right cum far-right populist bloc: the European Conservatives and Reformists.

Having said all that, it is important to remember that Reform is essentially a wing of the Tory Party, albeit in exile. Tice himself has been a donor and member of the Conservative Party for most of his adult life, his natural home, so it is quite right to be sceptical about his stated ambition of standing in *every* constituency to “make sure” that the Tories lose. Then there is Farage - another natural Tory, it goes without saying. Star visitor at the last Tory Party conference, dancing with Priti Patel at the evening ball, he might rejoin the Tories with a view to becoming leader - certainly not impossible.

On the assumption that we have a Starmer government this year, you can equally bet that it will not go swimmingly well - the NHS, schools, social services, etc will not find themselves awash with money. Sir Keir has promised it will not be like that, and there is no reason not to believe him - things will be grim and horrible, and this is without any major world event or external factors to make things even worse. People will quickly get fed up and those who had any illusions will lose them. As night follows day, that prepares the ground for an even more rightwing Tory Party - perhaps with Braverman or Farage at the helm ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

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WEBINAR

How Britain helped create Israel

Tony Greenstein and Thomas Suarez discussed 'The Ottoman Empire, the 1917 Balfour Declaration and Zionism before 1948'. Kenneth Syme reports on the December 21 Why Marx? webinar



Jewish Settlement Police during the 1936-39 Arab revolt

Tony Greenstein, author of *Zionism during the Holocaust*, began by briefly outlining the history of the Ottoman Empire in order to provide the context for the Balfour Declaration's appearance in 1917 during World War I.

The Ottoman Empire conquered Syria (modern Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine) in 1516 and ruled vast swathes of Europe and the Middle East (including Palestine) until its collapse during (and in part as a consequence of) World War I in 1917. The crucial date for Palestine was 1858, which saw the introduction of the Land Code¹ and began the move from collective ownership of land to individual registration (and confiscation) of land previously owned by communities - a pattern that would be later repeated by the Zionists after 1948. The Land Law also introduced western capitalist practices into the Ottoman Empire, and many Palestinians could not afford the rent required under the new legislation, with land often passing into the ownership of absentee landlords in Lebanon. European powers used religious interests - their favourite churches - to exert political leverage over the Ottoman Empire by buying up large tracts of land.

Emigration of Jews to Palestine significantly increased in 1882 after the Odessa pogroms - earlier Jewish settlements in 1878 had not been economically viable and were 'rescued' by Baron Rothschild. The difference between these settlements and the later Zionist settlements of 1904 was that while the first settlers and administrators did not want to work on the land themselves, but were content to employ Palestinians as cheap labour, the second wave evicted the Palestinians and worked the land themselves.

Consequently, explained comrade Greenstein, a number of settlers were assassinated and this in turn led to the formation of a number of Jewish Zionist militias, including

Haganah, which in 1920 became the main Zionist terror army, heavily influenced by the Histadrut (General Federation of Labour) and continued to be active until 1948. The role of the left, or labour, under Zionism was quite specific: after some debate a faction led by Ben Gurion successfully argued that socialism only applied to those currently employed at the time (Jews) and therefore did not include Palestinians - an early example of Zionist apartheid.

Ottomans

Occasionally, the Ottoman Empire would put restrictions on the activities of Zionist circles, but these were not always enforced, often because of representations from European powers using the leverage they had established over the Ottoman Empire.

In the course of World War I (where the Ottoman Empire sided with Germany and Austria-Hungary) the British promised independence to the Arabs. In 1917, however, Lloyd George's war cabinet approved the Balfour Declaration², which effectively gave the Zionists Palestinian land which the British did not own, betraying the promises made to Faisal Hussein by the British government and Lawrence of Arabia in negotiations between 1915 and 1916.

British double-dealing was compounded by the Sykes-Picot agreement, which arbitrarily divided up the rest of the Middle East, creating problems throughout the region - the British and French were entirely ignorant of the peoples that inhabited that part of the world.

Ironically, British Jews, including the then British Board of Deputies, were opposed to the Balfour Declaration and within Lloyd George's war cabinet the only opposition came from its sole Jewish member, Edwin Montagu. After the war, the League of British Jews was formed in order to oppose the Balfour Declaration and

Zionist settlement of Palestine. In the decade after the Declaration, there was a significant political opposition to it within the British establishment. The House of Lords passed a motion opposing it. Many felt it was a waste of money - why pay yet more to support Jews?

Others, like Churchill, saw strategic benefits. Greenstein outlined that among the many reasons, protection of the Suez Canal (best route to India - the 'jewel in the crown' of the British Empire) is the most likely rationale behind it - a view shared by Chaim Weizmann. As always, anti-Semites supported Zionism - it promised to provide a home for their unwanted Jews.

The Balfour Declaration led to the Palestine mandate, which ran from 1922 to 1948. Balfour himself, known as 'Bloody Balfour' because of the shooting of Irish demonstrators during his tenure as secretary of state for Ireland, was a committed imperialist and motivated solely by pursuit of what he thought to be the best interests of the British Empire, with a policy of divide-and-rule to control, as he thought, the Jews and Arabs. The Zionists successfully fought to prevent the establishment of a separate legislative assembly for the Palestinians, thus ensuring Palestinians were kept in a subordinate position with no effective mechanisms for establishing their rights.

Comrade Greenstein explained that during the Palestine mandate, 40,000 Zionists - who made up half of the Jewish population - were responsible for most of the assassinations and terrorism during that period. In fact, the majority of the victims of Zionist assassination were other Jews, not the British or the Palestinians. The Palestinians to a large degree adopted a policy of tolerating the oppression, on the basis that any significant attempt at self-defence or retaliation would be used as an excuse for further Zionist attacks.

