

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly **Worker**



After Rochdale: are George Galloway and Jeremy Corbyn about to join forces? Carla Roberts investigates

- Letters and debate
- General election tactics
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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**Amidst Gaza genocide
Tory-Labour establishment
demands clampdown
on ceasefire protests**

LETTERS



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

Economism

A by-election in Australia has seen the Australian Labor Party government retain the seat of Dunkley in Victoria - albeit with a swing of 3.7% to the opposition, conservative Liberal Party. In Australia's 'two-party-preferred' electoral system, the ALP won with 52.7% of the vote.

This is a pretty standard swing against a sitting government that will not trouble Labor. With about a year until the next federal election, the government of Anthony Albanese will find this a comfortable win, with its primary (first-preference) vote holding up (41.2%, up 0.9%). This was in the face of a Liberal attempt to whip up a racist fear campaign alongside an ongoing cost-of-living and housing crisis for most people, especially young workers and students. Labor campaigned on the basis that that it was 'listening' to people on the cost of living.

In the days ahead of the vote, which took place on Saturday March 2, Liberal Party deputy leader Sussan Ley sent a message on Twitter saying: "If you live in Frankston and you've got a problem with Victorian women being assaulted by foreign criminals, vote against Labor."

This was seemingly in reference to Victoria police charging a man on suspicion of sexual assault. Within hours of the arrest he had been released, with the police saying it was mistaken identity and not profiling. The man - a West Papuan asylum-seeker, who had been held in indefinite detention, given his previous criminal record - had been released under supervision after the high court ruled in November that his (and other asylum-seekers') detention was illegal. The Liberal Party has been trying to whip up racist and chauvinist hate ever since, but this appears to have fallen flat.

In total, there were eight candidates, including from the Socialist Alternative-dominated Victorian Socialists (VS), the Australian Greens, Animal Justice Party and Libertarians (the by-election was caused by the death of ALP MP Peta Murphy).

The Greens saw a near 4% drop in their primary vote and the VS, standing a Palestinian candidate, received just 1.73% - meaning they were outpolled by 'informal' (ie, invalid) votes (4.26%). While Labor is out of step with much of its base on the question of Gaza, this did not materialise as votes for the Greens or VS. The latter's electoral experiment - spearheaded by the Cliffite Socialist Alliance - did not fare well.

To give them credit, they highlighted the war on Gaza and Australia's complicity with genocide by standing Reem Yunis, a woman of Palestinian origin. But their actual position on this was indistinguishable from the Australian Greens, who stood the anti-Zionist Jewish candidate, Alex Breskin and he received 5,162 votes (6.37%).

Reem Yunis's letter to voters in Dunkley read:

"Instead of backing mass slaughter of innocent people, our government should take a stand against war and use its diplomatic power to push for justice for the Palestinians and a lasting peace.

"Let's fund better childcare,

schools and hospitals instead of wasting billions on weapons and war ...

"Let's ensure workers get a bigger share of the wealth they produce instead of helping the super-rich get richer."

As I have said, politically, this was indistinguishable from the Australian Greens. While the VS 'How to vote' card was branded green, black and red - no doubt a nod to the Palestinian flag - the top was dominated by a slightly darker shade of green to that used on Green Party literature!

The first social media output after the by-election from the Victorian Socialists was a tweet highlighting its best performing booth, Carrum Downs south, where Reem Yunis received 64 first preference votes (7.0%). "Very good result for us," it said. Really? This was a booth where Yunis came fourth - or fifth if you include the 76 informal votes (7.7%) - and where there was an 11% swing to the conservative Liberal candidate.

VS is repeating the errors of other 'lowest common denominator' left unity electoral projects. Rather than uniting the left around what is needed for the working class - a radical, democratic and republican programme that challenges the constitutional order and capital's control of economic and social life - we get bottom-drawer economism.

