

weekly worker



Sir Keir leads a bourgeois workers' party, but little separates him politically from Rishi Sunak

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No 1475 January 25 2024

Towards a mass Communist Party

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No to
Sectarianism

Yes to
Khilafah

Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain

First they came for the Islamists: the banning of Hizb ut-Tahrir



LETTERS



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

Factional rights

With Andrew Northall's recent string of letters on factions, readers have on display the bankruptcy not only of 'official communism', but all the confessional sects which cling to the myth of the Bolsheviks as the very model of the 'monolithic party'.

Of course, the Bolsheviks were not monolithic, they were a faction which unproblematically allowed factions (true till "temporary" 1921 ban, which, much to Lenin's concern, provided the ideal conditions for Stalin to subsequently consolidate his grip over the apparatus).

Comrade Northall doggedly blames the collapse of the 'official' CPGB on factionalism. His simplistic conclusion being that the answer lies in banning factions. But, to state the obvious, factions were banned.

That, however, does not prevent them coming into existence and flourishing. There were at least two leadership factions in the 'official' CPGB: the *legal* faction around Gordon McLennan, Tony Chater and Bert Ramelson; and the *legal* Eurocommunist faction around *Marxism Today*. Against the headlong rush into the arms of the bourgeoisie under these leadership factions, there arose various *illegal* oppositions: the Frenchites, the Straight Leftists, while Photis Lysandrou and Robert Griffiths had their own factions too. Then there was *The Leninist*, which alone stood on solid Marxist principles, fought openly and had the honesty to publicly declare itself a faction.

Comrade Northall blithely talks of a "genuine Communist Party" and why factions are "antithetical to democracy in such a party". The problem is that it is impossible to classify the 'official' CPGB as a "genuine Communist Party" - well, certainly with the late 1920s and the 'class against class' leftist posturing and then the mid-1930s turn to popular frontism (in effect a version of Menshevism). Certainly with the *British road to socialism* programme of the early 1950s, endorsed by none other than Stalin himself, it was right for comrades on the left to rebel. Whatever their many and various shortcomings, our sympathies lie with them, not the leadership factions.

Does he consider the permissibility and actuality of factions in the Bolshevik-led Russian Social Democratic Labour Party of 1903-1921 as being "antithetical to democracy", as inevitably resulting in failure? The very suggestion is just too stupid. No, the Bolsheviks succeeded because they constituted themselves a faction and allowed factions, including alternative platforms and publications within their own ranks. Minorities at a national level did become majorities in some local, regional and foreign-based committees and were expected, if they had real significance, to be represented on leading committees. A source of tremendous strength, not a fatal weakness.

Because comrade Northall can hardly deny that the Bolsheviks were a faction in the RSDLP, he resorts to historical falsification. He claims that the RSDLP was some kind of broad Labour Party within which the Bolsheviks operated as a faction. Nonsense on stilts.

The RSDLP was, as everyone knows, effectively founded in 1902-03 under the leadership of *Iskra*. The 2nd Congress agreed a programme based on the Erfurt model and committed itself to the revolutionary overthrow of tsarism and the "dictatorship

of the proletariat". From 1905 the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were the mass factions of this party and in 1912 the Bolsheviks, along with pro-party Mensheviks, voted to unite the party on a firm footing by disassociating themselves from both Bolshevik and Menshevik liquidators. Note, outside the big cities the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks often worked in joint committees up to and after the October 1917 revolution.

It is not that we want factions in a "genuine Communist Party". But without that right to form factions, the right to seek out and organise with co-thinkers, not only is the danger of irresponsible splits increased, the internal life of the 'party' is impoverished.

Comrade Northall's alternative to factional rights is the atomised individual member and their right to speak at branch meetings, contribute to the 'party' press, etc. The sorry results can be seen in the dull as ditchwater *Morning Star*, *Communist Review*, *Socialist Worker*, *The Socialist* and other such advertising sheets published by the bureaucratic-centralist left.

Comrade Northall seems to be under the impression that polemics around factional differences are a diversion from the *real* work of trade union demands, fighting the cuts and shouting 'Tories, out, out, out' on street demonstrations. If that is the case, he could not be more wrong. Polemics around factional differences are a high form of the class struggle - lower than making revolution, that is for sure - but higher, much higher, than so-called bread and butter issues.

Comrade Northall is happy with 'official communism' and its history. Socialism in one country, the 1928-29 counterrevolution within the revolution, the great purges, the execution of Lenin's closest lieutenants such as Gregory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, the assassination of Leon Trotsky, the *British road*, etc.

'Official communism' in Britain followed every Soviet general secretary like a slavish lapdog right up to and including Mikhail Gorbachev, the "Lenin of our time" (Tony Chater).

We all know where that led. The lesson to learn is not that factions were the problem: rather that the ban on factions disarms the anti-bureaucratic, anti-capitalist restoration, opposition.

Jack Conrad
London

Wiki factions

Andrew Northall starts his last letter by stating: "Of course, there are always different tendencies and trends within any Communist Party" and "it is important for these to be expressed and resolved openly and democratically" (January 18).

But, he goes on, "factions are something quite different". That is because they "have their own memberships, policy platforms, aims and objectives, organisational disciplines, etc, which are *separate* to, different from and most often *opposed* to the main party itself. Otherwise why organise into a *faction*?" After all, members are obliged to "*accept and carry out decisions* made by the party", yet the "existence of (by definition, opposition - or at the very least 'dissident') factions carries a very strong implication that members of [factions] will not carry out those decisions".

Comrade Northall's definition of a faction is, in my opinion, far removed from what is generally understood. For example, according to Wikipedia, it is a "group of people, especially within a political organisation, which expresses a shared belief or opinion different from people who are not part of the group". Absolutely correct. So why does he insist that members of factions

are usually "opposed to the main party itself"?

For example, we in the CPGB insist that all members must accept the party programme, abide by its rules and agree to implement all agreed decisions and actions. But, at the same time, they are free to argue against individual tactics and strategies, as well as particular aspects of our programme - so long as such opposition does not prevent an agreed action being fully implemented and acted upon by all members, including themselves.

And, of course, they are also free to unite with other CPGB comrades in not only opposing a particular course of action or practice, but fighting to implement a different one. That means they and their co-thinkers can come together to agree how their alternative will be phrased, how opposition motions will be drawn up and who will propose them.

While comrade Northall pays lip service to party democracy, in reality he opposes its implementation by ruling out all of the above. If you come together with other members to argue and organise for a change, surely you are not only forming a faction, but must be refusing to "accept and carry out decisions made by the party". What nonsense.

Democracy means the full acceptance of the right to come together with others in order to fight for change. And that in turn, in the case of a disagreement that is not quickly resolved, implies that those who do so must be able to organise to achieve their aims. It is completely false to claim that those who do this must therefore be "opposed to the main party itself".

Peter Manson
London

Faction free

Few communists would criticise comrade Andrew Northall's desire for a Communist Party free of factionalism based on his own experience in the old CPGB (Letters, January 18). In an ideal world, this would be desirable, but in the real world things are different. So the questions are, how do we get to that, and do factions in the Communist Party represent a danger to the struggle for socialism and the maintenance of communist rule after a socialist revolution? What is the cause of factions and how do we relate to them?

The first thing to point out, when debating the question of factions and how they came to be banned in the Soviet Communist Party, is that the whole issue is presented in an abstract, ahistorical manner, divorced from the concrete political background leading up to Lenin's banning of factions.

This political background was the fact that Lenin, with the support of Trotsky, started a socialist revolution in a country which had not reached the level of industrial, cultural or political development which would facilitate an easy, smooth transition to socialism. They started the socialist revolution primarily in the hope that it would trigger revolutions in Europe and, via Europe, the world revolution. This attempt to trigger world revolution failed and the Russian socialist revolution was left isolated in a mostly backward society.

A cruel, barbarous civil war followed with inhuman atrocities committed by both sides, but eventually the counterrevolution was defeated. The Leninist leadership was faced with a problem they had not prepared for, which was how to hold on to power and move toward socialism, while waiting for revolution in Europe.

It was the problems arising from this situation, especially following the Tambov and Kronstadt rebellions

against the Leninist regime, which led to Lenin proposing the banning of factions in the Communist Party. The militarisation of Bolshevik political culture during the civil war also exposed communists to being taken over by a totalitarian tendency.

But the Bolsheviks had seized power and defeated the counterrevolution in a civil war without any need to ban factions. This undermines the argument that communists will put factional interest above the party as a whole. The opposite was the case: when faced with a threat, communists will put factional differences aside and unite to defeat the enemy. This was shown clearly in the differences between Lenin, Trotsky and Bukharin over whether to make peace with the Germans on the eastern front and in the civil war.

The problems associated with making a socialist revolution in a backward country without a conscious understanding, at the start, of the dialectical nature of the transition from capitalism to communism, which was forced on Lenin and Trotsky (hence the New Economic Policy), led Lenin away from democratic socialism toward the totalitarian banning of factions in the Communist Party, when faced with opposition from those giving expression to the difficulties the working class and peasants were facing before, during and after the civil war. The problem with banning factions is that they don't cease to exist, but go underground. If this was not the case, there would have been no purges of the Communist Party by Stalin and his team in later years.

In my view comrade Andrew should take a more relaxed attitude to factions. They are not a threat to communist rule, as Leninism makes them out to be. If they were, the Communist Party would have lost power in the Russian civil war and during the 'cultural revolution' in China. Like many of us, comrade Andrew wants to see communists united in a single party, but starting out with the proposal to ban factions in a future communist party is surely the wrong place to begin. Factions result from contradictions in the party relating to tactics and problems associated with the building of socialism. As these contradictions are resolved, then factions naturally wither away.

I don't agree with the argument that the question of factions is about Menshevism versus Bolshevism, or communism versus Trotskyism. The Mensheviks weren't wrong in holding the view that a socialist revolution in Russia at the time was premature, and Trotskyists believe in communism, although often making ultra-left mistakes. The biggest ultra-left mistake, shared by Lenin and Trotsky, was making a socialist revolution prematurely in a mostly backward country, but this didn't stop Lenin from lecturing communists about leftwing communism being an "infantile disorder".

The Labour and Conservative parties have factions within them, but, come election time, their members always unite to win. When and if we get to the stage of a single communist party, it will be up to communists to decide whether to take a relaxed attitude to factions or to ban them in Orwellian fashion. Communists will have to choose between democratic socialism or totalitarianism.

Tony Clark
For Democratic Socialism

Police attacks

We note the criminal, racist arrests of members of the Revolutionary Communist Group on various fake accusations, of a leading member of the CPGB Marxist-Leninist, comrade Ranjit Brar on absurd accusations

that selling a book explicitly indicting Zionism for racism and anti-Semitism is a "hate-crime", and the outrageous arrest of Tony Greenstein (and Mick Napier in Glasgow) on fantastic lies that he is in some way a 'supporter' of Hamas.

These are the tip of an iceberg of police attacks on Palestine solidarity activists and ordinary demonstrators, orchestrated by Tory politicians with Braverman's ravings as the starting point, whose anti-democratic essence continues to this day. None of these attacks will be opposed by the Labour Party under Starmer. They clearly support this genocide, and the attacks against Yemen, whose purpose is to protect Israel's mass murder.

We propose that a united front should be created to confront this policy publicly and point out its purpose - police-state methods to repress opposition to the genocide of the Palestinian people. Such fraudulent arrests and harassment, and punitive bail conditions in some cases to forbid political activism, as well as the draconian 'conditions' imposed on completely peaceful mass demonstrations in support of the Palestinians, amount to political support for Israel's genocide by the Metropolitan police, the Glasgow police, and no doubt police forces around the country.

We think it would be worthwhile to take an initiative to confront the police politically over this, by initiating a protest at Scotland Yard and seeking broader labour movement support, against the political persecution of leftwing activists, which amounts to political support by the cops for Zionist genocide. It fits in with the admission by the head of the National Police Chiefs' Council, Gavin Stephens, that the UK police are "institutionally racist" based on too many terrible cases to list, and other appalling actions of the cops, like their arrests of women demonstrators protesting the murder and rape of Sarah Everard by a serving cop.

We should note that the large-scale murder of unarmed civilians in Gaza, including women, children and even premature babies, and the brazen support for it by ruling class politicians here, indicates what these politicians are quite prepared to do to ordinary people here if they feel threatened by resistance to their own crimes. The labour movement therefore has an overwhelming class interest in defeating these attacks on democratic rights and defending free speech against ruling class, Zionist genocidaires. This needs to be confronted head-on.

Ian Donovan
Consistent Democrats

Sunshine

So-called social democratic Labourism is defunct - overtaken, now simply dust on the grindstones of historical development. In parallel, old-style trades unionism has now become an unapologetic co-conspirator for consumer capitalism and indeed its essential neo-colonialism. As Lazare and many others around the *Weekly Worker*/CPGB point out, the (eventually demonstrated) complete impotence of all such flimflam politics creates the seedbeds for this newly reactionary era, with its then horrible fecundity.

So surely what's clear as sunshine on a beautiful summer's day (plain as anybody's own nose on their face!) is how without 'grasping' revolutionism's inherently transcendent nature - without a duly 'evolved' consolidation of both mentality and messaging from a resultant Communist Party worthy of the name - well, as that expression goes, we're all 'royally' fucked!

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

FREE SPEECH

First, they came for ...

The ban on Hizb ut-Tahrir demonstrates that our rulers have no effective way to control the Gaza narrative other than by legally silencing critics, argues Paul Demarty

When I first heard that Hizb ut-Tahrir, a long-established and rather astringent Islamist political party, had been proscribed by the home office, I admit I was a little confused. Hadn't they been banned already?