The Hope-Simpson Enquiry,

published in 1930, upheld the Palestinian perspective on Zionist atrocities - the only dissenting member of the enquiry was from the British Labour Party, 'foreshadowing the open Zionism espoused by Keir Starmer', said comrade Greenstein.

Despite the findings of the enquiry, the British continued to prepare, train and arm the Zionist militias so that in 1939 they were able to form the Jewish Settlement Police, heavily dependent on Haganah. Ultimately this enabled the Zionists to have sufficient strength to orchestrate the Nakba in 1948.

Biblical myths

Thomas Suarez, author of *Palestine hijacked: how Zionism forged an apartheid state from river to sea*, commented by condemning the Zionist idea that because there had never been a Palestinian state, what was happening in Gaza now was somehow justified. He saw this as harking back to the 19th century notion of the nation-state as the 'gold standard' and also pointed out the absurdity of viewing the Hebrew lands of the Old Testament as the basis of a 'nation-state'.

Tom reiterated that anti-Semitism was exploited by the Zionists, explaining that in 1916 Britain was not doing so well in World War I, at which point the Zionists decided to exploit the British anti-Semitic notion that the Jews were an international cabal controlling world affairs. He read out an extract from a December 1916 letter by Sir Edward Grey, Balfour's predecessor as foreign secretary. Grey had expressed the fear that the indifference or hostility of the Jewish race to the British would prove a deadweight against it in the war; he cited an Alexandrine Jew who asserted that if only Britain were to give Palestine to the Jews, then it would gain all the support it needed to win the war. Tom admitted it was unclear how far the British believed this, but thought it might have contributed to the creation of

the Balfour Declaration.

Tom went on to discuss Zionism as 'marketing'. Although not ultimately religious, it used a messianic philosophy and emphasised its 'biblical roots' to legitimise its demand for a Jewish homeland. They needed the name 'Israel' or 'Judea' as a key element of the brand. That was also the reason for choosing Hebrew as the vernacular, not Ladino or German. Indeed there were pogroms against settlers for speaking and writing in German.

The idea that Palestinians reject the opportunity of a state was another myth, said Suarez. The Palestinians recognised that partition was something the Jews wanted in order to legitimise themselves as a state - with no intention of honouring the partition of the land. Initially, Jews were given 55% of the territory, on the assumption that this might pacify them sufficiently to at least put off their attempt to annex even more of the land. In the event, this proved a forlorn hope. The Palestinians recognised partition as a scam.

A single-state solution had been considered, but was rejected on the grounds that it would unleash an uncontrollable wave of Zionist terrorism, a terrorism which 100,000 British troops had failed to subdue.

After the initial contributions from the two speakers there was a lively discussion and additional questions, including why America maintained its loyalty to Israel despite the apparent expense of doing so ●

Sessions take place every Thursday at 7pm on Zoom, registration via whymarx.com. Speakers in the series include Ian Spencer, Yassamine Mather, Mike Macnair, Ghada Karmi and others.

Notes

1. www.britannica.com/place/Palestine/The-Crusades#ref478921.
2. www1.udel.edu/History-old/figal/Hist104/assets/pdf/readings/14balfour.pdf.

PALESTINE



After October 7

The war in Gaza has to be put in regional, global and historic context. **Moshé Machover** talked to **Yassamine Mather** at a Voice of Revolution meeting held online on December 20

YM: I'm very pleased today to introduce and ask questions of Moshé Machover - an old-time comrade and friend of the Iranian working class long before I knew him. Moshé is a mathematician, philosopher and a political activist. He is noted not just for his writings against Zionism, but also for very valuable work on political economy. Born to a Jewish family when the British mandate of Palestine was in force, he's a founder-member of Matzpen, the Israeli socialist organisation that was set up in 1962.

He is also the author of a number of books, but I'm only going to mention two that have to do with political economy: *How labour powers the global economy*, with Emmanuel Farjoun and David Zachariah, and *Laws of chaos: a probabilistic approach to political economy* - again with Emmanuel Farjoun.

Welcome, Moshé, and I would like to ask you about the inevitability of events in Gaza that have created such a disaster for the region.

MM: The disaster is going on and I am afraid that it is going to go on for a while, because the Israeli leadership is not going to stop any time soon. They have reasons to prolong it.

First of all, I want to mention that the main aim of this war has become not the one that is declared for international consumption: to eradicate, eliminate, destroy Hamas. This is a convenient official aim, because it is limitless. But there is no

end to it: a complete elimination of Hamas is not going to happen, ever. But in my opinion the real aim of the war is ethnic cleansing, and this is happening in front of our eyes.

No-one who sees the horror of what is happening - the scale of dislocation, the scale of hunger and thirst, and the scale of destruction - can deny that this is actually ethnic cleansing in action. But the question with ethnic cleansing is where will the two million Gazan people go? I think (and looking here at the experience of the Nakba of 1948), the Israeli leadership would prefer the Palestinians of Gaza to, as it were, ethnically cleanse themselves - to do it of their own accord. They are creating conditions which are so unbearable that people, in the end, are forced to flee.

This, by the way, is in line with the long-term aim of the Zionist project: to create a Jewish state in the whole of Palestine. But a really stable Jewish state requires a Jewish majority, which in turn requires ethnic cleansing of the large number of Palestinians from this area.

I could add that I've been predicting ethnic cleansing for several years now, based on this logic. But I did not predict, of course, that this would start in Gaza, and in this respect the Israeli leadership has always been opportunistic. They will accept any opportunity that falls into their lap, that can be used to further the aims of Zionism.

So the onslaught by Hamas on October 7 gave them the excuse,

Bill Clinton brings Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat together to agree a fake two-state solution that never could and was never intended to work

the pretext, to perpetrate, to achieve, what is in fact the long-term aim of the Zionist project.