Yet outside their 'electoral' clothing, the Socialist Alternative comrades exhibit the same impatient, ultra-left 'strike, strike, strike' mentality you expect from Cliffite and International Socialist Tendency groups the world over. This is a strange Jekyll-and-Hyde approach to politics: semi-anarchist strikism and ultra-left posturing for university recruiting; and low-level reformist gruel for elections.

The only consistency between the two is economism. Outside of its call to oppose the war in Gaza, there were literally no political demands put forward. It was all below-par reformist economism: increase wages, "bring down housing costs and supermarket prices"; more funding for local transport, schools and hospitals. How this is meant to elevate working class consciousness and struggle to contest for state power is anyone's guess.

Leaving aside the fact that this electoral unity project is only in *one state* in Australia (there are no 'Queensland Socialists', etc), it is hard to imagine getting a lower vote on any platform. So why not stand on a political programme that actually challenges the political order and lays out the ideological weapons the working class needs to turn itself into a ruling class?

The answer, of course, is the comrades do not have the politics - or stomach - for it.

A side note on history: in its post-election thanks to supporters on social media, VS said its electoral campaign was the first run by socialists in Dunkley. While technically true - the seat was created in 1984 - the area was previously covered by the seat of Flinders, and throughout the 1930s the Communist Party stood former ALP member Ralph Gibson in the area. In his first shot, in a 1933 by-election, he won 3,124 votes (5.0%). In the 1934 federal election, comrade Gibson received 4,750 votes (7%) and, in 1937, the communists received 4,630 (9.1% of the vote). It was the last time they stood in the seat before the party was banned ahead of the 1940 elections.

The main slogan of the

Communist Party in 1934 was "For soviet power". By 1937, at the start of the popular front period, CPA slogans included: "Out with Lyons, who menaces democracy! Elect a Labor government! Preserve democracy! Bar the path to fascism!" While there is an obvious shift from 'third period Stalinism' to the collaborationist, anti-fascist popular front, in both cases the CPA prioritised political slogans.

A far cry from today's economistic left.

Martin Greenfield
Australia

Democratic Stalin

As many readers will know, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin died in March 1953. Just six months earlier, he gave a scripted and relatively short speech of just over 1,100 words to the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (October 14 1952).

In my opinion, one paragraph regarding the struggle for democracy and democratic rights had a most significant impact on, first, the development of a post-war western communist approach to revolution and a model of socialism very distinct from the Soviet approach and model, and, later, the development of Eurocommunism in the 1970s.

The key points in the relevant section read: "Earlier, the bourgeoisie presented themselves as liberal, they were for bourgeois democratic freedom and in that way gained popularity with the people ... The banner of bourgeois democratic freedom has been flung overboard. I think that you, the representatives of communist and democratic parties, must pick up this banner and carry it forward if you want to gain the majority of the people. There is nobody else to raise it."

It was precisely this new relation between the struggle for democracy and for socialism which helped inform the development of specifically western communist approaches to socialist revolution and indeed to their conception of the models of socialism to be achieved. In many respects, these were foreshadowed by actual experiences of the 'people's democracies' in post-war central and eastern Europe, which enabled relatively peaceful and rapid transitions to socialism - assisted considerably, it must be said, by the protective shield of the Soviet Red Army.

Western communists, despite the calumnies of the capitalist class and their media, never sought the *abolition* of democracy. Pre-war, for example, the programmes of the Communist Party of Great Britain, *Class against class* (actually the 1929 general election programme) and *For soviet Britain* (1935), sought to *replace* bourgeois democracy and all its parliamentary trappings - which was nothing more than democracy for the capitalist class - by a massively enhanced democracy based on the political and economic power of the majority working class, expressed through new organisational forms and structures created via working class struggle, the soviets. Soviet power would combine forms of both direct and indirect democracy and exercise working class power over the economy and society as a whole.

However, reflecting both the huge change in the post-war balance of world forces following the emergence of the USSR as a world socialist superpower, and the changed balance of forces within many of the advanced capitalist countries, it became possible to

present this as a combination of fighting to defend and advance basic democratic rights won under capitalism through working class struggle, smashing though "bourgeois restrictions and limits". This would, in effect, "transform" bourgeois (capitalist) democracy into working class (socialist) democracy, but now enabling the communist and worker parties to stand as the "true defenders of democracy" rather than their class opponents.