Apparently not, although the group's legal status has been threatened repeatedly. After the 2005 London bombings, the Blair government sought to designate it as a proscribed terrorist organisation, but could not in the end get the idea past its lawyers. David Cameron criticised Labour for this failure on the campaign trail in 2010, and the question arose again towards the end of his time as prime minister, when the rise of Islamic State and the proliferation of sympathisers in the west - and most of all the vicious massacres carried out in Paris and London - once again turned the home office's mind to the general territory of 'doing something' about 'terrorist sympathisers'. Still, in the end, nothing was done about HT, which had managed to avoid the almost childish provocations of al-Muhajiroun, together with those of the Westboro Baptist Church of global Islamism, which split from it in the 1990s (remember those "butcher those who insult Islam" protest signs?). It could look respectable if needed.

It is, unsurprisingly, HT's participation in struggle against the Gaza genocide that has finally given a home secretary the excuse to bring the hammer down. HT leaders are accused of cheering on Hamas (itself a proscribed organisation whom we are not permitted by law to 'glorify'); of denouncing "the monstrous Jews"; of calling on the Muslim powers of the region to militarily conquer Israel, which - were HT's various international branches in charge - one imagines would not be an especially pretty process.

According to leader Abdul Wahid - recently revealed by the *Mail on Sunday* to be a pseudonym for Wahid Asif Shaida, a London GP, who has now been suspended from his job by NHS England - HT will contest the ban legally, as well it might, and proposes to defy it in the interim. Yet the ban is a clear indication of the way things are going. We face a ratchet (indeed we already did before the Gaza war), whereby the space of acceptable speech on the question of Israel-Palestine slowly shrinks.

Under attack

It is here that we should probably take a closer look at Hizb ut-Tahrir, to see exactly what has been added to the dozens of proscribed organisations on the home office list. It was founded in 1953 in Jerusalem, when the West Bank was under the control of the Jordanian state, but spread slowly to encompass chapters in many countries - other Muslim-majority places, of course, but increasingly in countries where Muslims form a significant minority. The British branch is especially important, precisely because it has been able to operate openly here for so long, and it has a second headquarters in London, with a major role in coordinating the group's international activities.

Its goal is straightforward: the unification of Muslim lands into a new caliphate, and ultimately the victory of a renewed Islam over all who oppose it. Its strategy is focused on recruiting 'elites' - meaning educated sections of society, who will dedicate themselves to *jihad* in both its senses. As with most reactionary religious

organisations, it has decidedly fixed ideas on the proper relations between the sexes, and a grim view of homosexuality.

HT, clearly enough, is the thin end of the wedge. And it is a very thin end indeed. For good old British conservatives, there is the insult of an international organisation, whose leadership is concentrated in Jordan, waging war against 'our values': an enemy within. For liberals and leftists, it is difficult to deny that its stated programme is repellent to our objectives. Nobody, surely, can defend Hizb ut-Tahrir from this fate without a lot of throat-clearing, or else sliding into incoherence.

That is precisely why it *must be* defended. In order to get them on this list, James Cleverly and company have inched the line of acceptable speech further in the direction of tyranny. The most 'violent' piece of rhetoric anyone has added to HT recently is the idea that Muslim countries in the Middle East should intervene militarily against Israel. Its objective is clearly the removal of what it views as a foreign body in the Muslim heartlands. Yet one could equally argue for such an intervention on the basis of the various genocide conventions, the 'responsibility to protect', etc. Indeed, many protestors - not all Islamists by a long chalk - welcome the Houthi blockade for this reason. So, surely, that will be the next thing to be proscribed. It will not be long before it is not only Islamists, but leftists, who are under attack in this way.

Indeed, putting that in the future tense is already misleading. We have had the whole period of the witch-hunt against anti-Zionists in the Labour Party. That at least did not very much involve the use of *criminal* law. But several leftwingers, notably associated with the Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist), have been lifted on demonstrations for 'hate speech'. The CPGB-ML is, admittedly, a quirky organisation, ultra-Stalinists of the 1933 vintage. It is the thin end of our own wedge.

Tony Greenstein, a regular correspondent in these pages, was arrested for social media posts, his computers and phone confiscated. Student supporters of Socialist Appeal in Nottingham were threatened with a visit from the police for calling for 'intifada until victory'. It remains ticky-tacky stuff for now. The police are plainly reluctant to ban demonstrations outright, since - at least in London - they are plainly not staffed in sufficient numbers to enforce a ban (as has also turned out to be the case on many occasions in French and German cities). That is the logic, however: keep moving that line. Keep throwing people into the mincer.

Abdul Wahid: leader of Hizb ut-Tahrir



As with all the lawfare conducted against the Palestinian movement, this is a sign of a certain weakness. At no point have the allies of Israel - never mind Israel itself, which was reported by *Ha'aretz* to have assembled a huge social media psy-op at vast expense - truly got 'control of the narrative', as they say nowadays. Technological explanations of such shifts have definite limits, but in the age of the smartphone camera, it is devilishly difficult to sweep 25,000 corpses under the carpet. October 7 recedes further into history; fresh outrages afflict Gaza every hour of every day. All that is left to Israel's defenders is the police.

Expression

Indeed, the scope of proposed 'police actions' seems to get ever wider. Nikki Haley - the last 'best hope' of never-Trump Republicans in the United States - attracted ridicule for claiming that, for every 30 minutes spent scrolling through TikTok, a user became "17% more anti-Semitic" - a statement that seemed to have gone wandering off from the set of *Brass Eye*. Nonetheless, the threat to what limited freedom of expression exists on the internet is quite real. Like American bombers and Vietnamese villages, it will be necessary to destroy the narrative to control it.

If they are weak, however, so are we. As we have argued *ad nauseam* around these parts, many of the reactionary and authoritarian instruments being deployed against the friends of Palestine today were done precisely in the name of broadly liberal, progressive ideals - of marginalising forces opposed to multiculturalism, women's equality and tolerance of sexual minorities. Thus laws against hate speech, religious hatred and so forth. This legal creep has been cheered on by large sections of the broad left, including 'official communism', but also its notional Trotskyist and post-Trotskyist critics. The Socialist Workers Party happily supported Tony Blair's law against religious hatred; the Socialist Party in England and Wales supports freedom of speech ... except for racists.

Once such instruments are in the hands of the state, of course, the state gets to define religious hatred, hate speech, racism, and so forth. It turns out - who'da thunk it - we're racists! Because we oppose the state of Israel, therefore we hate Jews, whether we say so or not. I do not mean to overstate the role of the organised left here - we might have all the same laws on the books anyway, had we taken a firm stand in favour of free expression. But we would be in a better place now to fight back. We could say - as I do here - *this* is where it leads! In the name of anti-racism, the state chooses to illegalise - piece by piece - protest against a genocide. Instead, the left is forced into ducking and weaving, and above all special pleading. 'You're the real racists,' *Socialist Worker* tells the state, the cops and the media. 'No, you are,' replies the state - but it has the media to amplify its version, and the cops to enforce it in the end.

We cannot win this way. Our job is to delegitimise the state and its media outliers, to *reject* its right to police what is permissible. That means *opposing* restrictions on racist, etc speech *on principle*. And it certainly means demanding the abolition of this absurd, ever-growing list of proscribed organisations that now, finally, includes the name of Hizb ut-Tahrir ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

ACTION

Stop arming Israel - boycott Barclays

Saturday January 27: Local actions nationwide. Barclays Bank holds substantial financial ties with arms companies supplying weapons and military technology to Israel, used in its attacks on Palestinians. Join the protest at a local branch of Barclays to demand the bank stops bankrolling Israel's ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: palestinecampaign.org/events.

Protect the right to strike

Saturday January 27, 12 noon: March and rally, marking 40 years since Thatcher banned trade unions at GCHQ. Assemble Montpellier Gardens, Cheltenham GL50. 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, 9am to 5pm: Day school, north 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.

Stop bombing Gaza! Stop bombing Yemen!

Sunday January 28, 2pm: Anti-war convention, The Atrium, 124 Cheshire Street, London E2. Israel's genocidal attack on Gaza is destabilising the whole of the Middle East. The UK and the US are attacking Yemen. The risk of a war drawing in the whole Middle East is growing daily. Speakers include: Daniel Kebede (NEU), John Rees (Stop the War), Richard Boyd-Barrett (Irish Anti-War Movement). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events.

Defeat the new Tory anti-trade union law

Tuesday January 30, 6.30pm: Online public meeting. Discuss how the trade union movement can give effect to the strategy of resistance to Sunak's Minimum Service Levels law, as set out at last December's special TUC congress. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: www.facebook.com/ShopStewardsNetwork.

What it means to be human

Tuesday January 30, 6.30pm: Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taverton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'Woman's biggest husband is the Moon: BaYaka hunter-gatherer gender relations'. Speaker: Jerome Lewis. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.facebook.com/events/1022609509009052.

Israel-Palestine: oppression and resistance

Thursday February 1, 7pm: Nasser and the Arab Revolutions. Speaker: Yassamine Mather (Hands Off the People of Iran). Part of an online education and discussion series. Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

EP Thompson at 100

Saturday February 3, 9.30am to 3.30pm: Conference, Trinity Sixth Form Academy, Northgate House, Halifax HX1. To discuss and reflect on communist historian EP Thompson's intellectual and political legacies, as well as the ongoing relevance of Thompson's approaches to history and politics for the world of today. Registration free, includes light lunch. Followed by a social until 6pm. Organised by Society for the Study of Labour History: www.facebook.com/groups/127531310640386.

Preparing for a general election challenge

Saturday February 3, 11am to 4.30pm: Organising convention, Carrs Lane Church Centre, Birmingham B4 and online. Preparing a challenge by trade unionists, socialists and campaign groups, with candidates standing against Sir Keir Starmer's Labour Party in the forthcoming general election. Registration £5 (£2). Organised by Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition: www.facebook.com/TUSCoalition.

Ceasefire now! End the siege of Gaza!

Saturday February 3, 12 noon: National demonstration, central London - details to be announced. 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/7133507213412167.

Stand with Gaza

Wednesday February 7: Nationwide workplace day of action. A call to all those in work, college or university to organise a walkout, lunchtime or early morning protest to demand a permanent ceasefire. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk/events/standwithgaza-workplace-day-of-action.

The Workers' Committee

Friday February 16, 7pm: Pamphlet launch and social, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Reprint of JT Murphy's 1917 pamphlet, which delves into the struggles and triumphs of the early shop stewards networks. Tickets £5 (free). Free refreshments. Organised by Strike Map: www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=688785040119446.

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.

CPGB

A stale left in a tumultuous world

There were two topics on the agenda: the Israel-Gaza war and the coming general election. Scott Evans reports on the January 21 aggregate for CPGB members and supporters

Beginning with the Provisional Central Committee's statement on the Israel-Gaza war and reflecting the fact that all 23 of its points were largely uncontroversial within the organisation, we had only two amendments, neither of which saw anyone vote against. One proposed the inclusion of an additional sentence on boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS), while another was put forward for the sake of accuracy on the legal definition of genocide.

Jack Conrad opened the discussion with the PCC's statement. He explained its primary purpose as clarifying the position of the organisation in the wake of the events following October 7 - particularly given that we have published some material with which we have some serious disagreements. Of course, that is one of the great merits of the *Weekly Worker*: if all we published was strictly compatible with some largely fixed, prescribed line, it would hardly be worth reading.

The first amendment, proposed by Mike Macnair, called for the removal of the reference to "acts of omission" from the definition of genocide.¹ Clause 1 had originally read: "Note, genocide is legally defined as acting with the intent to 'destroy in whole or part a national, ethnic, racial or religious group as such' - that includes acts of omission."

Comrade Macnair was not arguing about whether Israel would fall foul of one or another definition of genocide - indeed most (or all) present at the meeting consider that what Israel is doing does indeed amount to the opening acts of genocide. The point is simply that the typical legal definition of genocide does not include acts of omission.²

The more important underlying point here is rejecting the common practice on the left where accuracy is abandoned for the sake of punchier rhetoric, backed up by moral righteousness. Regular abuse of this rhetorical trick - outside of the heat of the moment on pickets and demonstrations and other such forgivable instances - rather blunts its effectiveness over time. One can imagine examples: 'Neoliberalism is genocide', 'This bill is fascism', and so on. Crying boy, meet wolf.

BDS

Anne McShane proposed the second amendment heard by the meeting:

Point 4 add: "The boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign launched by Palestinian organisations also deserves support, because it provides a way for the wider working class to express its opposition to the Israeli regime and can lead to more militant action if given an anti-imperialist edge."

The comrade explained that, while she had held reservations about particular aspects of BDS in the past - such as the boycotting of academics in Israel, which she was concerned might stifle opposition voices - she has since dropped all such concerns. The important thing is to build support for the Palestinians outside Israel, given the situation of the Israeli working class, and use BDS to draw attention to various aspects of the state of Israel and its connections to the imperialist world.

BDS, in some places more than others, also provides a framework through which to direct organising



Sir Keir heads a bourgeois workers' party, but there is little to choose between him and the Tory PM

efforts around Israel/Palestine. We simply have to engage with it without any illusions, occasionally fostered by ahistorical comparisons with South Africa, about its possible role in solving the crisis on its own terms. The fact that the UK government is clamping down on such expressions of solidarity only increases the vigour with which we must support such efforts.