YM: Can I ask you just as a follow-up how you would expect Egypt to react, because it clearly doesn't want a single Palestinian. I know ordinary Egyptians have been supporting the Palestinians and demonstrating in their favour, but Egypt is a military dictatorship. So how would you see it reacting? I know this is speculative, but they are not going to welcome these Palestinians: they are going to try to prevent it. But will they start shooting them, killing them, as Israel is doing in Gaza? Will the Israeli leadership care?

MM: The Israeli leadership will not care. They will say, 'It's not us who are doing it. We warned the Palestinians' - to move from areas of danger to areas of more danger, as they have been doing. Israel will claim that it's all the fault of Hamas, of Egypt, etc. Of course, this is not going to improve their relationship with Cairo, but I've heard talk of Egypt being compensated for accepting Palestinians by financial grants from the United States.

But Israel, I think, has plans for developing the Gaza Strip, where gas deposits appear to be huge. That may be used partly to compensate Egypt for accepting Palestinian refugees.

YM: What is the role of Vladimir Putin and Russia in all this? I know it's a side issue, but for Iran it is an important one, given the Islamic Republic's close relations with Russia.

MM: Surprisingly enough for some people, the relationship between the Netanyahu government and Russia has been quite cordial. Putin visited Israel not long ago and was warmly received.

First of all there is a big number of immigrants from Russia and from the former Soviet Union in Israel. They have quite fond memories and relations - they go back and forth to Russia. Putin has said that Israel is the only country where there is a big Russian-speaking community outside what used to be the Soviet Union.

But there are more solid grounds for this warm relationship and that is Syria. As people may know, the Russian airforce controls the sky over Syria. Israel has an interest in and makes frequent incursion into Syrian airspace. This is done to target the supply route between Iran and Lebanon, which goes through Syria.

There is a considerable Iranian presence in Syria, which Israel is keen to attack, but it cannot do this without permission from the Russians. It has a notification agreement with Russia in order to prevent accidental clashes between Israeli and Russian aircraft, which would be catastrophic, provoking an unwelcome international incident.

This coordination over Syrian airspace with Russia is necessary for the low-intensity war between Israel and Iran. So the relationship between Israel and Russia is an aspect, a derivative of this.

YM: I also wanted to ask your

opinion about what was and still is called the Axis of Resistance. And here I am confused, I think, because, on the one hand, the Iranian government denied any advance knowledge of the events of October 7. This seems to be correct - there were reports of some kind of disagreement, although I don't know how reliable they are.

When Putin visited Iran and met with ayatollah Ali Khamenei, he gave a kind of confusing message, which has been interpreted as a U-turn regarding Iran's position vis-a-vis the Israel-Palestine conflict. What he has said is that Iran does not call for the end of the Israeli state.

This has been interpreted by sections of Middle Eastern media as meaning that Iran is moving towards a two-state solution. Here, of course, Russia and China will be influential, and Iran is very much part of those discussions. I know that across the Middle East there has been some criticism of Iran's position. Have you any information about this?

MM: I think we should listen carefully to what people say and especially to the tone in which they say it - a lot can be deduced from open information. It is clear that both the Iranian leadership and Hezbollah were taken by surprise by October 7.

Secondly, I don't think that what Khamenei said is a big innovation. Internationally Iran has been misrepresented as saying that it would put an end to the state of Israel. Iran has said that it looks forward to the demise of Israel as a Zionist state, but it was taking the line that history would take care of things. I think Iran has made it clear that it will support any solution of the Palestinian problem that the Palestinian leadership would support.

And, by the way, this has also been said by Hamas, which has its own messianic view of what is going to happen in the long run. We know that Hamas has said it will accept any solution that the Palestinian people will agree to. But the policy of the Palestinian leadership in the West Bank - that is to say the Palestine Liberation Organisation leadership - is to accept a two-state solution, but that is not going to happen. It is an illusion. Israel is in no way going to allow it, yet this is the official policy of the so-called 'international community', of the Palestinian Authority and of the United States. I wrote in the 1970s an article explaining why a so-called two state solution was not going to happen, and I think my analysis was correct then and has been proven right.

As for the so-called Axis of Resistance, surprisingly the most active element are the Houthis, whose actions have been extremely effective in terms of repercussions worldwide. This reminds me of the oil-producing Arab states in 1973, when they actually caused a global crisis. Similarly the Houthis have stopped the traffic of oil through the Suez Canal, and have lengthened the supply routes by 20 days. Instead of going through the Suez Canal, the tankers have to go around the whole of Africa.

This is of enormous consequence. What the so-called 'international community' is going to do about it, is another question. Few would have speculated that the Houthis were going to step in. They have made certain noises, they have fired a few rockets towards Israel, but the effect is way beyond what people expected. It is way beyond what Hezbollah is doing (or Iran, for that matter). But, of course, the low-level war between Iran and Israel is going on all the time.

YM: That was well put, because it places the whole debate where it should be.

I was going to ask you about what people generally, at least in the Middle East and particularly in Iran perhaps, are saying about how far Israel is an extension of the US armaments industry. That is, how far it plays the role of selling what might be called 'illegal state security' to many of the allies of the 'international community': ie, of the United States.

MM: Oh, it's more than what you have defined it as. I think there is complete synergy between the United States arms industry, the military-industrial complex and the Israeli armaments and high-tech industry. The two should be taken together.

There are several aspects to it. First of all, in replying to the Israeli supply of spy software and various means of crowd control, there is a good book which I would like to recommend: *The war against the people* by Jeff Halper. I think it's about seven years old now, but it's still an interesting read, because the author goes into detail about Israel's supply not only of spyware and hardware, but also other means of controlling the masses, controlling demonstrations, controlling opposition and so on.

Israel's role in supplying spyware to various, mainly unpleasant, regimes is well known. I Googled 'Israel spyware' recently and you know how many entries I got? Nearly two million! This story is well known and I don't need to go into detail, as Israel has been caught red-handed doing it, and in some cases it even got slapped on the wrist by the US, because it sold some of the software to regimes that the United States did not necessarily approve of.