A "transformed" socialist democracy would clearly be very different in form and content from previous capitalist (parliamentary) democracy, as the institutions, structures and mechanisms required for the majority working class to govern society for itself and in its own interests are very different from those required to run society in the interests of a small, parasitical, capitalist minority class.

Yes, we might expect to see a continued role for elected representative assemblies at various levels in society, but these would be considerably supplemented by forms of ongoing direct democracy and the active daily participation of the working people in the production of useful goods and services, the running of the whole socialist society in their own interests and the greatest development of their creative and productive initiative.

Is there any fundamental difference between seeking to "transform" bourgeois democracy into socialist democracy and "replacing" the former with the latter? I don't think so, although the

former formulation does suggest a potentially more democratic and peaceable approach.

Successive editions of the British communist party programme, *The British road to socialism*, equivalent programmatic statements by many (although not all) western communist parties, the emergence of genuine Eurocommunism in the 1970s (as opposed to what emerged in the old CPGB in the 1970s, which in my view was little more than classic rightwing social democracy and liberalism), can only really be understood as the strategic application of the correct relationships between the struggles for democracy, democratic rights and for socialism.

No doubt some of the more weird and wonderful Trotskyoid solo or single-figure sects will denounce all the above as "Stalinist revisionism and reformism", so I will just quote Trotsky's long-time political and ideological opponent, one VI Lenin, on the subject (I would strongly recommend the reading of the texts in full):

"For socialism is impossible without democracy because: (1) the proletariat cannot perform the socialist revolution unless it prepares for it by the struggle for democracy; (2) victorious socialism cannot consolidate its victory and bring humanity to the withering away of the state without implementing full democracy" (*A caricature of Marxism*, 1916).

"Through utilisation of bourgeois democracy to socialist and consistently democratic organisation of the proletariat

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PARLIAMENT

House of cowards

Speaker Lindsay Hoyle kept a real Gaza ceasefire off the agenda a few weeks ago in the name of keeping MPs safe. **Paul Demarty** stands up for the right to protest

When Labour MPs conspired with Commons speaker Lindsay Hoyle to keep a real Gaza ceasefire off the agenda a few weeks ago - one of the most spectacularly cynical acts ever undertaken in that den of thieves - Hoyle justified his actions on the basis that to have allowed the vote would have represented a threat to MPs' safety.

Hoyle is not, of course, one of life's great original thinkers; and his bizarre excuse picked up on a running theme. Harriet Harman, New Labour lifer and chair of the Commons standards committee, urged party leaders to take threats to MPs more seriously and allow them to work from home if they feel unsafe. Since then the government has, of course, announced a £31 million package to ensure the security of MPs.

Harman's comments were prompted by the decision of Mike Freer, justice minister, to resign from parliament, citing repeated threats to his person and a near miss at the hands of the murderer of David Amess - the Southend Tory who was killed by an Islamist 'lone wolf' type in 2021.

How seriously should we take these complaints? There is clearly *something* there - after all, Amess really is dead. His murder followed that of Jo Cox, a rightwing Labour MP, who was stabbed and shot to death by a far-right 'lone wolf' type, back in 2016. Death threats are undoubtedly the lot not only of MPs and their counterparts in other countries, but more or less any public figure in contemporary society. We are not, generally, in favour of people being murdered, not even Tory MPs; and, while the floods of death threats directed at MPs are more or less uniformly frivolous (top tip number one for actual cold-blooded killers: don't tell a well-connected target in advance that you're going to kill them!), they are nonetheless unpleasant and anti-social acts.