Following her introduction, owing in part to Jack Conrad's mentioning of some comrades' prior reticence about BDS in his introduction, Peter Manson spoke expressing his concern in the past about a particular use of BDS - specifically the proposed boycott by international telephone operators (in the days before direct dialling) of calls to apartheid South Africa. Why, the comrade asked, should ordinary people in South Africa, including anti-apartheid activists, be denied the ability to speak with their family members or comrades living abroad? Surely what we want to target is *the capitalist class*, not our allies on the ground in the country we are proposing to hit with worker-sanctions.

Answering the comrade, Conrad weighed in on the importance of symbolism in politics. One example given was the working class in Britain, particularly in the north of England, acting in solidarity with the Union in the American civil war in the fight to abolish slavery. He contended that any boycott of communications would not in reality completely cut off any country, and to suggest it could would be naive; the point is the symbolism of it. Comrade Conrad also countered comrade Manson's suggestion that actions should or can avoid catching workers in the crossfire, that in fact some actions Marxist should support *do* materially hurt some sections of the working class, such as pushing for a boycott of arms production and shipments, which could mean that some workers lose their jobs (indeed their trade union might intervene on the side of continuing production and shipments).

Farzad Kamangar wondered whether the amendment should be changed, so that it begins: "The *international* boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign ..." She said that we should support

BDS specifically because it is an *international* campaign, particularly given that in many places it has very little presence, or its presence is limited to "silly things that don't really matter" like boycotting particular fruit and vegetables.

In her response to the contributions, comrade McShane explained that what she thinks is important about a protest is the politics, not the form. Of course, with anything like BDS you are going to get a number of people engaging with it on a purely liberal level (what they will and will not buy in the supermarket, etc), but what is important is picking good symbols, drawing people in and educating our class.

The comrade also noted that she found there to be an equivocation on the question of genocide in the PCC statement, and that it is very clear that the Israeli state has an *intent* which one can see both in its actions and in the statement of many senior politicians, whereas the statement merely says the situation "could easily lead to death on a scale that amounts to genocide".

Besides further discussion on the nature and purpose of BDS, there was some discussion about whether support for Hamas is higher or lower than the figure quoted in the statement, whether polls reflect support for Hamas or October 7, and so on, but the existing statement went unamended on these points and was unanimously agreed.

Second

Opening the second discussion of the aggregate, Mike Macnair spoke on the possibilities, or lack thereof, for left intervention in the coming period. The inability of the left to unite is a permanently discrediting feature that we seek to overcome, and we look for every opportunity to do so.

The next UK general election is likely to take place sometime towards the end of this year, and this will likely mean we will see even more of the already fairly numerous attempts by the left to throw up new party-esque initiatives in opposition to Labour, 'the status quo', the sect landscape, and so on. The discussion was fairly short, limited in scope, and preliminary.

The comrade focused on some

of the initiatives we have seen so far already, including from existing sects such as the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, and how we might orient to them. We have Transform,³ the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition with its "organising convention" for a left intervention in the election,⁴ the Campaign for a Mass Workers Party, and so on. Signed up to Tusc's convention so far, noted comrade Macnair, are seven organisations, though this includes the organisation which runs Tusc, the Socialist Party in England and Wales, and Socialist Students (SPEW's student section).

Labour

As for Labour itself, he stressed that we continue to make the point that Labour is a bourgeois workers' party *and always has been*. Before 1914, Labour MPs voted with the Liberals on foreign policy and rearmament questions, while Clement Attlee's 1945-51 government was characterised by austerity, and so on. Labour's rightwing character is not new. But it is still a form of workers' party because of, first of all, its name, which is not trivial, in combination with the fact that the core electoral base is in working class areas, its history in and around the working class and socialist movements, and is largely financed and supported by trade union affiliations. For this reason, we should not expect to see any left opposition to Labour to have substantial success at this particular juncture; 'Get the Tories out' will be the order of the day.

While our aim is not a Labour Party mark two, but a mass Communist Party, there is still the possibility of transforming Labour into a genuine united front of the working class - where communist and other left organisations are free to affiliate. Meanwhile, left electoral projects are, for us, useful exactly to the degree that they provide an opportunity to agitate and propagandise in for a Communist Party. In this sense, Respect was more useful for us than SPEW's Campaign for a New Workers Party, being closer to a real partyist project, while the CNWP was (like Tusc today) really just a front for SPEW.

When it comes to calling for a vote for this or that party, comrade Macnair argued that we should be

oriented by what is *agitational*, so it could be that we call for a vote for CPB candidates on the basis of the name 'communist' alone, or for the Workers Party of Britain because of their clear anti-imperialism (not because we approve of leader George Galloway's politics or anything beyond this simple point), and not to call for a vote for the likes of Tusc because it does indeed just stand for a Labour Party mark two.

Adding to this introduction, Jack Conrad explained that there would be no point in us standing any election candidates of our own at the moment. Aside from the fact of our limited numbers, it would have no real impact - unlike in 1992, where there was a real possibility of making an impact, however small, in the wake of the collapse of the old 'official' CPGB. We stood four candidates: one in Scotland, one in Wales and two in London. Today, however, we are, like SPEW, barred by the Electoral Commission from standing under our own name. Comrade Conrad was also sceptical about the 'vote Labour but ...' formula, given that Sir Keir's leadership is probably the most rightwing expression of Labourism that there has been.

Carla Roberts pointed out that Left Unity seems to be putting some distance between itself and the increasingly anaemic Transform⁵ - which, if a continuing trend, would leave Transform with what was the Breakthrough Party and various independent socialists and ex-Labourite hangers-on. The incredibly lacklustre founding conference doubtless put off some people.⁶ She also wondered if the more interesting stuff might come after the election, after a 'crisis of expectations' - although she expressed scepticism about that too. Expectations, that is positive expectations, about a Sir Keir government are non-existent.

Vernon Price questioned what exactly we want to do concretely to intervene on the ground with these left projects, noting also the possibility of a Socialist Appeal/Revolutionary Communist Party electoral initiative ... if the electoral commission gave permission (doubtful). What we have is various useless broad front projects and in the case of Socialist Appeal a sect rebrand of Fabian socialism because of the failure of Corbynism and the growing popularity of communism amongst young people.

Summing up, comrade Macnair agreed with the idea that we should be turning up to meetings, helping out with canvassing or whatever is happening on the ground, specifically with whatever seems to be the most promising left project. But the details of any such concrete intervention will be clearer much closer to the time than now ●

Notes

1. An omission, as opposed to an act, is a failure to perform an obligation.
2. See www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2001/17/contents; but note that the bill it originates from does include omissions, which is one potential source of confusion when searching for such stuff online: publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/199900/cmbills/166/00166-a.htm. See also the Rome statute and UN definitions.
3. transformpolitics.uk.
4. www.tusc.org.uk/19890/29-11-2023/general-election-challenge-organising-convention-details-agreed.
5. See, for example, the framing in leftunity.org/greetings-to-the-transform-conference-this-weekend.
6. See 'Sixty seconds and no politics' *Weekly Worker* November 30 2023: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1469/sixty-seconds-and-no-politics.

THESES

Israel-Gaza war and communist strategy

Theses agreed by January 21 aggregate of CPGB members, including the two agreed amendments

1. Democratic opinion throughout the world is justifiably outraged by the Israeli assault on Gaza. In what is a blatant act of ethnic cleansing almost the entire population has been uprooted. Getting "our hostages back" provides the Israeli war cabinet with a smokescreen for a second Nakba. Ongoing military operations, combined with denial of food, clean drinking water, shelter, fuel, sanitation, medicine and the rapid spread of infectious diseases, could easily lead to death on a scale that amounts to genocide. Note, genocide is legally defined as acting with the intent to "destroy in whole or part a national, ethnic, racial or religious group as such".

2. Israel seems quite content to let the majority of the Gazan population starve to death or die from disease, but its actions - not least packing huge numbers of people next to the Rafah crossing - show a clear intention of creating the conditions needed to trigger a mass exodus into Egypt. Some Israeli government ministers have been quite explicit about wanting another Nakba.

3. Calling for a ceasefire is not enough. We must demand that Israel immediately withdraws its forces, stops the bombing and lifts its siege of Gaza. The occupation of the West Bank must be ended too. Zionist settlers, with the active connivance of the Israeli Defence Forces, are bent on driving out as many Palestinians as possible through a vicious campaign of murder, intimidation and land grabs. As for the so-called Palestinian Authority, it acts as a police force for Israel in what is, in fact, a series of 'Indian reservations'. Not surprisingly Mahmoud Abbas is massively unpopular. He is a quisling.

4. It is incumbent upon the left in the west, crucially in the US, to fight for the ending of all military supplies to Israel. This is a demand to expose government collaboration in a potential genocide, but also a demand to be agitated for in terms of action from below. Those engaged in the transport industry - road, rail, docks, sea and air - could play a leading role in imposing workers' sanctions against Israel. The boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign launched by Palestinian organisations also deserves support, because it provides a way for the wider working class to express its opposition to the Israeli regime and can lead to more militant action, if given an anti-imperialist edge.

5. Israel claims to be acting in self-defence after the audacious October 7 attack from Gaza. However, as a colonial-settler state whose origins lie in mass expulsions, which treats Gaza as a giant prison, has annexed the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem, militarily occupies the West Bank and has planted nearly 400,000 illegal settlers, it has no such right. Israel is engaged in an unjust, not a just, war.

6. Whatever the atrocities, real and alleged, October 7 was a desperate act of resistance. Presumably the idea was to set the whole region ablaze. There can be no drawing an equivalence between the Israeli government and Hamas. True, it is a reactionary, Islamic, organisation, but, whereas the likes of al-Qa'eda, Islamic State and Boko Haram have no serious mass base, that cannot be said of Hamas. It is deeply implanted in the Palestinian population. According to a recent, post-October 7 poll, Hamas is supported by 44% in Gaza and 42% on the West Bank.

7. It is right to demand the overthrow



Little Amal: marching for Palestine

of the Israeli Zionist regime. Zionism is a blood-and-soil ideology that necessarily involves discrimination, dispossession and expansionism. From the start Zionism aimed to establish Israel as a work colony; that means, if Israel is to be a democracy, expelling or at the very least marginalising, denying rights to, the indigenous Palestinian population.

8. The Palestinian right of return must be championed. This is a right of habitation decided upon individually, or by family group. It is not, as is alleged by social-imperialist apologists for Zionism, a demand for an impossible *Volks* movement of the entire diaspora - which now inhabits not just Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, etc, but the US and many countries in western Europe too.

9. While communists oppose Zionism, we recognise that since 1948 a definite Israeli-Jewish nation has come into existence. Israeli Jews speak the same Hebrew language, inhabit the same territory, have a common culture and sense of identity. To call for the abolition of this - or any other nation for that matter - is thoroughly unMarxist. Such a call is either naive, utopian or downright murderous. The Israeli Jewish nation is a historically constituted reality that has to be recognised and dealt with in a civilised, not a barbarous, manner.

10. No democratic solution to the Israel-Palestine question can be won without the consent of the Israeli people. Yet, the fact is that, despite the courage of a tiny minority of leftwingers and peace activists, the Israeli population has consistently - often overwhelmingly - supported the wars of their governments, irrespective of the death, suffering and repression that this involves.

11. The 1948 war, which followed the declaration of Israeli independence,

then the 1967 Six-Day War, had well over a million Palestinians flee or being forcibly driven from their homes. The 'Arab citizens of Israel', subjected to arbitrary martial law which only ended in 1966, and now constituting some 20% of its population, still suffer from systemic oppression (which, according to Amnesty International, amounts to apartheid). Nearly six million Palestinians are officially registered as refugees by the UN. However, both the colonial subjects within and those without continue to resist using whatever means they have at their disposal.

12. Amongst Israeli Jews this engenders a permanent sense of insecurity. Israeli politics therefore moves ever further to the right in the vain attempt to crush Palestinian resistance. Expecting, or relying upon, Israel's so-called democracy movement - in reality a movement which favours constitutional checks and balances *against* democracy - to fight for the national rights of the Palestinians is delusional. The same goes for Histadrut. It primarily seeks to advance the sectional terms, conditions and interests of Jewish Israeli workers.

13. The two-state solution hypocritically promoted by the US, its Nato allies and Labor Zionists (and naively promoted by 'official' communists, Palestinian collaborators and the Labour Party soft left) effectively falls at the same hurdle as the single-state solution. We cannot expect Israel, as presently constituted, to concede the territory necessary to create a viable Palestinian state. Without a serious transformation of the regional, and indeed global, balance of forces, any such solution will simply not happen. Benjamin Netanyahu has the virtue of making that abundantly clear.

14. The Palestinian national

resistance movement cannot win by its own efforts alone. The balance of forces simply precludes any such possibility. However, the Palestinians are an integral part of the wider Arab nation - total population around 460 million - and this commonality represents both a source of tremendous strength and a threat to the reactionary regimes in Cairo, Amman, Riyadh, etc. Solidarity with the Palestinians easily spills over into demands for radical economic, political and social change. Solving the Israel-Palestine question is feasible therefore if the working class can put itself in a position whereby it leads the struggle for democracy and Arab unification.

15. Only such a strategy can hope to win over a majority of the Israeli Jewish working class. A single Palestinian capitalist state is not only unfeasible: it offers nothing to the majority of the Israeli Jewish population - except perhaps a reversal of the poles of oppression and therefore a denial of elementary national rights. Israeli Jews will not accept any such solution: collective memory, especially since 1933, militates against such an outcome. Israeli Jews would desperately fight ... and at huge cost in terms of loss of life. After all, Israel is fanatically nationalistic, is strategically backed by US imperialism and is militarily very strong. Some armchair generals militarily rank it as the fourth or fifth most powerful state in the world. Nor should we forget its arsenal of nuclear weapons.