There is one aspect that goes beyond this. Israel's high-tech industry is intimately locked into the American military-industrial complex, and this translates into very sophisticated high-tech elements that Israel contributes to American weaponry. It specialises not in producing aircraft, but elements that are used in them - navigation equipment, weapon direction, etc. Now, anyone can produce unmanned drones, but Israel was a pioneer in producing drones both for spying and for assassination. This is very well-developed in Israel, which is locked into, and is very helpful to, the American industry.

One more thing - Israel is by far the biggest recipient of American aid, and was, before this current war, receiving \$3.5 to \$4 billion annually in wholly military aid. Israel long ago stopped receiving any other economic aid from the US, for which it has no need, but the Israeli military is in much need of this additional help and it is in fact a hidden subsidy from and to the US. How come? Because by agreement Israel is obliged to spend a lot of this military aid on American equipment - fighter planes, etc.

If Congress is asked to provide a direct subsidy to Israel, this might involve some questions, but when it is addressed as giving aid to our loyal junior partner in the Middle East, it sails through Congress without a problem. But in fact it is a hidden subsidy to the American military too.

YM: Very interesting. I learned a lot from that. You know very well that China in the last few years has pursued the policy of 'Belt and Road', where, according to the Chinese government, it invests without exploitation - but in reality the level of interest it gets is a form of exploitation. In the Middle East there is a lot of talk that India, some of the Arab Emirates and Israel are still in the process of building an alternative trading group in order to compete with China's Belt and Road. Is there any truth in this?

Of course, all of this would have

been pre-Gaza because relationships, even with Saudi Arabia, have soured. But was there any indication that there was such cooperation?

MM: I cannot answer that fully. I suspect there is. The relations between the Modi regime in India and the Israeli state are very close, both politically and ideologically. I could go on into the similarities between the ideology of the movement that Modi leads with Hindus and Zionist ideology, and this translates also into a close political relationship.

Additionally, of course, the hostility to Islam is common to both, so I wouldn't be surprised. I think Israel, as in the case with Russia, is trying to play an independent role vis-à-vis China. It would like to have a closer relationship with China than it actually does, but there is a limit to what Israel can do without angering the United States too much.

But, as in the case of Russia, it does proceed further than some other US allies. I think Israel is trying to play both sides, to create an alternative. Of course, it is thinking strategically and knows that the relationship between the United States and China is probably not going to improve in the next decade - especially given the likelihood of who is going to be the next American president! I think they are hedging their bets here.

YM: That covers a lot of what was suggested by comrades who asked me to pose these questions.

Earlier you mentioned gas and oil. Particularly in Iran many people are saying that Israel's takeover of Gaza is because that will give them access to gas and oil. I find this difficult to believe, because I would say the primary question here is ethnic cleansing. But, given the strength of these allegations amongst what I would call Middle East pundits, I would like to know what you think of these comments.

MM: I agree that this is not the main aim of the Israeli war at the moment, but it would come as a very welcome bonus for Israel to get control of these deposits, which are huge.

If you look at the maritime border between it and Lebanon, you see that Israel is now exploiting some gas deposits - areas on both sides of the line have deposits. This was an important issue which required a tacit agreement between Israel and Hezbollah, because Hezbollah is a powerful player in Lebanon's politics. They finally came to an agreement on how to divide these fields, but what has been discovered offshore near Gaza is far in excess of this. Recently it has been found to be a huge amount.

Now does this play a role in Israel's calculation? Of course, it does raise various questions: Will Israel be within international law? Will it be allowed to develop this asset? It cannot do this without the complicity of international conglomerates. It will need to make use of some of the big oil and gas corporations, which will not risk involving themselves in terms of breaking international law. So there will be many problems to solve, but I think the appetite is whetted.

YM: Thank you for the clarification.

Two more questions. Some time ago we saw protests in Israel about hostages, especially after the killing of the three Israeli hostages in Gaza. We have seen demonstrations that were more significant than previously. So what is the state of the Netanyahu government? Has he gained a lot of support because of the war, or have the protests, especially about the hostages and lack of preparation about October 7, played a negative role, as far as his political position is concerned? I'm well aware that, once the war finishes (if the war finishes!), he faces court cases for corruption, so I wondered if

you could talk about the state of the opposition in this context.

MM: This is very complex. Usually when there is a war it tends to unify a nation. In this case if you look at the Jewish majority of the citizens of Israel it has and it hasn't. Something like 80% think it is a just war, but they don't approve of all its conduct. Public opinion is deeply divided - I think that more or less half would say is that when the war ends we will get rid of the rascals who caused this catastrophe.

So, when the war ends, Netanyahu is going to face investigations - not only about his corruption, but also about his failure in political and military leadership, in terms of being properly prepared to use information about October 7 that was available but ignored. The opposition to the leadership is strengthened by the pressure of the relatives and supporters of the hostages still in the hands of Hamas. They notice that what Israel is doing is putting their relatives in big danger. The killing of the three escaped hostages by Israeli soldiers strengthen this view.

There are hundreds of these relatives who demand an end to the current hostilities because 'you are putting our dear ones in danger'. They now realise that this is a side effect of the murder of the three escaped hostages, which was murder in cold blood. The hostages came half naked, called for help in Hebrew and were waving a white flag. But we only heard about it because they happened to be Israelis. But it tells you what the Israeli military is doing to Palestinians in the streets of Gaza.

The Israeli military leadership says that these murderers were acting against explicit instructions about how to open fire. But this is a lie. They are not going to put these murderers on trial. There is no plan to. Why? Because if they put them on trial they would reveal that they acted according to what to them is normal practice. Whether these are official instructions or not, I don't know, but they obviously acted in accordance with their normal practice when faced with Palestinians, so that would come out in a trial, which therefore could not be allowed. If a soldier opens fire without authorisation, against explicit authority, he could be court-martialed. But these people are not going to face any such action.