Framing

The devil is really in the *framing* of this behaviour as a problem about which 'something must be done'. If we are to believe the weeping MPs, this is a story of politics generally becoming more rancorous, of 'irresponsible' rhetoric increasing tensions, of 'polarisation' and 'divisiveness'. This mood music from sober-minded parliamentarians has reached a deafening volume since George Galloway's crushing victory in the Rochdale by-election last week; Galloway has become quite the scapegoat for all the frail creatures of parliament, and to hear everyone from Rishi Sunak to gormless *Sky* hack Sam Coates tell it, you would think he is to march on the Commons at the head of a skeleton army, as in Bruegel's painting, 'The triumph of death'.

It is the strangest thing; after all, this is not the first time Galloway has gazumped the main parties. He beat Oona King, the warmongering Blairite, in Bethnal Green and Bow back in 2005; he snuck to victory in Bradford West in 2012 - I do not remember anything approaching this level of hysteria on those occasions; Tony Blair and Ed Miliband took it on the chin, and Labour took the seats back at the next time of asking. On that evidence, the poor beleaguered denizens of parliament



Because they refuse to speak out against genocide, MPs feel threatened - good

need only suffer his presence for 10 measly months.

Barely mentioned by any of these people is the *substantive* political controversy of the day - the issue that Galloway campaigned on, the issue that occasioned Hoyle's tearing up of procedure: Israel's genocidal onslaught on Gaza. Freer is a fanatical Israel supporter, who in 2014 defied the Conservative whip, resigning from a minor government post, to vote *against* a purely formal motion in favour of the general idea of Palestinian statehood. There is, strangely, a close correlation between pro-Zionist fanaticism and, let us say, the *perceived* threat level among our political class.

This is really only to be expected: after all, this is not even *that* divisive an issue, all things considered. The British are not split down the middle, as they were on Brexit. A very large majority - 70% or so - supports an immediate Israeli ceasefire. Unfortunately, the 30% contains nearly the whole Tory parliamentary party, and at least the Labour front bench (Hoyle's ploy saved Keir Starmer the embarrassment of a likely huge rebellion).

This amounts to a staggering insult to the British people: for all the bourgeois parties - *in an election year!* - to unite *against* the largest

part of the electorate. That is hardly surprising to any Marxist, of course: what democratic forms are permitted to the masses in capitalist society are constrained from interfering with the interests of the rulers themselves, and above all the interests of the global top-dog state. British elections are constrained by our strategic subordination to the United States, usually by the discreet means of media monopoly. With the media, for one reason or another, unable to frame unceasing mass murder as anything other than what it is, all that is left is to bluntly deny voters anything like a *choice* on the matter: we clearly cannot be trusted to do the 'right' thing.

Insults tend to be received as such. There is an extraordinary lack of self-awareness on the part of all these MPs complaining about abuse and threats. Harman, remember, is the chair of the *parliamentary standards committee* - she is supposed to ensure that MPs are worthy of the honour of representing us. Instead, she uses that platform to chide voters for being unworthy of their MPs.

In despair at the sudden success of the nativist American Party (better known as the 'Know Nothings'), Abraham Lincoln famously remarked: "I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no

pretence of loving liberty - to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy."

The aristocratic ruling classes of old at least had the virtue of openly stating that they were a whole different breed - quite literally - and thereby were ordained to rule, and the rest of us owed them deference. There are people on the far right today who believe this, for that matter: Catholic integralists, neo-Nietzscheans and techno-monarchists, etc. They all have the virtue of guilelessness.

Not workplaces

There is something false, however, in the very being of every professional politician in modern western 'democracies'. Their job is - on paper - to represent a set of voters in the halls of power. Yet the very fact that it is a *job* - that is, a professional career, to which one dedicates one's adult life in the same way that one might become a lawyer or a software engineer - *requires* insulation from the popular will to some extent. Professional advancement depends on a certain level of stability in the overall structure. It is the professionals themselves who are equipped to evaluate each others' performance; the consent of the great unwashed

at the ballot box is a regrettable expediency on the way up the greasy pole of patronage and preferment. Thus the bureaucratisation of the parties of the workers' movement is *itself* a mechanism of capitalist class control.