16. A socialist solution involving not only the Arab nation, but other neighbouring peoples too, would be another matter entirely. Israeli Jewish workers would lose their nationally privileged position, true, but liberate themselves from capitalism and become an integral part of the new ruling regime. 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.

17. Communists would, of course, advocate the unity of Arabs and Jews in a single state, but voluntary unity is vital. Military conquest of Israel is imaginable, but we advocate rapprochement, assimilation and eventual merger.

18. Protests against Israel's assault on Gaza almost instantly assumed mass proportions. London has seen some of the biggest demonstrations in British history. Inevitably the establishment, including the Sir Keir Starmer leadership of the Labour Party, has hit back. There has been a concerted attempt to smear the pro-Palestine movement as anti-Semitic and therefore motivated by intolerance, bigotry and hatred. Eg, the slogan, 'Palestine shall be free from the river to the sea', is condemned as a call for the mass extermination of Jews in Israel. A big lie.

19. The claim that anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism is now a tested and tried weapon in the class war that was used with considerable effect against the Jeremy Corbyn leadership of the Labour Party. As we predicted, this weapon was bound to find wider application in combating opposition to Israel and unstinting US support for what is its most important and most reliable ally in the Middle East. Those on the 'left' who failed to actively combat the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' campaign in the Labour Party have revealed themselves to be charlatans of the first order.

20. All major parties in the UK are fully, unquestioningly, committed to the 'special relationship' with the US and therefore to the defence of Israel and therefore to the promotion of the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' big lie.

21. It would, of course, be amazing if there were not a rise in real, not fake, incidents of anti-Semitism (the same goes, albeit because of different reasons, for anti-Muslim incidents). Israel claims to be the state of all Jews, claims to represent them and act on their behalf, no matter where they live in the world. A few, politically backward, supporters of Palestine, will inevitably fall for this falsehood. Thankfully, the mass pro-Palestinian demonstrations have been notable for the presence of large numbers of Jews who militantly oppose Zionism. This has doubtless contributed to the almost complete absence of anything that genuinely smacks of anti-Semitism.

22. Clearly basic democratic rights are under attack. There have been calls from on high for banning demonstrations and ever more restrictions are imposed by the police. People have been arrested for the most ludicrous reasons, but mainly because of their opposition to the Israeli state, under legislation supposedly designed to protect ethnic and religious minorities.

23. The main lesson to draw from this is the correctness of upholding the unrestricted right of free speech and assembly. That must include reactionaries and fascists too: "you cannot pluck the rose without its thorns" (Marx). By supporting restrictions, including no-platforming in universities, sections of the left have unintentionally legitimised laws that are not only turned against the left, but, on this occasion, against the entire pro-Palestine movement ●

LEFT

Communist unity and its refuseniks

We must reject bureaucratic centralism, sects of one and diplomatic unity-mongering. Instead, we must uphold the right to engage in sharp polemics and form factions, says **Mike Macnair**. This is an edited version of his January 21 Online Communist Forum talk

This is a further contribution to the discussion of communist unity which has been running in the pages of the *Weekly Worker* and to some extent elsewhere in the last few months. Most of the interlocutors in this discussion did not actually attend this Online Communist Forum meeting, though we were pleased to have some significant critical contributions from Caitriona Rylance.

Let me outline the background to the discussion. The Young Communist League, which is attached to the Communist Party of Britain (in turn the appendage of the *Morning Star*), has had a recent sharp turn to militant 'spectaculars', using masks, red flags, etc on demonstrations, to present itself, in a sense, well to the left of the 'official' CPB. The turn has been less apparent on the Palestine demos, so it may have been short-lived.

In 2023 the Socialist Appeal group decided to run a recruitment campaign using the slogan, "Are you a Communist? Then get organised - join Socialist Appeal". It has now decided to rebrand itself as the Revolutionary Communist Party, reappropriating a name first used by a Trotskyist group of the 1940s, but later appropriated by Frank Furedi and co (previously the Revolutionary Communist Tendency, later *Spiked*; it would be a diversion to attempt a political characterisation of the Furedi RCP before the group's turn, through 'contrarianism', to eventual Toryism).

'Talking About Socialism ... from a Marxist point of view' (TAS) of Nick Wrack, Will McMahon, Chris Strafford and others issued a socialist unity appeal without offering any explanation of how theirs was different from anybody else's - including here the CPGB's own long-term campaigning for communist unity. We did then have an exchange, and at that point it became clear that TAS was not in fact willing to talk face-to-face to the CPGB, because they regard us as being marginal and unimportant, and they are busy building up their own organisation; and because we were 'rude' to them in some way (I am not quite clear how we were rude, as opposed to arguing that they needed to explain what was new in their proposals and expressing political differences. But there it goes.)

Comrade Lawrence Parker, who has a widely read blog on communist history, has embarked in the last few months on a course of purely negative criticism of the CPGB. His argument is that we are a "wilting specimen" and display a "sluggish 'non-combat' culture" leading to "the politics of the holding pattern" and suggests that "the CPGB-PCC's organisational crisis, its 20-year curve towards liquidation, is set to continue".¹ What comrade Parker's positive alternative is (if any) is very unclear.

Arising from these various issues, TAS and ourselves have had, as I already said, an exchange, including in the *Weekly Worker*.

Background

Let us look first to the general background of this discussion. The left is actually moving - in relation to the objective needs of politics - in ever-decreasing circles. Sir Keir Starmer (assuming that he wins the general election, which now looks likely) will be the most rightwing Labour prime minister presiding over the most rightwing Labour government.



Lenin, Trotsky and Voroshilov along with other delegates at 10th Congress in 1921

That is not actually saying a great deal, of course. Think about the role of Arthur Henderson and co in supporting the British war effort in 1914-18. Think about how rightwing Ramsay MacDonald's government in 1924 was, with Philip Snowden's treasury orthodoxy or Jimmy Thomas as colonial secretary authorising the bombing of Iraqi villages. And so on.

Nonetheless, in 1945-48 the outcome of World War II (Soviet tanks on the Elbe, mass communist parties in several 'western' countries and much wider hostility to capitalism, forced the bourgeoisie to make major concessions to the working class (Labour as a party of government was, of course, made possible by the 1918 concession on the suffrage, which would never have been made without the 1917 Russian Revolution). Capital and its political representatives have pursued a long-term policy of taking back these concessions, by quite devious means of policy steps intended to bear fruit 20 or 30 years down the road. This has been facilitated by the belief of the social democrats, and more recently the Eurocommunists, that concessions to capital will produce concessions from capital. The reverse is the reality: capital concedes significant reforms when it is faced with the 'stick' of threats to its political power, in addition to the 'carrot' of reformists willing to settle for less than working class political power. Thus we already had the 1867 Reform Act and 1871 and 1875 legalisation of trade unions, in response to the 'Sheffield Outrages' (trade union violence of the 1860s) and trade union leaders' participation in the First International.

Since 1945, capital's long-term policy and the reformists' craven loyalism have produced an objective rightward dynamic. The first Harold Wilson government in 1964-70 was well to the right of Clement Attlee's 1945-51 administration, while the second in 1974-76 was to the right of the first. Tony Blair's government was a long way to the right of the second Wilson government, but Starmer will be to the right of Blair. The same dynamic affects the Tories. The governments of Anthony Eden and

Harold Macmillan in 1951-64 were substantially to the right of the 1940-45 coalition government. Edward Heath (1970-74) was sufficiently far to the right of Macmillan to gain the name, 'Selsdon man', for his reactionary politics, while Margaret Thatcher was notoriously way to the right of Heath. As for David Cameron, he signalled his intentions early by taking the Tory Party out of the centre-right group in the European parliament to form a new rightwing group, together with the Italian post-fascists and other characters of this sort.

Starmer

So the Starmer government - assuming Starmer does win - will be a very rightwing government, and its failure to deliver anything significant to Labour voters will produce demoralisation, and a Conservative government to follow it - which will be to the right of Sunak, Braverman and co. and look more like Giorgia Meloni or Viktor Orbán.

On the left, we have seen a succession of small left electoral initiatives of one sort and another, each broadly trying to pretend to be left Labour: the Socialist Labour Party in the 1990s; the Socialist Alliance, Respect - the Unity Coalition, Left Unity, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. And so on and so on. The left is doing the same thing over and over again, with decreasing returns.

On the other hand, we have seen in the last year or so a significant uptick in student radicalisation. The YCL's turn to 'leftism' is an example of this, but there has also been a significant recovery of the Socialist Workers Party, back to being able to recruit large numbers at freshers fairs. Socialist Appeal has plainly grown rapidly among students (as is visible from its participation in Palestine demonstrations). Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century - again, basically an organisation based among students - self-reports that it has trebled or quadrupled in size.

Student radicalisation is based on the idea that the past is very easily forgotten - there is a three- or four-year turnover of activists. Hence it is possible, as with the SWP, that a

group can actually adopt the idea that 'The membership has failed us: we must elect a new membership'. Rapid student recruitment can promote the delusion of the 'breakthrough' to a mass scale without left unification, which is so apparent in Socialist Appeal's 'party turn'.

In this respect, SA's party turn is like the Furedi group's (similarly student-based), and more unrealistic than the similar (unrealistic) turns of the 1940s RCP, of Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League to create the Workers Revolutionary Party, and of Tony Cliff's International Socialists to create the SWP. The 1940s RCP, the SLL-WRP and the IS-SWP all imagined that they had made the breakthrough by recruiting militants in industry. (In reality the old 'official' CPGB was in the 1940s and 1970s also growing, and much bigger than the 1940s RCP, the 1970s SLL-WRP and IS-SWP.)

On the other hand, in the 1960s-80s left groups outside universities and colleges could nonetheless intervene in them. More recently, that has become a lot more difficult. Universities have tightened up massively on who may turn up to freshers fairs; more generally, there are elaborate controls on who can book meeting rooms, and so on. If you already have student supporters, you can recruit; less so from outside. That is a problem for the CPGB, and for other left groups.

Polite

Nonetheless. I suggested in my most recent article on this topic that it *may be* actually impossible for the CPGB's project to work.² This is what TAS argues: the openly polemical character of the *Weekly Worker* is so repellent that it cannot work. TAS's counterproposal is in essence an organisation based on a platform which is formed by private, diplomatic agreements, not open to discussion as to what the platform should be, and which insists on 'comradeliness' in political exchanges.

TAS's platform, as was the case with comrade Wrack's Socialist Platform in Left Unity in 2013, is so drawn that the Alliance for Workers' Liberty could sign up to it without discomfort. But

the AWL is an 'anti-anti-imperialist' organisation: it opposes (alleged) Russian imperialism and (alleged) Iraqi and now Iranian imperialism, but "does not oppose" but merely "places no confidence in" British and US overseas military operations. The AWL pioneered much of the anti-Semitism smear campaign deployed against the left in the Labour Party. On Ukraine, it demands, 'Arm, arm, arm Ukraine': that is, escalate Nato's proxy war against Russia. In origin a Trotskyist organisation, the AWL has become a plain social-imperialist group, like HM Hyndman's and HG Wells's 1916-1922 National Socialist Party: a component of the social democratic right.

The Socialist Platform's programme was designed to contain diplomatic formulations which would allow unity with the AWL. The same is in fact true of TAS's platform - though TAS comrades have published better articles.³ But, at the same time, the diplomatic formulations are not in principle amendable, and the 'principle of politeness' is adopted: ie, it is necessary to avoid arguments and sharp polemics in order to avoid "repellent" publication.

We are also running a debate in the letters column of the paper with Andrew Northall, who argues that banning factions is essential to effective organisation. This is the view of the *Morning Star*/CPB, and indeed of the traditional 'official' communist parties in general. In fact it is also, as it happens, the line of the SWP, banning 'permanent' factions, from the mid-1970s, and before that of the American Socialist Workers Party (not connected to the British SWP) from the mid-1960s.

Trotsky, in *Where is Britain going?* (1925) made an analogy between the 'official lefts' in the British labour movement and those who breed pigeons which are so short-beaked that they cannot get out of the egg on their own. I argued in the article mentioned above that actually, if the CPGB is wrong on the question of factions and on the question of open polemic, then it follows in reality that the labour bureaucracy, and the capitalist state which stands behind it, have been so

successful in breeding short-beaked pigeons on the left that the victory of the right in the labour movement is guaranteed. And, if that is the case, then the victory of the right overall is guaranteed, and the underlying dynamic of capitalist politics towards World War III is likely to proceed more or less unabated.

Lessons

I offer here a little more explanation of this point, by way of fundamental lessons on this question. The first is actually the fall of the Soviet Union. This demonstrated, in the first place, that bureaucracy controlled a regime in which the planning authorities lied to the party leadership about the 'success' of the five-year plans, the managers lied to the planning authorities about the extent to which they had fulfilled plan targets, and the workers lied to the managers about their work. The end result of this was the famous Soviet joke: 'They pretend to pay us, and we pretend to work'.

The result was a general demoralisation, and very widespread illusions in the direct political agents of capitalism - reflected in the fact that large parts of the working class actually supported the overthrow of the USSR and the satellite regimes. Once these were gone, of course, capital dumped on the workers. But, after 60 years of lying 'official optimism', anyone who pointed out that the fall of the regimes would have disastrous consequences could not be believed.

Secondly, once the core leadership of the party decided to restore capitalism, which is essentially what happened under Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin, there was no institutional means within the regime by which anybody could resist. All that could be attempted was an inherently politically illegitimate - and hence easily defeated - military coup.