YM: You have been amongst the people who have never, as far as I know, supported a two-state solution. I think Matzpen's ideas about the resolution of what is called the Palestinian-Israel conflict is more sophisticated than what is proposed by some people - a simple one-state solution. So I wondered if you could expand on both your criticism of the two-state solution and your proposals. Right now, people who for many years were supporters of the two-state solution now no longer defend it, given the current situation.

MM: This could require, I think, another whole-day discussion! It is a vast subject.

But I think that what was claimed as a two-state solution was never really that. It was at best, a one-state solution with a sort of subservient, disarmed, Bantustan-type mini- or micro-Palestinian state. That was the most that Israel has ever considered.

Israel has never agreed to a two-state solution, so it has never accepted any sovereignty by Palestinians of any part of Palestine between the Jordan and the Mediterranean. Right from the immediate aftermath of the 1967 war, Israel began the colonisation of the West Bank. It was led, of course, by the religious messianic Zionists, but the Israeli authorities were always in a position to prevent it, if they had wanted to. In fact, they passively encouraged it.

If you are serious about the two-state solution, you are not going to colonise the part which is supposed to belong to another state. It has been compared to people negotiating over how to divide a pizza, while one of them is actually eating part of it as they discuss it. I think people who advocate a two-state solution are either misguided, misinformed or ill-intentioned, in that they are trying to deceive us. I call it a 'two-state illusion' or 'two-state deception'.

There is a quite another project that we hear about - a single, democratic, binational state between the Jordan and the Mediterranean. I don't think this is a harmful idea, but I think it is impossible in the way it is proposed. At least it has the advantage of throwing a challenge to the powers that be. Why should you oppose this idea? It's a very nice idea if it could be realised. It would create a situation which is far better than what we have - just like the end of apartheid in South Africa created a better situation. Not an ideal one, but better than what existed previously.

But the point is that the Israeli colonisation is very different in its political economy from the South African one. In the case of South Africa, apartheid could be overthrown by the working class that was the major, direct producing class under the regime. It was their power that enabled the overthrow.

Some people hoped that the end of apartheid would be a coupled with socialism - I think many believed in this 'permanent revolution' idea. Okay, maybe. But the case of Zionist colonisation is different. It is based on a completely different political economy - Israel does not depend on the labour-power of the Palestinian people - at least not to a major extent. The overthrow of the Zionist regime, which is a necessary condition for any solution, requires it to be from the inside. But who is going to do it?

The majority of the Israeli Jewish working class has nothing to gain by overthrowing a Zionist regime under a capitalistic economic order. It would lose its privileged position as part of a dominant, exploiting nation. It would lose its position as part of a dominating, hegemonic nation in Palestine, without gaining anything: it would still remain an exploited class, because the economic social order would still be capitalist. So from being a exploited but privileged class, it would become an exploited unprivileged class. What would be the gain? So you cannot expect the Israeli Jewish working class to overthrow the Zionist regime under these circumstances. So who will do it?

The Zionist regime can only be overthrown in a situation where the working class would exchange its position of an exploited class as part of a dominant nation to be part of a ruling class without national privileges. This is a deal which makes sense, but would require far-reaching revolutionary developments in the whole of the Middle East region. It cannot possibly happen under the present capitalist order.

Of course, this is a very brief sketch and we don't have time to go into detail. But I have previously written quite extensively about this.

YM: Thank you very much. I'm very grateful for the time you've given. I've learned a lot from what you have said and I'm sure that those who read or listen to this will also benefit.

MM: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure talking to you ●

This meeting can be watched at voice-of-revolution.com and the video is available at www.youtube.com/@voice-of-revolution

POLEMIC

Taciturns offer nothing positive

Naming your organisation Talking About Socialism and then not wanting to talk is as perverse as it is revealing. **Mike Macnair** responds to the arguments of Nick Wrack and Will McMahon



Arnold Lakhovsky 'The Conversation' (circa 1935)

This reply to Nick Wrack and Will McMahon ('Nothing positive to be gained', *Weekly Worker* January 7) is not from the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee, but an individual response on my part.¹

We formally invited their organisation 'Talking About Socialism ... from a Marxist point of view' (TAS for convenience) to debate the question of communist unity face-to-face with us. The comrades' response to this invitation is in the conclusion to their article:

We are small, new, and our priority at this stage is to develop our network, publications and Zoom discussions. In the New Year we hope to organise face-to-face meetings in selected towns and cities. At this stage we see nothing positive to be gained by discussing with the CPGB-PCC, which already has a pre-determined and hostile assessment of who we are and our value to the cause of socialism/communism. We therefore decline the invitation.

The comrades should expect in principle that it is not just the CPGB that will have a "pre-determined and hostile assessment of who we are and our value to the cause of socialism/communism". We are, in fact, likely to be *more* willing to imagine that TAS could have positive value, and to engage in discussions with TAS, than other organised left groups.

The reason for this is that what TAS describe themselves as doing in this paragraph is just setting up another competing left group to add to the substantial number of left groups already in existence and to compete with them in recruiting unorganised militants. And none of the other groups are likely to be persuaded (without a lot more argument) to line up behind TAS's outline 'Who we are and the ideas that guide us' in

preference to their own political projects.

The difference is merely that the *Weekly Worker* has published Jack Conrad's, and my, critical initial responses to TAS's arguments: other groups will hold equally critical, if not more critical, views of TAS in private, and not publish them. We publish them because we want to see debates among the organised left, because in our view we cannot practically unite without openly addressing our differences.