The more successful these forms of control are, however, the more they tend to rob ordinary people of meaningful engagement with politics at all. There is a tendency towards atomisation, and it is this that gives you endless social media death threats and - out at the edges - the 'lone wolf' killers of Cox and Amess. So, when MPs complain that nobody should have to put up with this sort of thing in the workplace, they involve themselves in a flat contradiction: it is just because politics is a *workplace*, a protected closed-shop profession, that they *do* have to put up with it.

This leaves the left with a few different tasks. The most immediate is to resist the thrust of all the current wailing: attempts to use the law to criminalise any form of protest that might make a cowardly MP feel at all unsafe. Murder, it will be remembered, is already illegal (as, for that matter, are death threats). It is not physical harm these people fear really - it is the minuscule level of accountability represented by having a few people accuse them of something unpleasant.

Deplorable left

However, in the second place, this goes for us too. The left has proven, in recent years, deplorably vulnerable to sabotage by those who suppose that the movement owes them a life free of discomfort and anxiety before anything can be done. No such thing is possible, probably not after the best possible revolution, and certainly not on the road to it. Speech codes, prissiness about etiquette, 'safe spaces' - all are precisely forms of the bureaucratic dictatorship of the bourgeoisie *within the workers' movement*, and lead precisely to the rule of a caste of mediocrities like today's parliamentarians: short-beaked pigeons who can do nothing but wallow in self-pity and make themselves immovable by the manipulation of procedure.

Finally, and most importantly, we must remember that it is not all bad news. We *can* build a truly democratic society, which would entail the end of politics as a bureaucratic profession, and far more extensive involvement in decision-making throughout society. Removing the scarcity should at least temper the rancorousness of polemic, although people will continue to passionately disagree and call each other all manner of epithets. The minimum programme of a Marxist party worthy of the name would amount to such a regime - measures such as annual parliaments, proportional representation, wages representative of constituents, the abolition of advertising and the bribe-subsidy it offers to the press, and the replacement of the police - whose job it is to enforce the boundaries of permissible protest - with a popular militia: all these would contribute to the possibility of a better, more robust political culture.

In the absence of that, we can only watch on in contempt at the antics of the Commons cowards ●

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UNITY

Where next for left?

Are Jeremy Corbyn and George Galloway about to join forces? **Carla Roberts** takes a look at what is going on between these two reformist charlatans and the pending launch of yet another unprincipled lash-up - this time called Collective

“Keir Starmer, this is for Gaza” - that is how George Galloway quite rightly began his victory speech after he was declared winner of the February 29 Rochdale by-election. With 40% of the vote, he administered Rishi Sunak and the entire pro-Zionist establishment the mother of all ass-whoopings.

Galloway's victory is a blow to the ruling class and therefore extremely positive, that despite our criticisms of his reactionary politics on some social issues which were on full display in his often cringe-worthy interview on the *Not the Andrew Marr show*. He explained that “Before a big decision, I often ask myself, what would Jesus want me to do?”¹

Well, perhaps he, that is Jesus, might have advised against writing a truly awful letter that went out predominantly to the non-Muslim constituents in Rochdale. It could have been written by Nigel Farage himself: “I believe in Britain”, “I believe in family”, “I believe in law and order” (“There will be no grooming gangs on my watch. Even if I have to arrest them myself”), “I fight for small business”, and, my favourite, “I want to bring back Primark” and “make Rochdale great again”.

The letter also includes a long transphobic section: “I believe in men and women. God created everything in pairs”. Total nonsense, of course, which features in the *Quran*. There is, for example, no ‘opposite force’ to gravity. Also, there are many animals and fungi which are exclusively parthenogenetic (asexual) and certain species of fungi are multi-sexual, having three, four or even several thousands of genders.² God must have got a bit confused.

In any case, I daresay a lot of people will have voted for Galloway not because of, but *despite*, this wacky letter. It is his second letter, however, which was apparently sent chiefly to Muslim households, that explains his appeal:

I, George Galloway, have fought for Muslims at home and abroad all my life. And paid a price for it. I, George Galloway, have always come to the side of the people of Palestine in their agony - and am doing so again, now that Gaza is burning.