The proletariat is the potential bearer of socialism, because as a class it needs to organise collective action in order to assert its interests. That is just as much true in a regime which purports to be a workers' regime as it is in a capitalist regime - a point which Lenin made against Trotsky in the debate on the militarisation of labour and the trade unions in 1920-21. The proletariat still needs to organise. But then the corollary of that is, if you ban all the parties other than the Communist Party and you ban all factions within the Communist Party, the upshot of that is inevitably going to be that there is no means by which the proletariat can collectively organise to assert its interests. And if it happens that the political leadership is captured by pro-capitalist elements, the restoration of capitalism becomes inevitable.

Hence, the comrades of the *Morning Star*/CPB, and people who hold similar views about the supposed necessity of the ban on factions, need to accept political responsibility for the collapse of the Soviet Union. This is both because the regime of lies which was enabled by the absence of competing factional views and open arguments produced the 'anarchy of the plan' and utter demoralisation of everybody in those societies; and because the ban on factions and apparatus control of what could be said also meant that, once the leaders of the regime set out to restore capitalism, nobody could effectively resist.

The second lesson is the fate of Corbynism. The far left clings to unity with the 'official left' (Corbyn and co) and avoids openly denouncing the 'official left' - just as the 'official left' clings to unity with the rightwing of the labour movement, and avoids openly denouncing it. After all, there is no way in which you can get a Labour government without the unity between the Labour left and the Labour right. But the labour right, in coordination with the capitalist state

and capitalist media, witch-hunts both the 'official left' and the far left.

Clinging to unity on the basis of diplomacy - unity without open controversy, unity without denunciation and polemic - entails that result. It is a *natural and probable consequence* (stronger than merely a foreseeable consequence) that, as long as the far left continues to be diplomatic towards the official left and the official left continues to be diplomatic towards the right, the right will be victorious. The victory of the right is guaranteed, and we saw it play out with Corbynism.

We had already seen it in different forms in Rifondazione Comunista in Italy. The leadership decided to join a government which was backing the imperialist war in Afghanistan, and the result of that was the total and utter destruction of Rifondazione, with merely political gravel left behind. We have seen it in the fate of the left in the Brazilian Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT or Workers Party) which originated as a broad-front left unification on the basis again of diplomatic methods in relation to political differences, and ended as merely a 'social liberal' party, like New Labour.

If the ban on factions within the party is necessary in order to achieve unity in action, then that also logically entails the diplomatic approach to creating unity beyond the party. If you cannot have unity without suppressing the open discussion of differences within the party, then it follows inescapably that to have unity outside the party we also need a diplomatic approach, where we must tone down our polemics. That in turn entails the suppression of speech which might disturb such diplomacy.

So the *Morning Star*/CPB's policy has been actually tested and failed on the largest possible scale - in the fate of the USSR. And it has also been tested and failed on a very large scale in the case of Corbynism, of Rifondazione, of the Brazilian PT, as well as many other examples.

But this policy is not only that of the *Morning Star*/CPB. It is shared by the SWP in its policy within the Stop the War Coalition in the early 2000s, in Respect - the Unity Coalition at the same period, and so on and so forth. It is shared by the Socialist Party in England and Wales in its policy in Tusc, and so on. It is shared by Anti-Capitalist Resistance.

And TAS also offers the method of diplomatic unity and the method of politeness. So imagine that the tens of thousands of ex-members of left groups of one sort or another who have not gone over to the right all flock round TAS on the basis of adopting the general approach it proposes, and as a result TAS becomes a mass force. (I have to say that I do not think that is very likely! I am merely imagining such a highly positive development.) The same would be true of a mass surge into one of the SWP's projects, or into Tusc. The result would necessarily be a repetition of the catastrophes and demoralising defeat of the Corbyn movement.

Positive

I will turn now from the negative to the positive. The first point is that what we seek is *communist* unity, not socialist unity. No doubt it would be nice to have a unified workers' party and a unified workers' international, which would include the right wing of the movement if it was willing to act in a disciplined fashion if it lost votes, and to tolerate dissenting minorities if it won them.

The reality, however, is that the rightwing of the movement is not willing to act in a disciplined fashion: it collaborates with the capitalist state to exercise police control over the movement. And, as Lenin and Zinoviev wrote in 1915,

On all important occasions (for example, the voting on August 4 [1914]), the opportunists come forward with an ultimatum, which they carry out with the aid of their numerous connections with the bourgeoisie, of their majority of the executives of the trade unions, etc.⁴

The Corbyn movement displayed this process at work, and yet again reconfirmed that this is the normal practice of the rightwing of the labour movement.

Hence, before we can pose the issue of partial unity with the loyalist rightwing, we need communist unity - the unity of those who stand for the overthrow of the capitalist state, for the overthrow of the regime of imperialism; who stand for generalised human emancipation, including the emancipation of all the people whose lives do not matter in the eyes of the imperialists, like the Palestinians, the Yemenis, and so on, and so on. *Communist* unity, not unity with the 'anti-anti-imperialists'.

We need that, partly because our own ability to combat the loyalist wing of the workers' movement is massively undermined by the inability of the communists to unite as communists.

Secondly, we need to organise. On this point the CPGB is on the same side as the *Morning Star*/CPB, SWP, SPEW, Socialist Appeal/RCP, and so on, and against the various left 'independents'. We need a political voice. To get a political voice entails the ability to run election campaigns, if we have the resources to do so. It entails the ability to publish regular newspapers and other journals and publications, which can combat the monopoly of the capitalist-controlled media.

In order to do all this, we need to have an organised, dues-paying membership - we need to draw lines on the basis that people get to vote if they participate and pay dues. We need to have fund drives. We need to have the necessary assets and organisational structures, etc.

If we do not accept these necessities, we will not get a political voice. Instead, we get merely one or another form of ephemera, whether it is Occupy in 2011 and other such anarchist spectacles, or the various short-lived fronts and coalitions previously mentioned. It is quite fundamental, then, that we stand for the organisation of a Communist Party.

Thirdly, we must be willing to be a minority and, for those who happen to be a majority, to risk being a minority. It is necessary to take seriously the discussions which we have among ourselves, and not regard them as a waste of time (the idea that we need to stop talking among ourselves in order to turn outwards to the masses, to broader forces, or whatever).

Think of the old slogan, 'Educate, agitate, organise'. And in this case, both 'educate' and 'organise' involve taking seriously political debates among ourselves. They involve being willing to go on as a minority fighting within an organisation which you think is going badly wrong. It means being willing, as a majority, to put up with the disruptive complaints, and the arguments and grumbles, and so on, and so forth, of the minority. It means, therefore, necessarily the acceptance that there will be ongoing disagreements of one sort or another, and there will be factions.

If we could get the acceptance of the need to unify as communists, to organise as a party and to accept that there will be ongoing disagreements and factionalism alongside our common work, then in principle, we could unify the forces of the *Morning Star*/CPB, SPEW, SWP and all the rest of the smaller groups.

And, if we unified communists as communists, it is possible that we could start a snowball effect (with the snowball running downhill and getting rapidly bigger). I gave earlier the negative examples of the Brazilian PT and Rifondazione. But they are also *positive* examples of the snowball effect which is possible as a result of unification. And if we look at the history of the Second International, it is perfectly clear that there was just such a snowball effect. In relation to the 1875 Gotha fusion of the Eisenachers and Lassalleans, which unified small groups, both of which had paper membership of around 10,000, the result of the unification was to create a snowball effect which grew very rapidly to a mass scale. The same is true of the unification processes of the Austrian Socialist Party, the Italian Socialist Party, the French Workers' Party.

The same is true, in fact, of the unification process of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, in spite of the fact that the unification in 1903 immediately issued in a split. But it was two big public factions, the majorityites (Bolsheviks) and minorityites (Mensheviks), still plainly identifying as parts of the RSDLP, not as separate parties. It was on this basis that the RSDLP could grow by a snowball effect, once there was a temporary opening of political conditions in 1905 (and this drove towards the partial organisational reunification of the factions in 1906).

Possible

The CPGB is not presently in a position to launch an organisational initiative for communist unity of this sort. We do not have the weight, the presence or the numbers to be able to kick something off on our own. Moreover, conditions are unlike the 1990s. On the one hand, the global political tide is running strongly towards right-populist nationalism. On the other, among the far left, the defeats of the broad-front projects since the 1990s,

and the illusions of outcompeting the rest by linear recruitment that are created by the recent revival of student leftism, make unity a marginalised aspiration.

That does not mean that it is impossible. There is no reason why it cannot happen, except that the majority of the left cling to the method of diplomacy, the ban on factions and all the other forms of apparatus control ('comradeliness' requirements, 'safe spaces' and so on). By clinging to these methods, they preclude the unity of communists as communists.

And, by clinging to these approaches, they *make our movement safe for the capitalist class*. From the point of view of the capitalist class, it is fine to have a labour movement controlled by a loyalist leadership. Hence it is no problem to have the sort of left 'opposition' that is diplomatic towards the loyalist leadership. Equally, if the far left is diplomatic towards the official left, that is no problem for capital either. If the only choices which are available are the loyalist-controlled Labour Party or a wilderness of competing sects, that is safe for the capitalist class.

As I say, right now the CPGB is not in a position to launch an organisational initiative for communist unity. But the possibility of communist unity exists, if the revolutionary left is prepared to break with the methods of diplomatic unity. The alternative is the dominance of the loyalist right wing of the workers' movement - and with it the slide of capitalist politics towards nationalism and world war ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

Notes

1. communistpartyofgreatbritainhistory.wordpress.com.
2. 'Taciturns offer nothing positive' *Weekly Worker* January 11: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1473/taciturns-offer-nothing-positive.
3. See, for example, Nick Wrack's strong article at talkingaboutsocialism.org/sunak-shapps-and-starmer-beat-the-war-drum.
4. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/s-w/ch01.htm.

Fighting fund

Best possible deal

We have not yet made any permanent arrangement for a replacement printer after that fire. But hopefully that will be done very soon and we will then be in a position to know whether or not we face increased costs.

Naturally, instead of making the assumption that we must pay more, we will be negotiating the best possible deal we can. After all, we are willing to pay a month in advance by standing order. Any businessperson worth their salt knows that in return for a guaranteed income it is more than worthwhile to offer a substantial discount on the 'normal' - ie, one-off - cost of printing a 12-pager like the *Weekly Worker*.

Nonetheless, for next few weeks we do face a considerable hike in our printing costs. However, for the moment the monthly fighting fund target remains set at £2,250 - and the good news is, we are incredibly close to reaching it, with exactly a week of January remaining as I write. Thanks to some brilliant donations over the last seven days, our running total stands at no less than £2,138. In other words, we need just £112 to see us home!

Four of those donations - either monthly standing orders or one-off bank transfers - were three-figure contributions: thank

you, comrades KB, GB, PM and SK (KB led the way by showing his gratitude and solidarity by donating exactly £200!). Other SOs came from TB (£60), DR (£20), GD (£15) and TT (£6). Finally comrade Hassan donated his usual fiver to one of our comrades. All in all, our fighting fund running total increased by a fantastic £722!

So now we have a good opportunity to go shooting past that £2,250 target - a way of showing that you - our readers and supporters - *can* do what is needed. A healthy 'excess' this month will certainly go some way to matching that increase we are paying the new, temporary, printer. We will see what they offer on a permanent basis.

So please play your part over the next seven days. Go online to contribute by PayPal (no-one did that last week!) or bank transfer/standing order - see details of the link on our website below. And there's still time to send us a cheque - if you do it as soon as you read this! ●

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

GERMANY

All together against far right

A secret meeting of a dozen abhorrent rightwingers has finally given the establishment a rod with which to beat the AfD, writes **Carla Roberts**

In recent weeks there have been huge demonstrations across Germany. Hundreds of thousands have come out to protest against 'Fremdenhass' (xenophobia) and Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). Some cities have not seen such big demonstrations in many decades, and rallies in Munich and Hamburg had to be cut short because of lack of space. There have been numerous calls for the AfD to be banned - the feasibility of which is widely being discussed in Germany (more on that below).

The concrete reason is a much-reported 'Geheimtreffen' (secret meeting) on November 25 in Potsdam's Adlon countryside hotel of about two dozen rightwingers, who "discussed the mass expulsion of foreign nationals and foreign-born Germans", as an overexcited report in *The Times* puts it.

"A masterplan against Germany", warns the liberal magazine *Der Spiegel*: "We need to stick together - tomorrow you could be next" (with reference to a bastardised version of Pastor Niemöller's poem). It breathlessly claims that "some people are thinking about leaving Germany".¹

The meeting was not that secret, as it turns out. Journalists of the *Correctiv* campaign were given advance notice, as was Greenpeace. They were able to get hold of all the documents and emails in advance, managed to put up not one, but three TV cameras, various microphones and even had a few people check into the Potsdam hotel at the same time. They then took six weeks to edit and prepare their feature about the "dangerous meeting" that has shaken Germany.

On January 10, *Correctiv* finally published a report of the meeting, written in the style of a crime thriller and with selected quotes by the bad guys (which has already been read aloud by actors in a number of German theatres, to great publicity). The article is spruced up with grainy pictures of the villains and who, what and where graphics and has helpfully been translated into French, English, Russian, Turkish and Arabic.²

The protagonists were: a couple of mid-range German capitalists, a handful of 'neo-Nazis', a couple of members of the rightwing group, Wertunion (which is in the process of becoming a party), and a few eccentrics like the 'entrepreneur', Alexander von Bismarck, and Henning Pless - an "esoteric practitioner of alternative medicine". The meeting also, crucially, included four members of the AfD, among them MP Gerrit Huy, Ulrich Siegmund (leader of the party's parliamentary fraction in Saxony-Anhalt) and Roland Hartwig, personal assistant of the AfD's national chairwoman and MP, Alice Weidel (who has since been forced to resign from his post).