Left group

This point is, in fact, symptomatic of the whole character of the differences. TAS comrades seek to create "a mass socialist/communist party". They take it that these two names mean the same thing, as defined at a little more length in their 'Who we are':

6. Capitalism must be replaced by a different system in which the private ownership of the means of production - the land, its waters and minerals, factories, machines, transport, science, and technology - has been abolished, along with the exploitation of the working class for profit. In this new society the world's resources will be owned in common by all, with production planned democratically for the benefit of all. It will be a society without any classes because everyone will be a worker like everyone else. It will be a society in which the government of people is replaced by the administration of things and of the way production is organised. This system is called 'socialism' or 'communism'. Both words have been distorted and misrepresented by misuse in theory and practice. In our material we generally use the two terms interchangeably to mean the same thing.²

The aim here is common ground of the whole of the non-Labour left and the part of the Labour left that thinks of itself as socialist, Marxist, or communist.³ Now, of course, the 'Who we are' goes on to express differences with parts of the left:

15. We reject the idea that the various labour and social democratic parties, which aim simply to manage capitalism and which in office carry out attacks on the working class, represent any form of genuine socialism/communism.

And

9. We reject the possibility of building socialism/communism in one country. We reject the idea that the undemocratic Stalinist regimes of the former Soviet Union and similar other countries were socialist/communist.

(I have inverted the order because historically, the betrayals of social-democracy/Labourism came before those of Stalinism).

Point 17 perhaps expresses reasons not to join the Socialist Workers' Party, given its recent commitments to 'anti-electoralism':

17. A socialist/communist party would seek to win both parliamentary and local council seats. All elected representatives would be tribunes of the working class and the oppressed, using their positions to advance the cause of socialism/communism. They will be accountable to the party membership. The party must be completely democratic.

But the expression of the point is unclear.

Why create a new group on a basis like this, rather than simply join up with one of the stronger organisations of the far left, like the Socialist Party

of England and Wales, Socialist Appeal/Revolutionary Communist Party, etc?

And, coming back to the issue of the betrayals of the social-democracy/Labourism, point 8 on internationalism contains the statement that "Socialists/communists oppose all capitalist wars." This is a *diplomatic* statement, which could be signed up to by people who are "socialists" but emphatically *not* "communists",⁴ because they are anti-anti-imperialists, like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

Past

The point of my original September 28 article 'It's good to talk', which comrades McMahon and Wrack characterise as "aggrieved, peeved, indignant and disingenuous" was that comrades who set up new organisations, publications and websites are under some degree of obligation to account for, first, where they are coming from, and, second, why a new formation is needed, rather than adherence to one of the existing organisations. I was as much concerned in that article with the various splinters from the British SWP and US International Socialist Organisation and the *general culture* of the left of creating 'new' formations without accounting for their history, or explaining why a *new* formation is needed, as with the specific cases of *Prometheus* and TAS.

And, in fact, comrades McMahon and Wrack in their reply *do* address the history. "Aggrieved, peeved, indignant" is just empty verbiage, having no purchase on what I wrote, either in 'It's good to talk' or in the later 'Unity based on solid principle' (November 2) or 'Upfront, sharp and personal' (November 30). 'Disingenuous', on the other hand, is given some content. Comrades Wrack and McMahon assert, in the first place, that when I said that comrades Wrack and McMahon

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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have a "long history in the various broad-front projects",

We have sat in meetings of many of these projects with members of the CPGB. We have always tried to argue for socialist politics within them. We have also argued for a 'partyist' approach.

Before Left Unity in 2013-15, this is not my impression of their history. Both comrades were 'leadership insiders' in the Socialist Alliance and Respect. They may have argued *privately* for socialist politics and a 'partyist' perspective in these formations. I am happy to accept that this is possible. But *publicly* they gave political support to the broad-front politics of the leaderships of the projects.

It is for this reason that we were very strongly positive about the Socialist Platform project in Left Unity at its outset (though we thought Left Unity had a lot less chance of producing a positive outcome than the Socialist Alliance). It did seem to be a break with broad-frontism by leading comrades who had been up-front supporters of this method.

But then, *first*, the formulations adopted were ones that could be signed up to by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. The AWL was already a left-Zionist and witch-hunting organisation, committed to an anti-anti-imperialism that amounts to giving practical backing to Atlanticism and US imperialism. To adopt 'diplomatic' platform formulations which the AWL can without discomfort sign up to is, in consequence, inherently broad-frontist - because it is to include an element of the Labour *rightwing* in your 'left bloc'. This may have been a little less *completely* obvious in 2013 than it became after the 'anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism' smear campaign, which the AWL helped pioneer, hit the big time following the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party. But it was already pretty obvious.

Then, *secondly*, came the decision - at short notice - to argue for 'indicative votes only' at the founding meeting of the Socialist Platform. This was, in essence, to

repeat the techniques of the broad-front projects, and arguments of the sort used by John Rees in Respect, that people present at a meeting have to defer to the possibility of disagreement from those absent.⁵

Comrades McMahon and Wrack in their present article *defend* this course of action:

Our argument for not taking the amendments was simple. A huge amount of work had gone into drafting it and then getting people to sign it. We had originally thought that it would be possible to amend it. However, we became concerned that were the document, which by then a large number of people had signed, to be changed without consulting them and involving them in the decision to make changes, we couldn't be sure that they would still support it.

The problem with this argument is that the proportion of signatories who were present at the Socialist Platform founding meeting was extraordinarily high relative to attendance at left (or, indeed, Labour or trade union) meetings in general. If an equivalent proportion of signatories had attended Left Unity's own founding conference, the meeting would have spilled onto the streets.

Conversely, if the non-attendance of signatories to the appeal was a ground for not taking votes, Left Unity itself could have taken no votes at all at its founding conference (or any of its later ones). The argument is thus specious.