Some people on the left have got very upset by the fact that he “opportunistically” sent two different letters to different parts of the constituency. There is generally nothing wrong with approaching different parts of the working class with your programme in a different style and manner - even though in this case the two letters read like they have been written by two entirely different candidates, reflecting, of course, the rather eclectic ‘socialism’ of Galloway.

We do wonder if these letters were approved by the Workers Party of Britain executive. Galloway after all is not usually one to have his materials approved, as his former comrades of the Socialist Workers Party found out when they were - temporarily - acting as his foot soldiers in Respect (their spectacular falling out also explains why the organisation idiotically called for what amounts to a vote *against* Galloway in Rochdale³).

His Catholic, transphobic,

nationalist, chauvinistic ‘Britain first’ policies, however, will not play a big role, now he is a member of parliament. After all, he is not running the government or heading the opposition. He will probably end up on the wrong side, when it comes to issues like the forthcoming vote on decriminalising (late) abortions. But mainly I suspect he will use his platform in parliament in the next few months to speak up in solidarity with Palestinians and against Israel’s genocidal policies, aided by UK and US imperialism. That is why Marxists supported his election.

Own goal

In the same interview, Galloway also appealed to Jeremy Corbyn to help set up a “coalition of socialist, progressive, anti-war organisations. Set up an alliance of the remaining socialists in the country. You’ll lead it, I’ll support it - let’s go.”

Despite their politics not being vastly different, this looks unlikely, at least in the immediate term. His request for Corbyn to accompany him into parliament was rebuffed, officially because of a “diary clash”. But we hear that Corbyn never even replied to the request. Galloway admitted in the same interview that “Jeremy has not spoken to me for many, many years”.

Perhaps Corbyn was busy instructing his lawyers in his defamation campaign against Nigel Farage, who said on *GB News*: “I was never a subscriber to the madcap theory that the Jews run the world. But I tell you who was: yes, Jeremy Corbyn.”⁴

A waste of time and money, in my view. The fact that bourgeois commentators can treat as ‘common knowledge’ Corbyn’s softness on anti-Semitism is a self-inflicted wound, of course. Corbyn should have fought the charges *politically* and when it really mattered. Instead, as leader of the Labour Party, he rolled over, apologised, allowed trumped-up charges to be weaponised against the left, while throwing hundreds of his supporters to the wolves. We are all still reaping the result of the failure to tackle these false charges, which were aimed at Corbyn, but as a secondary target.

The prime target was always free speech over Israel/Palestine. In the current situation, it is of massive help to the Zionists and their supporters in the British and US governments that they do not have to do much explaining when denouncing this or that protest - the mere charge of anti-Semitism will suffice. The actual definition of anti-Semitism (hostility to or discrimination against Jews) has been lost; the Zionist ‘redefinition’ is almost universally accepted by the mainstream media: criticism of Israel.

The day after Galloway’s election, Rishi Sunak gave what was supposed to look like a spontaneous emergency address “to the nation”, declaring in a long and repetitive speech that “our democracy itself is a target”. With puppy eyes, he rattled off platitude after platitude about the need for “unity”, “defeating the

extremists”, “the shared values we hold so dear”, “when they tell lies, we tell the truth”, etc. It sounded like ChatGPT had put together the most boring bits of Tony Blair.

The purpose, however, was a serious one: he was laying the groundwork for even tougher restrictions on the right to protest and demonstrate - not just those protests in solidarity with the Palestinians, but also the pesky climate change cavalry and other potential “extremists”. A recent Ipsos poll showed that the Tories are now languishing at 20% in the polls - the lowest since Ipsos began its regular tracking in 1978. With Labour on 47%, Sunak is desperately trying to look like a man in charge. And, although he failed rather spectacularly (only the *Daily Mail* liked his speech), within hours we witnessed tougher police actions: for example the crazy midnight arrest of three activists in Newham for “racially aggravated harassment”.⁵