The style and composition of the conference are somewhat reminiscent of the 'scandal' of December 2022, when two dozen members of the Patriotic Union were arrested for planning a "coup d'état" that was supposed to re-establish a monarchy in the tradition of the German Reich³ by creating civil war. Still, the mainstream media has leapt on the plans drafted in Potsdam as a "fierce attack on the German constitution itself", as *Correctiv* writes.

By now, you will have sensed a fair amount of cynicism from this writer. Yes, it is good that people are demonstrating against the far right - we probably would have been there too, with critical literature. But, once you look behind the screaming headlines,



AfD poster: "Islam does not belong in Germany. Woman's freedom is not negotiable!"

it is indeed difficult to find much 'meat' to the story - instead we see an artificially generated moral panic designed to counter the rise of the AfD.

Mass expulsions?

Take this paragraph by *Correctiv*, for example, which many newspapers have simply copied and pasted:

The scenarios sketched out in this hotel room in Potsdam all essentially boil down to one thing: people in Germany should be forcibly extradited if they have the wrong skin colour, the wrong parents or aren't sufficiently 'assimilated' into German culture according to the standards of people like Sellner.

No wonder good German people are on the streets, with Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, Greens, Free Democrats and Die Linke (Left Party) having organised demonstrations together, marching arm in arm!

No question, Martin Sellner is an unpleasant rightwinger and wannabe Nazi. But what he actually said in his secretly recorded speech is something quite different. He outlined different approaches to three different groups of foreigners: Asylum seekers - deport ASAP. Foreigners who have the right to remain - chip away at said right. But "most importantly", those with German passports who have "not assimilated" - they should be the focus of "remigration" by "customised laws" and a "high level of pressure", so that they adapt to the German way of life. "Remigration won't happen overnight; it is a project that will take decades."

"Remigration" is not quite the same as "mass expulsion" based on the "wrong skin colour", is it now? The speech was allegedly followed by "positive" reactions and questions from the AfD members in the audience, which is the stick the media and bourgeois politicians are using to beat the AfD with.

Of course, as communists we oppose migration controls and other nationalist measures supposedly designed to 'protect' the nation-state (in reality the creation of two classes of labour, one legal, the other illegal). People should be free to live, work ... and join *effective* trade unions wherever they please. The same cannot be said of the mainstream political parties.

In fact, it is difficult to see much difference between Sellner's musings and the policies of the mainstream bourgeois parties who have been out on the streets, buffing-up their 'democratic credentials'. The need for 'proper assimilation' has been a hot topic for many decades: After World War II, Germany begged workers from the poorer parts of Europe to help rebuild the country - as temporary *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers). Funnily enough, many of the tens of thousands of people - most from Turkey and ex-Yugoslavia - decided they would rather stay than go back to their homelands. But there was never an agreed state-plan to integrate them into German society or even to provide language courses - and there continues to be a real and visible schism that is exploited by the right and those looking for easy answers to the increasing economic problems Germany is facing.

Pushed on by the growing popularity of the rightwing AfD, chancellor Olaf Scholz (of the SPD, which is governing in coalition with the Greens and Free Democrats) has been promising to "finally start deporting in mass numbers".⁴ Only last week, on January 18, the Bundestag agreed the *Rückführungsverbesserungsgesetz*, which will make it far easier to deport asylum-seekers - through "bypassing" the cherished constitution, as it happens. It is the fifth law aimed at speeding up deportations agreed since 2015 and has been described by pro-asylum campaigns as "nourishment for the right".⁵

Nancy Faeser, SPD interior minister, has further explained that this

law is needed to make space for "the 1.1 million refugees from Ukraine".⁶ This distinction between good and bad refugees is very important to the government. Germany is a big supporter of Ukraine, and Scholz - impatient with the increasingly lukewarm approach of France and other EU countries - has just pledged, unilaterally, a whopping £6 billion of German taxpayers' money to support Volodymyr Zelensky.

This expensive pro-war stance is coming increasingly under criticism within Germany, as is the government's sickening uncritical support for Israel's brutal attack on Gaza: Scholz announced that Germany will act as a 'third party' in front of the International Court of Justice and wants to provide evidence that Israel is *not* committing genocide. No easy feat, considering that the result of Israel's genocidal policies can be seen daily on TV screens, including in Germany.

The appeal to 'collective guilt' over the holocaust is starting to wear thin, according to polls. Only 37% agree with chancellor Scholz that Germany has a "special responsibility" to support Israel (51% oppose) and 61% think that Israel's attack on civilians in Gaza is "not justified". Only 35% are of the view that "Israel respects human rights" - and "supporters of the AfD are the most critical": just 30% of them support that statement.⁷

The AfD has managed to be seen as the 'peace party' in parliament. Its 78 MPs are certainly the most outspoken critics of the ongoing war in Ukraine and are arguing for a 'diplomatic solution' to Israel's war against the Palestinians - in contrast to the increasingly respectable Die Linke, which supports the "historic necessity of Israel", while raging against the "anti-Semitic Hamas"⁸ and firmly blaming Russia for the Ukraine war.

Despite having a fair share of millionaires in its ranks, the AfD has successfully positioned itself as the representative of the 'little people' - those left behind, the discontented - with increasing success. It currently stands at 24% in the polls, way ahead of the SPD (15%), the Greens (13%) and the FDP (7%), though behind the conservative CDU (30%). Die Linke hovers at a measly 4% and will probably be kicked out of parliament at the next general election in 2025 (parties must receive more than 5% of the vote to be represented). Sarah Wagenknecht's populist split from Die Linke, BSW (Bündnis Sarah Wagenknecht), which holds its launch conference this coming weekend, is faring slightly better at 7% (down from 12% when it was first set up).⁹

Heavy fire

Wagenknecht too has come under heavy fire in this whole 'scandal': She was outed as having been "in regular contact" with the host of the *Geheimtreffen*, Gernot Möring, a wealthy retired dentist, over the course of 10 years. There was at least one dinner and "many emails". Wagenknecht's assurance that she "never knew that he was on the right" has been met with many a raised eyebrow.¹⁰

After all, the political platform of the BSW is not a hundred million miles away from that of the AfD - both are appealing in a populist manner to those 'left behind', are outspoken on the need to restrict "uncontrolled" immigration and try to position themselves as "the peace party".¹¹ The BSW wants to be a leftwing version of AfD, but there are, as commentators regularly and correctly point out, many

Berührungspunkte (points of contact).

Although a ban on the AfD could aid her own organisation, Wagenknecht is quite rightly opposed to it: "A ban is only being discussed, because the AfD is currently so strong in the polls". Talk about banning the party is "a gift for the AfD", she quite rightly pointed out. It is indeed likely that those threats will make the AfD appear even more attractive to its potential voters - most of whom will not have been put off by the massive show rallies of the mainstream parties.

Still, a possible ban is widely discussed on the many political talk shows on German TV and is supported almost across the political board. Die Linke demands the banning of the AfD's youth wing, Junge Alternative, and has called for a leader of the AfD, Björn Hoecke, to be stripped of his citizenship rights. He is leader of the AfD fraction in the federal state of Thuringia, one of three states where the national intelligence agency has found the AfD to be "officially in contravention of the German constitution". A petition demanding a ban currently stands at over a million signatories.¹²

Complex

Banning a political party in Germany is an extremely complex process, which can only be started by the government or a majority in the Bundestag or the second chamber, the Bundesrat. The last time there were attempts to ban a party - the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) - they failed rather miserably. The first time, in 2003, the process had to be abandoned after it transpired that the regional and national leaderships of the party were riddled with "too many" informants and spies (this begs the question of how many is 'just right'). The second attempt led to a four-year process, which ended in 2017 with Germany's federal supreme court ruling *against* a ban: although it found that the NPD was indeed acting "against the constitution", it was deemed too small to cause any real damage.¹³

Socialists and communists should stay well clear from calls for such bans, even when it comes to allegedly 'neo-Nazi' parties. We are, after all, interested in overthrowing the capitalist system, including the various 'oh so democratic' constitutions. It is no coincidence that the last time the Federal government was successful in implementing such a ban was in 1956, when the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) was outlawed ●

Notes

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USA

Corrupt Dems hand Trump another win

Moves against the former president continue to backfire. Daniel Lazare reports on the Fani Willis case

Three years ago, Atlanta Democrats thought they had Donald Trump nailed to a wall. "I just want to find 11,780 votes, which is one more than we have, because we won the state," he told a top state election official on January 2 2021, in a devastating phone call that had just come to light. Since Trump had lost Georgia by 11,779, that would have been just enough to move the state into the plus column and put him within shooting distance of winning the electoral college.

It was as clear a case of election interference as the Democrats could wish for. With the corporate press hanging on their every word, local prosecutors in Democratic-controlled Atlanta went to work investigating Trump in full confidence that he would eventually go away to prison for a long, long time. With the Capitol Hill insurrection occurring just a few days later, the goal was to remove a threat hanging over bourgeois politics and banish it for good.

But now they have done the opposite, providing Trump with yet another boost in his journey toward a second White House term.

How did they manage to shoot themselves in the foot so spectacularly? The answer is simple: corruption.

The Democrats' latest nervous breakdown centres around Fani Willis, a 52-year-old Atlanta prosecutor elected in 2020 on a pro-cop, anti-crime platform. She has been in charge of the Trump election-fixing case from the start. But events took an unexpected turn early this month, when Michael Roman, a former campaign official who is one of Trump's 18 co-defendants, filed a motion to dismiss on the basis of legal documents indicating that Willis had brought on board a romantic partner to assist with the prosecution. The alleged partner - a suburban attorney named Nathan Wade - had mainly handled low-level criminal cases. Yet not only did Willis hire him for something far more demanding: she paid him two-thirds more than another attorney - a specialist in the complex anti-racketeering laws that are the basis for the case. All told, she paid Wade more than \$650,000, according to the complaint - money that he then used to take Willis on a Caribbean cruise and treat her to a vacation in California wine country.

Sound like a kickback? It certainly does to a county auditor who recently sent Willis a letter demanding that she turn over documents indicating whether the public funds she used to pay to Wade "were converted to your personal gain in the form of subsidized travel or other gifts."

It is a stunning setback. Putting on a brave face, Democratic legal experts are now arguing that the case remains untainted and that it can go forward under Willis's leadership regardless of her infractions. Indeed, Norman Eisen, a White House special counsel under Barack Obama, argues that it *should* go forward, since replacing Willis with another prosecutor would "delay the case unnecessarily" and would be "inconsistent with the public interest".²

All of which makes little or no sense. Trump is not just any defendant or any presidential candidate, for that matter, but, rather, a frontrunner who is as much as four points ahead, according to the latest polls.³ Moreover, he is a frontrunner because he has succeeded in convincing a plurality of Americans - 46% to 40%, according to another survey⁴ - that Democrats are guilty of "lawfare", which is to say putting together a phony legal offensive in



Fani Willis is an integral part of Democrats' lawfare campaign

order to put him behind bars before 'we, the people' get a chance to vote.

For a growing portion of the electorate, therefore, the Willis scandal is proof that Trump is right, that both wings of the establishment are rotten to the core, and that it is better to elect a wealthy real-estate magnate, since only a non-politician is capable of cleaning out the Augean stables. For Americans who are "mad as hell and are not going to take it any more" (to quote the 1976 movie *Network*), Fani Willis is merely the latest object of their wrath.

Atlanta

But why Willis, why Atlanta, and why now? To understand why it is all coming together in such an explosive way, it is necessary to know something about her and the town she lives in.

With a population of just under half a million, Atlanta is one of the most dysfunctional cities in the United States. At 16.41 per 100,000 people, it has the 20th worst homicide rate in the country, according to FBI statistics - one that is five times higher than New York's, seven times higher than Canada's, and at least 15 times higher than western Europe in general. It also has the biggest gap between rich and poor of any major US city and one of the biggest racial gaps as well, with black families earning on average just a third of what white households make. If Atlanta were a country, it would be the third most unequal on earth. With a Gini coefficient of 57.86, it would be just behind South Africa at 63.00 and Namibia at 59.10.⁵ Even by third world standards, it is radically unjust.

But every third world country needs a comprador class, which is where Willis comes in. She has excelled in at least two respects. One is by portraying herself as a tough-as-nails prosecutor, who will come down on the city's black underclass like a ton of bricks, while raking in votes and campaign donations from wealthy white homeowners. Another is by using an increasingly dangerous and rightwing legal instrument known as the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act - RICO for short - the same tool she is using against Trump. RICO's purpose is clear: to put more and more lower-class offenders away for longer and longer stretches of time.

As an up-and-coming assistant district attorney, Willis used Georgia's RICO statute to go after 35 Atlanta teachers and school administrators - all of them black - who were accused of doctoring test scores on state education exams. Raphael Warnock - senior pastor at an Atlanta church where Martin Luther King once held forth and now a US senator - described her heavy-handed approach as "a dark chapter" in the city's history, while

Van Jones, a former special advisor to president Barack Obama, said it amounted to a plain case of "over-criminalization".⁶ Yet Willis's fortunes continued to soar.

After getting herself elected DA on the heels of an anti-Black Lives Matter backlash, Willis then used RICO to go after gang members closely linked with Atlanta's thriving hip-hop scene. In May 2021, she charged a dozen members of a gang known as the Bloods with RICO violations and then, in May 2022, used RICO against such well-known rappers as Young Thug and Gunna, along with 26 of their associates. A few months after that, she accused 26 more gang members of racketeering. "We have a message," she told a press conference. "Get out of this county or expect to start seeing sentences that go life-plus, because I am not going to negotiate with gang members."