It is, of course, true that the meeting did itself vote to take only indicative votes (narrowly, and including AWL votes in support). But this vote, though it is a vote, is like the referenda to establish the powers of Louis Bonaparte or Adolf Hitler or that Iran should become an Islamic republic - or, closer to home, the vote to ban factions in the Russian Communist Party in 1921. It is *self-cancelling* majority rule - because the objections to allowing a binding vote in *this* meeting would apply with equal, or probably greater, force to any *subsequent* meeting.

The logically inherent claim is that the diplomatic agreements reached behind closed doors have to override any vote that might be taken. The majority thus denied itself, not just the CPGB-led minority, the right to democratic decision-making for the future.

Initiatives

Comrades McMahon and Wrack claim that

In our view, the CPGB-PCC realised too late that our initiative to launch the Socialist Platform was something that it should have done. They realised that our initiative exposed their own lack of initiative on the very issue they claim to have the monopoly - socialist/communist unity.

This formulation is illuminating, because of the role it gives to *initiative*. The problem is that this method - the idea that 'taking the initiative' gives you some sort of proprietary rights over what is created - is at the core of the problems of the British far left.

After all, how does it come to be the case that there exist in the trade unions at least four rival 'rank and file' movements: SPEW's National Shop Stewards' Network, the SWP's Workers' Summit, Counterfire's Rank and File Combine, and RS21's Troublemakers' Conference? The answer is that each group *takes an initiative* and insists by procedural mechanisms on the right of control. It is for the same reason that SPEW broke with the Socialist Alliance after it lost control to the SWP, and that the SWP broke with Respect after it lost control to a coalition of George Galloway and others. Comrades Caitriona Rylance and Chris Trafford broke with CPGB over our negative evaluation of the 2012 New Anti-Capitalist Initiative launched by the three fragments of Workers' Power.

TAS is a new 'initiative' with the same framing conception: launch the right initiative at the right time, and you will overtake the rest of the left and be on the road to the mass party we all want. It is one among a lot of new initiatives of one sort or another. TAS comrades have been critical, as we have, of the attempt to regroup a number of these small new initiatives as Transform.⁶ But the *method* is one shared by comrades McMahon and Wrack's argument.

Repulsive?

CPGB is not worth talking to, in the comrades' view, at the end of the day, because

The CPGB-PCC may want to go through the existing left but its manner of engagement is counter-productive and it has little, if anything, to show for its efforts. ...

And

... we do also want to attract new layers. Most of them won't turn to the CPGB because its invective is repulsive. However much the CPGB-PCC thinks it a strength, it isn't. It puts up an unnecessary barrier to anyone who might want to learn more or get involved.

Our point is not that invective is a strength - though invective *may* at times be essential to political clarity. It is that diplomatic methods of constructing unity, and speech controls in order to avoid conflict, are inevitably a weakness. As soon as serious issues arise, sharp disagreement *will* happen. For example, the AWL will call us anti-Semites; and so on. We say that the anti-Semitism smear is a big lie; in

Fighting fund

Upping the rate

As reported last week, our printers were badly affected by a fire, which meant, especially given the time of year, that we couldn't arrange a substitute at short notice. It should be added that our printer was intending to sell their traditional, four-drum Heidelberg press and go over to digital with the possibility of not being able to do our paper in its present format. Either way, we've now got a new print company and we are trying them out this week.

They promise same day delivery. So, hopefully (if all goes well!), the print edition will be folded, collated, posted by our team and be with you on schedule ... depending, of course, on the vagaries of Royal Mail.

However, we are still looking for a printer to take over the job on a permanent basis. And this might well entail an increase in the price we will have to pay. We'll let you know if that is the case and what that means in terms of this fund, the cover price, sub rates, etc, in the coming weeks.

In the meantime, we're looking good to reach our £2,250 target for January. With,

as I write, just under a third of the month gone, we've already received from our readers and supporters £952. Special thanks go to comrade AC for his £100, but there've been plenty of other donations over the last week. Thanks also to FK (£39), BO (£35), HN and CO (£30 each), GD and DV (£25), SJ (£20) and TM (£13). Then there was £20 from JN, £15 from RG and £10 each from DI, IS, SM, LG, PM, GW and MH.

Apart from the last two listed, who contributed via PayPal, all the others paid by bank transfer/standing order. But, irrespective of the method, this week we raised £422. That augurs well for reaching a new target, probably beginning in February.

Keep up your good work, comrades. We absolutely rely on your help! ●

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](https://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate)

Orders for a killing

Assassinating political opponents frequently has a paradoxical effect: instead of weakening and defeating, it strengthens, argues **Yassamine Mather**

In the last couple of weeks, we have heard on at least four occasions of assassinations organised and executed by US and Israeli military and security forces against Islamic (Sunni and Shia) military commanders and political leaders in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. Of course, there have been many other targeted killings of particular individual Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. However, I am concentrating on the assassinations that have made headlines because of the significance of the targets.

On Christmas Day, an Israeli airstrike outside Damascus killed Sayyed Razi Mousavi, a senior commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Mousavi's responsibility was the coordination of the military alliance between Syria and Iran.

On January 2, Saleh al-Aroui, Hamas's deputy leader, was killed in a drone attack in a suburb of southern Beirut, a Hezbollah stronghold. Six other members of Hamas were killed in the same attack, while a number of cars and houses were destroyed. Although officially Israel neither confirmed nor denied that it killed al-Aroui, a spokesman called it a "surgical strike against the Hamas leadership".

On January 4, the US military killed a high-ranking commander of the Iran-backed militia, Harakat al-Nujaba, in Baghdad. The Pentagon, confirming the attack, tried to justify this assassination and that of several other members of the militia by pointing out the close ties between the militia and Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

According to the *Financial Times*,

The Islamic Resistance of Iraq, a newly created shadowy group of Iran-backed militias, has carried out more than 100 attacks on military bases housing US and other foreign troops in Iraq and Syria since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza strip.¹

However, it should be added that most of these were low-level attacks. Similarly, on January 8, Wissam al-Tawil, a senior commander of Hezbollah, was killed in southern Lebanon when his car was hit by an Israeli strike.