Corporate media loved it. *The New York Times* lauded Willis as "the baddest DA in the country", while *The Washington Post* called her "a pit bull".⁷ But there is a problem - a big one.

Race card

Sometimes described as "the crime of being a criminal",⁸ RICO is a catch-all that can be used to jack up penalties for nearly any offence under the sun. One Atlanta defence attorney says it allows prosecutors to employ a longer statute of limitations to go after "garden-variety" offenders and then hit them with longer sentences. He says:

Now when you have two or more individual crimes, you can charge that as RICO, which makes the statute of limitations five years instead of two and comes with a mandatory minimum of five years in prison rather than no mandatory minimum.

Other defence attorneys complain that Georgia's RICO laws are so expansive that they can be used against "any drug smuggler, prostitute, gambler or pornographer who committed at least two crimes by which he made money".⁹

A study has found that, by 2012, prosecutors were using RICO - originally designed for use against the Mafia - to go after gangs that 86% of the time were black, Asian, or Latino.¹⁰ Last September, Georgia's state attorney, Christopher Carr, widened the scope even more by using RICO to indict 61 people opposed to a \$90 million police-training facility that Atlanta was building in a nearby county. As evidence of racketeering, Carr cited the "mutual aid" that protesters extend to one another. It's "a term", he said, "popularised by anarchists to describe individuals who exchange goods and services to assist

other individuals in society without government intervention". Other examples of racketeering, according to the 'Cop City' indictment, include transferring money, blogging anonymously, trespassing, purchasing camping supplies and passing out leaflets.¹¹

It is an updated version of the 'criminal syndicalism' laws used to crush the Industrial Workers of the World (better known as 'the Wobblies') during and after World War I. If that was not bad enough, Georgia Republicans have recently proposed to expand RICO to cover loitering, littering, disorderly conduct and pasting up unauthorised posters. A racketeer can thus be someone who drops a gum wrapper on a sidewalk or who leans against a lamppost in a disreputable manner. Even worse, Republicans are also pushing for stepped-up penalties on the basis of "political affiliation or beliefs".¹² A RICO offence is thus anything prosecutors do not like perpetrated by particular people either - which is to say anyone who is lower class, the wrong colour or who stands to the left.

Willis did herself no favours by claiming she was a victim of racism at a service for Martin Luther King at a local black church on January 15. Describing herself as "a very flawed, hard-headed and imperfect servant" of god, she told the congregation that "only one percent of the district attorneys in this country are women of colour" and added: "First thing they say, oh, she's going to play the race card now. But no, god, isn't it them who's playing the race card?"

Playing the race card by pointing to legal documents that leave little doubt that she is guilty of misappropriation? Plainly, race has nothing to do with it. But race has everything to do with how the scandal is now playing out. The reason is not that Willis is black. Rather, it is that she is a black Democrat - which is to say a supporter of a party that acts as if it owns black people and can use them however it likes. Black

Americans were taken aback when Joe Biden told a radio interviewer during the 2020 campaign: "If you have a problem figuring out whether you're for me or Trump, then you ain't black." They were incredulous that he presumed to define who is black and who is not and to expel those who do not meet his political criteria. But it was a perfect example of how the Democrats expect black workers to toil away on the party plantation for the benefit of a liberal political elite, even as their own condition goes downhill.

Fani Willis was happy to use dubious legal means to put away alleged black gang members. But, now that she is accused of wrongdoing, she wraps herself in the mantle of Martin Luther King and claims that she is a victim of racial persecution. Hypocrisy of this sort benefits one person only: Donald Trump ●

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NHS

Cruel and inefficient

Equality means good health outcomes, inequality bad health outcomes. Ian Spencer savages Labour's Singapore plans

Labour's shadow health secretary, Wes Streeting, on a visit to Singapore, has spoken admiringly of its healthcare system.¹ Of course, it may be natural for a Labour rightwinger to admire a tax haven - that is, one of the most unequal countries in the world, with limited democracy, high levels of imprisonment and no right to jury trial. However, it is an interesting choice.

On the face of it, Singapore seems to be something of an 'outlier'. Very unequal countries generally have poor healthcare outcomes.² Yet, at first glance, that is not true of Singapore. For example, a study of

disability-adjusted life years and health-adjusted life expectancy across 193 countries between 1990 and 2017 found that Singapore had the highest life expectancy for women (87.6 years) and men (81.9 years) ... the probability of dying from non-communicable disease between the ages of 30 and 70 is 10.1%, which compares favourably with the UK (11%), the USA (13.6%), Denmark (11.6%).³

And all of this on a relatively low level of expenditure - 4.47% of gross domestic product. So is Streeting's admiration for the Singapore health system a change of direction to that followed by Conservative and Labour administrations since 1979? I doubt it, but there is cause for concern.

All is not what it seems. The statistics leave out nearly a quarter of its population and 37% of its workforce; migrant workers, who are excluded from Singapore's universal healthcare system. Health insurance for migrant workers is the responsibility of employers, covering injuries at work and other unforeseen circumstances, but chronic conditions are omitted and long-term illness, even from industrial injury, can result in deportation.⁴ Migrant workers are generally young and fit; after all, they are those who can make the journey and work the average of 60-70 hours a week that many face. There is no need to provide for the diseases of old age in these workers, as they will have returned to their home countries by then.

Rich and poor

In international comparisons, poverty accounts for the world's worst health outcomes. The major threats to life are communicable disease, poor sanitation and water quality, and nutritional insecurity. Once societies become developed enough to minimise these threats, then inequality, the gap between rich and poor, exerts an influence independently of poverty. This is in large part because of stress hormones, such as cortisol and adrenaline, on workers who have little control over their lives, but are aware of wide inequality.⁵

This produces a well-documented pattern, where the USA, for example, spends more on healthcare as a proportion of GDP than any other country in the world, but achieves worse health outcomes than many far poorer countries, including some developing ones. In addition, many workers in the USA have no health insurance at all. Comparing the health outcomes of different countries, epidemiologists will usually consider a wide range of indicators, from suicide rates to teenage pregnancy and from narcotic use to deaths from gun violence. Almost all of them are



Born in the midst of austerity: Aneurin Bevan, Minister of Health, on the first day of the NHS

worse, the more unequal the country.⁶

In countries with the best health outcomes - eg, in recent history Japan and Spain, the gap between rich and poor is far narrower than in the USA, which has very poor health outcomes at great cost, socially and economically. Put differently, any society wishing to improve health across the board would be better placed using its wealth to reduce inequalities. Social differences have a far greater impact on the likelihood of getting some life-threatening disease than the quality of medical care has of preventing or treating it.⁷

The UK, which closely follows the USA as one of the most unequal countries in the world, has been moving closer to the US model of healthcare. This has led to significant investment in British private medicine by US healthcare companies. It has also led to Wes Streeting being given substantial donations by supporters with links to private health corporations.⁸ But he is not alone: Sir Keir Starmer and Yvette Cooper have also received hundreds of thousands of pounds from donors with connections to private health companies.⁹

Singapore is an island state of 5.7 million people, where only 4.2 million are "citizens and permanent residents". Effectively, it imports its working class from the Philippines and south Asia, which endures low-paid work in construction, maritime services, manufacture and domestic service. The health profile of these migrant workers is very different from those of citizens and permanent residents. Many suffer high levels of significant mental illness owing to stress related to debt, the threat of deportation and poor accommodation. The fact that migrant workers are often housed in dormitories had a devastating impact during the Covid pandemic.

Tens of thousands effectively work under conditions of debt bondage due to high recruitment agency fees and the fact that they must surrender their passports to their employers and require permission to change jobs, under threat of deportation.¹⁰ Migrant workers are also excluded from political representation. The so-called People's Action Party (PAP) has governed continuously since 1959, when Singapore was an autonomous part of Malaysia. The only opposition

in parliament is the so-called Workers Party, which claims to represent a "constructive opposition" to the PAP - but certainly not to capitalism or the miserable status of migrant workers.

Shortage

The healthcare system has been subject to several reforms in recent years to address some of the difficulties it has been facing, due in large part to an ageing population. These have included a shortage of acute hospital beds and the moving of health professionals away from the publicly funded sector to the private sector. Singapore has a system of widespread private healthcare and a safety-net provision for those who cannot afford to pay. There is an emphasis on personal responsibility for preventing illness and reliance on MediShield and MediFund insurance schemes as a long-stop provision for those on low incomes. Around 70-80% of Singaporeans obtain medical care within the public health system.

There is, of course, a well-developed private system for the very wealthy. Workers who are citizens and permanent residents, who can afford to pay, must contribute a proportion of the cost of care and this has led to a system with significant upfront costs for patients. Around 60% of Singaporeans have no general practitioner, as these are almost wholly engaged in private business. The majority of those seeking outpatient primary care obtain it through publicly subsidised polyclinics. It may be that Wes Streeting was unaware or indifferent to this when he stated that he would "bring back the family doctor system, if he became health secretary".¹¹ That certainly is not happening in Singapore!

Where Streeting may draw some inspiration is that citizens and permanent residents must contribute compulsory savings toward their healthcare - effectively 20% of their income. If admitted to hospital, Singaporeans must contribute to the cost of treatment, on a sliding scale, according to their earnings. If Singapore has inspired Streeting, it will be to find new ways of making the working class pay more for their care, while ensuring that it is private medical companies which make the biggest gains.

Streeting was also clearly

impressed by the level of technology in Singaporean hospitals, or at least one of them - the vast Singapore General Hospital. Here, "They use fixed machines to measure their own blood pressure, weight and height and receive a printed plan of their day at the hospital, including timings for scans, tests and appointments to see doctors."¹² We have seen the fetish for technological solutions many times before. From the Horizon scandal in the Post Office to the debacle of 'test and trace', each successive government has tried to portray technology as providing a pain-free solution to the difficulty of solving problems without the cumbersome business of employing people, particularly when the National Health Service is hemorrhaging staff.

High tech

Of course, technology does have an important place in healthcare. For example, an ultrasound machine can provide relatively cheap, non-invasive, diagnosis at a fraction of the cost of an invasive laparotomy. However, that is a far cry from computer systems whose objective is to provide a system of surveillance over barely trained staff, which is, I suspect, closer to Streeting's objective. After all, Streeting's response to the NHS Long Term Workforce plan is to suggest that the Tories had stolen his idea and that he would have put the plan in place sooner! Yet the plan is unrealistic - based on the deskilling of nursing and medicine, in favour of 'associate' nurses and physicians, with shorter training and, of course, lower pay.¹³ Streeting and Starmer have both refused to say that they would make any significant improvement in NHS pay.

The NHS did not come into being like a shiny new pin in 1948. Nor is it an island of socialism in a hostile capitalist sea. It was the nationalisation - and rationalisation - of private, Poor Law, local authority and charitable provision. Its hospital stock was ageing and in a particularly bad way. In 1948, 45% of hospitals in England and Wales were built before 1891 and 21% before 1861. It was a "ramshackle and largely bankrupt edifice".¹⁴ However, it has remained extremely popular - in no small part because it embodies some very important aspects of what a genuinely socialist society would

have at its heart. Distribution is, for the most part, according to need. It was also, at inception, to all intents and purposes, free and universal. Moreover, if looked at from the point of view of the cost of administration, it was efficient. As the market has become a more dominant part of NHS expenditure, the proportion that is spent on administration has steadily risen - almost to the levels of US healthcare.

The NHS was achieved despite post-war austerity, the opposition of the Tory Party and senior doctors, who resisted the loss of income from private medicine. However, Labour's record in office of defending the universal provision of health and social care after 1948 is not a good one. The Blair years saw a continuity of Margaret Thatcher's move towards the piecemeal privatisation of the NHS. For example, The Health and Social Care Act (2003) provided the basis for NHS hospitals and primary care trusts to become eligible for 'foundation' status and start the process of becoming not merely independent, but incorporated into an increasingly privatised system. Private companies effectively 'brand' themselves as NHS components and many patients today are treated in private facilities paid for from public funds - including the dividends paid to the shareholders.

The recent history of the dismantling of the NHS owes far more to a move in the direction of US-style, insurance-funded, two-tiered healthcare than it does to Singapore. Streeting's visit was a piece of political grandstanding in advance of the general election to appeal to staff writers at *The Times*, etc. The example of Singapore has been manipulated by commentators, who choose to ignore the fact that the healthcare system there is extremely expensive, when one considers the proportion of it paid for by relatively privileged citizens and permanent residents. These in turn enjoy their precarious privileges at the expense of a significant proportion of the population with no access to universal healthcare at all, unless it is provided for through employer contributions to insurance.

What we would be left with if we followed this route would be, like the US model - as cruel as it is inefficient ●

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NUCLEAR

A comedy of errors

Vastly expensive, unsafe and inextricably linked to weapons of mass destruction - Eddie Ford rejects the madness of nuclear power

Last year the government rebranded British Nuclear Fuels Ltd as Great British Nuclear - a typically Johnsonian name. Originally created in 1971 to manufacture nuclear fuel, run reactors, generate and sell electricity, reprocess spent fuel and so on, the renaming was meant to signal the government's determination to accelerate the development of new nuclear projects and supposedly meet its net-zero targets. Of course, the idea that nuclear power is in any way 'green' is totally mad, but that has not stopped the government and its agents embracing the idea.