Role in Islam

Political assassination dates back many centuries (at least to the time of Egyptian Pharaoh Teti of the Old Kingdom's Sixth Dynasty in the 23rd century BCE) and has been used regularly since then by rulers against their internal and external opponents.

However, today political assassination can be categorised as the dawn of a new era in this long history. New technology in the form of facial recognition tools, global positioning systems and automated weapons (drones) have made it



Al Qaeda hits New York in September 2001

much easier for some countries, particularly the United States and Israel, to identify, spy on and target leaders and military commanders of Islamist groups - presumably as part of a strategy to weaken and defeat their opponents.

The first point to make here is that adopting such a tactic shows a complete failure to understand how these groups operate, how they recruit new members, not to mention the pulling power of martyrs. The concept of martyrdom is important in all the major monotheistic religions, both as a means of promotion and as proof of the religion's devotion. However, in Islamic tradition, martyrdom plays a more significant role, and it had already become a key element of religious war (jihad) as early as the 7th century.

For most Muslims driven to political extremism, whether they are Salafi (Sunni) or Shia, martyrdom, including assassination by foreign powers, is considered an achievement. They not only believe that they will go to the gardens of heaven and be revered forever, they hope that, if they die a martyr's death, it will promote their cause and increase recruitment dramatically. In the case of the Shia religion, martyrdom plays an even more crucial role. For this faction of Islam, the Battle of Karbala and the violent death of Imam Hussein are not just pillars of their beliefs, but the commemoration of this event plays a key role in the customs and rituals of

the Shia (12th Imam) believers.

In October 680 (Muharram AH 61), the Battle of Karbala was a short but significant clash, where Hossein ibn Ali, the grandson of the prophet Muhammad, along with a small group of supporters, were defeated and massacred by far larger forces sent by the Umayyad caliphate. This solidified the Umayyad dynasty's power. For Shia Muslims, who revere Hossein, this date marks his martyrdom and was named 'Ashura', an important day of mourning and remembrance.

Soleimani

So it is difficult to understand how the United States and Israeli intelligence officers are under the impression that targeted assassinations will damage Shia militias. One of the most significant of these assassinations occurred in January 2020, when Qasem Soleimani, a major general of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, was assassinated by a drone strike carried out by US forces. This incident took place close to the Baghdad International Airport as he was en route to a meeting with Iraqi prime minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi.

Apart from the fact that Soleimani had until then been heralded by sections of the US media as a hero - the man who helped defeat Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (making the cover of *Time* magazine) - this was a clear violation of Iraq's sovereignty. The United Nations

special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions considered the assassination as a likely violation of international law, as well as US domestic laws.

The Iraqi government complained that the act undermined its national sovereignty and was a breach of bilateral security agreements with the US - an act of aggression against Iraq, as five officials were also killed during the operation. There can be little doubt that the death of Soleimani was initially a gift to the leaders of the Islamic Republic, leading to huge demonstrations protesting against the assassination, until the Islamic government in Tehran managed to squander this support by bringing down a passenger plane, mistaking it for a US military plane. As I wrote in this paper,

Inside Iran, a mood of patriotism has grown, with rival factions within the government coming closer together, and even some opponents of the regime rallying to 'defend the country'. Such views are expressed by the former foreign minister of the Shah's era, Ardeshir Zahedi, who praised Soleimani in a January 5 [2020] article, and his views find echoes amongst middle class nationalists, though they have never been supporters of the regime.²

If the intention behind the assassination was to diminish or impair Iran's influence in Iraq

or Lebanon, four years after the event we can say with a level of confidence that Shia militias in Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon continue to thrive and recruit large numbers of volunteers keen to follow the path taken by their hero, Soleimani.

Meanwhile, the dead leader is easily replaced by a clone-like deputy or some headstrong younger man eager to prove his military prowess. Far from having a chilling effect, the result is often the exact opposite. When it comes to the Sunni side, of course, if there was any 'intelligence' in the security forces of the US and its allies, they should have learned from the experience of the assassination of Osama bin Laden.

Islamic State

Daesh, ie, Islamic State - a branch of al Qaeda, then a rival, initially led by Abu Omar al-Baghdadi - recruited widely not only in Arab countries, but also among Muslims throughout the world, including second-generation Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Algerians, Moroccans ... in western Europe. More to the point, by 2015 its militias had seized hold of considerable tracts of territory in northwestern Iraq and eastern Syria. At its height Islamic State commanded 30,000 fighters, had an annual budget exceeding \$1bn and ruled over some 12 million people. Of course, al-Baghdadi is long gone, killed in a US raid. Today IS has its fifth caliph, Abu Hafs al-Hashimi al-Qurashi, and operates with deadly effect throughout central Asia and north Africa.

Bourgeois opponents of political assassination point out that it is against the rule of law both national and international, especially as most of these killings occur in a third country. Of course, those of us who have no illusions about such matters have learned from real examples of constant breaches of international law by the US. However, we must emphasise the fact that assassinations can further enrage sympathisers and followers of the martyred individual, fuelling demands for revenge in a bloody spiral of murder and mayhem, that easily spills over into other countries, leading to further chaos and instability.

Assassination undoubtedly promotes a culture of tuggery, irrationality and secrecy - there is no transparency and accountability, no sense of acting within some legal framework. Governments such as the United States, Israel and Russia, who regularly use such mafia methods should be exposed both in terms of breaking their so-called commitment to civilized behaviour and for pursuing a strategy that amounts to outdoing the terrorists in terrorism ●

Notes

1. www.ft.com/content/6c70205d-e2b0-4f1a-bb19-835f7aa2b268.
2. 'A godsend for the regime' *Weekly Worker* January 1 2020: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1281/a-godsend-for-the-regime.