So earlier this month, regardless of faltering nuclear output and near endless project delays - leading inevitably to ever more spiralling costs - ministers set out hubristic plans for what they call the "biggest nuclear power expansion in 70 years". To this end, they published on January 12 a roadmap that "recommits" the government to building a "fleet" of nuclear reactors capable of producing 24GW by 2050 - enough to meet a quarter of the national electricity demand. Approval will be given, we are told, for one or two new reactors every five years from 2030 to 2044. According to Boris Johnson back in 2022, building a new reactor every year would "wean" Britain off fossil fuel - but you cannot help but be reminded of his pledge to build 40 "new" hospitals by 2030, which was always an obvious nonsense. However, junking what his predecessor had said, Rishi Sunak announced last year that he wants to wean us back onto fossil fuels with his "maxing out" policy of granting 100-plus new gas and oil drilling licences. Needless to say, the government's entire approach to energy makes no sense whatsoever.

Promised land

We have a situation where Britain's nuclear power output fell to its lowest level in more than 40 years in 2023, after three reactors closed in the previous two years and statutory maintenance forced temporary shutdowns at four reactors. EDF Energy - the French state-owned developer of Hinkley Point C and Sizewell C - said its nuclear output in the UK had fallen from a high point of 65 terawatt hours in 2016 from eight nuclear plants, to less than 40TWh in 2023. It even said this month that it would delay the shutdown of four of its UK nuclear reactors for at least two years to help plug the "looming gap" in the UK's nuclear supplies towards the end of the decade.

But the promised land seems to keep getting further away, with EDF announcing this week that Hinkley Point C could be delayed by a further four years, and cost £2.3 billion more - making the whole project a comedy of errors, with the company blaming inflation, Covid and Brexit for the recalculation. Originally, in a display of boosterism that must have made Johnson proud, then EDF chief executive, Vincent de Rivaz, declared in 2007 that by Christmas 2017 people would be eating turkeys cooked using electricity generated from Hinkley! When the project was finally given the green light in 2016, its cost was estimated at £18 billion and was due to be completed by June 2027, with a 15-month 'buffer' period which was likely to be used - putting its completion at September 2028, with



Nuclear fuel assemblies under inspection

a further year for the second unit, its costs being estimated then as £25-26 billion. Inevitably, this was later revised up to £32.7 billion and has now edged up again to £35 billion with a possible finish date of 2031. But watch this space, as EDF is still using 2015 prices, so expect the price tag to soar once more. Unsurprisingly, Hinkley's ballooning costs have proved controversial with French taxpayers, which are picking up the tab. A bargain!

As for Sizewell C, its future looks far from certain, if not a potentially embarrassing failure. The project was first proposed as a consortium of EDF Energy and China General Nuclear Power, owning 80% and 20% respectively. In 2022 the UK government announced a buy-out to allow for the exit of CGN from the project after a lot of pressure from Tory backbenchers and others. As a consequence, tit-for-tat, CGN halted funding for Hinkley in December. Regarding Sizewell, the British government formed a 50% stake with EDF, though the latter expects this to fall below 20% following "external investment". The power station is expected to meet up to 7% of the UK's demand - when and if it comes into service (there is always the possibility that EDF might bail out of the project).

Yet the plain fact of the matter is that every few months or so the British government makes a grandiose public statement about how the future is nuclear, in the hope that a big investor out there will actually believe the hype and step up to fund this outdated and inefficient technology. But the energy industry and just about everybody else with a brain knows that the economic case for vastly expensive nuclear power does not add up and the future is renewable. Hinkley Point C, Sizewell C and the twisting EDF just prove the point.

Adding insult to injury, the government has admitted that its roadmap to building new nuclear power plants will increase household energy costs, but a new reactor will "add at most a few pounds a year to typical household energy bills during the early stages of construction". But it

claims that households would pay less than £1 a month extra on average over the whole construction period. Well, if you believe that ...!

Therefore, it is entirely legitimate to ask the burningly obvious question - why is the government providing extraordinarily generous support for this ailing technology? Why is it hooked to nuclear power? After all, official assessments more or less openly acknowledge that nuclear performs poorly compared to alternatives, with renewables significantly cheaper (and getting considerably cheaper over time, as technology improves - especially when it comes to storage and battery power). By contrast, nuclear is getting increasingly expensive over time, with a secretive state apparatus wrapped around it, and the only new power station under construction - as we have seen above - is still not finished, running many years late and many times over budget. And never mind the safety aspect - just one accident could prove to be catastrophic. There is also the perennial problem of what to do with the nuclear waste - bury it? Shoot it into space?

White paper

The whole thing becomes even more inexplicable and irrational, when you consider that the UK government appears to have given up justifying support for nuclear power in any kind of substantive way - we are just supposed to accept it as given. The last white paper that provided any sort of rigorous argument in energy terms was way back in 2003; and the delayed 2020 white paper did not detail any comparative nuclear and renewable costs - let alone explain why this more expensive option receives such disproportionate funding. But we get a lot closer to the truth with a document published alongside the latest government announcement: the disingenuously named *Civil nuclear: roadmap to 2050*.¹ Yes, it is more about affirming official support than justifying it.

In fact, the roadmap policy document mentions 14 times in

different sections the need to continue to strengthen the existing cooperation and tie-ups between the civil and military industries to the benefit of both - they come as a package. The underlying logic is to keep to a minimum the training and development costs for both the weapons and power sectors. Of course, the UK government previously denied the ample evidence that countries with nuclear weapons favour atomic power over renewables.

Other countries

Other countries, however, tend to be more open about the interdependence between 'civil' nuclear power and nuclear weaponry. This is certainly the case at presidential level in the US, whilst French president Emmanuel Macron has been quite blunt about it - "without civil nuclear power, no military nuclear power; without military nuclear, no civil nuclear". This largely explains why nuclear-armed France is pressing the European Union to support nuclear power, and this is why non-nuclear-armed Germany has phased out the nuclear technologies it once pioneered. It is also why other nuclear-armed states are so disproportionately fixated by nuclear power.

For those with eyes to see, the military angle to nuclear power is clear. For example, in 2006 prime minister Tony Blair proclaimed that nuclear power would be "back with a vengeance". Why? Because, prior to his evangelical statement, there had been a major three-volume study by the military-linked RAND Corporation for the ministry of defence, warning that the UK "industrial base" for design, manufacture and maintenance of nuclear submarines would become unaffordable if the country phased out civil nuclear power. Then a 2007 report by an executive from submarine-makers BAE Systems called for these military costs to be "masked" behind civil programmes, while a secret MoD report in 2014 showed explicitly its belief that declining nuclear power erodes military nuclear skills.

We have repeatedly heard various academics, engineering organisations, research centres, industry bodies and trade unions - monstrosly - urging continuing civil nuclear as a means to support military capabilities. Clinching the argument, surely, submarine-reactor manufacturer Rolls Royce in 2007 even issued a special report outlining the case for expensive "small modular reactors" to "relieve the ministry of defence of the burden of developing and retaining skills and capability".

Given the starkly obvious disadvantages of nuclear compared to renewables, this seemingly strange commitment can only be understood when you realise the elite imperative to sustain the capabilities, skills and supply chain activities necessary for Britain to build, maintain and operate the nuclear-propelled submarines that underpin its nuclear weapons system. In other words, civil nuclear power is a *subsidy* towards military nuclear activities, and that alone is reason enough for communists to oppose its development ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

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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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Axis of Resistance
largely ineffective
apart from
Houthis

Rivals or allies?

It was not in revenge for Kerman. Yassamine Mather explains what really lay behind the recent missile attack on Pakistan

Last week, Iran's Islamic Republic was involved in three missile attacks against 'enemies' in Syria, northern Iraq and Pakistan.¹

A number of Iranian 'analysts and commentators', assembled by dubious Persian-speaking TV stations abroad, offered the usual analysis: "The leaders of Iran's Islamic Republic are going mad"; and "With three missile attacks in one week, while supporting their proxies, 'the Houthis', the regime is overextending its capabilities; it will not survive."

Al-Monitor's correspondent in Tehran reported that Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard corps not only miscalculated the reaction to the missile attack in Pakistan, but also risked pushing the country to the brink of full-blown war with its nuclear-armed neighbour.

A more reasoned analysis was provided by professor Vali Nasr of Johns Hopkins University during a discussion with BBC's Lyse Ducet:

Iran has showcased its missile arsenal and its willingness to use it. This was likely also a message intended for Israel and the US amid the Gaza war, especially considering the potential escalation in Lebanon and Yemen.²

He rightly pointed out that, for now, Iran is not looking to escalate the conflict - less than a week after the incident, Iran and Pakistan have made peace. The ambassadors, initially withdrawn following the respective missile attacks, have returned to their posts.

Confusion

As usual, there is some confusion in both western and Persian-speaking media, with outlets broadcasting anti-regime propaganda from outside the country. They are attributing the bombing in Iran's Kerman province in early January as the reason for Iran's 'revenge' attack in Pakistan.

However, as Tariq Ali has rightly pointed out in an article, 'The Baluchistan imbroglio',

The level of ignorance in western coverage of the border clashes between Iran and Pakistan should come as no surprise. Nor should the state department declaration that Pakistan's response was "proportionate" - making for queasy comparisons with the ongoing mass slaughter being perpetrated by another US-funded and armed entity not too far away.³

In relation to the Kerman province incident, two bombs killed mourners and bystanders at a ceremony marking the fourth anniversary of Qasem Soleimani's assassination by the US. Islamic State - presumed to be a faction based in Afghanistan, not in Pakistan - claimed responsibility. Consequently, the attack on the Baluchi separatist group in Pakistan, Jaysh al-Adl



Iran's Fateh-110 missiles: warning to Israel and its US backer

(formerly known as Jundallah), cannot be considered revenge for the Kerman bombing. It was instead related to another attack by Jaysh al-Adl, who stormed a police station in the Iranian city of Rask last month, resulting in the death of 11 officers.

There is a long history of skirmishes along this border, with separatist groups from both countries using the border to seek refuge after attacking their opponents - mainly officers and military personnel associated with the governments in Tehran or Islamabad. Sunni Baluchis generally do not support Iran's Shia clerical regime, and foreign powers have attempted to exploit the general discontent in this underdeveloped and impoverished region of Iran to ferment armed

opposition. In 2007, ABC News claimed the US was giving covert assistance to Jundallah to cause unrest inside Iran.

Kerman in southeast Iran has long been a contested area between Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. In 1871, the British government (allegedly representing the interests of the Khan of Kalat, a Pakistani prince) and Iran agreed to define their mutual frontier. However, at that time, the border was not demarcated on the ground. In 1905, another joint treaty was signed between Britain and Iran.

In 1958, 11 years after Pakistan gained independence, the two countries eventually defined their border. During the cold war, Iran (under the shah) and Pakistan - both close allies

of the United States - were founding members of the anti-communist bloc, the Central Treaty Organisation. The shah's government supported Pakistan in the 1965 war against Soviet-leaning India. However, according to several memoirs by high-ranking Iranian officials close to the Pahlavi court, the shah was disappointed by the breakup of Pakistan and saw the further dismemberment of that country as a nightmare - primarily due to his concerns about growing separatist activities in Balochistan. Alex Vatanka, the author of *Iran and Pakistan: security, diplomacy and American influence*,⁴ noted that after 1971 the shah hinted at the possibility of Iran annexing the Pakistani province of Balochistan if Pakistan

was further dismantled due to internal ethnic conflict.

After 1979, Iran backed the Afghan mujahideen, who were in part directed by Pakistan. In return, Pakistan increased its support for Iran. Moreover, Iran has shown interest in joining the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor - a key part of the broader Belt and Road Initiative. In recent years, as the United States withdrew its troops from Afghanistan and the Taliban regained power in the 2020s, Pakistan and Iran stepped up their cooperation to promote 'peace and stability' in Afghanistan. Overall, mutual interests suggest that, contrary to the analysis of some pro-US commentators, Iran and Pakistan have reconciled their differences, and an escalation of conflict between the two countries seems unlikely.

Gaza and Yemen

As the bombing of Gaza's towns and hospitals continues, resulting in a death toll of 25,000 (mainly civilian) Palestinians in two and a half months, the only significant resistance is shown by Yemen's Houthis, who have ignored repeated warnings by the US, UK and their allies to stop targeting ships in the Red Sea heading to and from Israel.

The British prime minister continues to assert that these airstrikes are "unrelated" to Gaza; however, this is widely called into question. The Houthis have clearly articulated their reasons for launching these attacks, and it is almost certain that they will stop if there is a ceasefire.

Throughout the Arab world, due to the widespread disdain for corrupt, incompetent Arab rulers who have done little to support the Palestinians, the Houthis are the only group in the so-called 'axis of resistance' (comprising of Iran, Yemen, Hezbollah, Syria, and Shia militias in Iraq) that has achieved any effective resistance. There is no doubt that Iran's Islamic Republic sends arms to the Houthis. However, they are far more independent of Iran than Hezbollah and the Shia militias in Iraq.

During the Afghan civil war (1992-96), Pakistan's support for the Taliban created tensions with Iran, which was hostile to a Taliban-led Afghanistan at the time, and sided with the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. Following 9/11 (al Qaeda's September 11 2001 attacks on New York's Twin Towers and the Pentagon), both Iran and Pakistan joined the global 'war on terror'. It is also important to remember that Pakistan has often played a role as a mediator in the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia ●

Notes

1. See my article last week in this connection ('A drop in the ocean' *Weekly Worker* January 18: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1474/a-drop-in-the-ocean).
2. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68017444.
3. newleftreview.org/sidecar/posts/the-baluchistan-imbroglio.
4. Published in 2017 by the International Library of Iranian Studies.