No doubt, they did not hiss the pro-business councillor, Joshua Garfield, because he is Jewish.⁶ But in the current climate, that is how it was immediately interpreted by the right: hissing = gas chambers, it seems. There were also arrests of protestors outside the General Dynamics arms factory in Hastings,⁷ as well as outside Emily Thornberry’s constituency office,⁸ while a long-running, regular protest organised by the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN) outside the Israeli ambassador’s London home has suddenly been banned.⁹

In addition, the government is “considering proposals to ban MPs and councillors from engaging with groups such as the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil.”¹⁰ Rather entertainingly though, some Tories have cottoned on to the fact that such legislation

could also stop them from supporting rightwing groups that campaign against, say, transgender or gay rights.¹¹

This particular piece of idiotic legislation might therefore get scrapped, but the message is clear: stay away from pro-Palestine demonstrations or any other displays of solidarity with Gaza. With every new massacre committed by Israel, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the government to justify its ongoing support for Zionism. Almost 70% of the population are in favour of an “immediate ceasefire” (ie, a stop to Israel’s genocidal campaign against Palestinians in Gaza).

But clearly the strategy is working for the useless members of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs and the tame PSC, which has just “disavowed” a local branch meeting on Zoom with Palestinian Leila Khaled (who was involved in the famous 1969 hijacking of a plane on its way to Tel Aviv) after a campaign run by *The Times*.¹²

Unite?

Galloway and Corbyn might have some political differences and personal animosity, but they are certainly on the same side when it comes to the big question of the day: Palestine. This does create pressure for them to unite in some kind of new political formation. It will be interesting to see if Corbyn accepts the ‘challenge’ by Galloway and lets him and/or the Workers’ Party join whatever political organisation he ends up supporting (if any).

It is, of course, questionable if Galloway’s result can be replicated up and down the country, as many on the left (including Galloway) now seem to believe. Firstly, 30% of the population of Rochdale are Muslim and therefore much more attuned to the plight of the Palestinians. Secondly, Galloway has a well-known name and a reputation that few if any on the left can match. Thirdly, in the general election, many voters will be chiefly concerned about getting rid of the Tories. Many will fear that voting for this or that left-of-Labour candidate might let a Tory win.

Might such a newly formed ‘movement’, called Collective, overcome the mish-mash of leftie candidates standing on pretty much the same political platform? And, crucially, can it go beyond electoral strategy and beyond reformist platitudes and start organising the socialist left on the basis of a serious, socialist programme and in a democratic and transparent way?

Collective was rather hastily launched at the ‘No Ceasefire, No Vote’ conference on March 2 in London, officially put on by “independent socialist councillors”. Thanks to Andrew Feinstein’s widely pre-advertised speech, a rally about Palestine rather suddenly turned into “the launch of a mass movement to the left of Labour”.¹³

Registered at Company’s House on February 28 as ‘Justice Collective Ltd’, it features journalist Justin Schlosberg and Pamela Fitzpatrick as company directors.

The latter is also co-director of the ‘Peace and Justice Project’ (the other one is Jeremy Corbyn). The platform on March 2 also included Lindsey German, Claudia Webbe MP, Salma Yaqoob and Jamie Driscoll (North of Tyne mayor).

Andrew Murray is also very much involved. A member of the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain, he formally left in 2016 after he was ‘seconded’ by Unite to support Jeremy Corbyn as a political advisor (along with two other former Straight Leftists, Seumas Milne and Steve Howell). With the collapse of the Corbyn project in December 2019 his entry work in the Labour Party came to an end and he formally rejoined. Whether or not the CPB is on board with Collective is another matter, but, thank god, the stillborn Transform is.¹⁴

Transform is one of the organisations listed as “in solidarity.”¹⁵ The others are the For the Many Network, the Liverpool Community Independents and Reliance (who?). There was a lot of crossover between those groups already, so it is not exactly breaking new ground. But, because of the people on board, Collective looks more serious than the multitude of recently formed groups and organisations (but then it is hard to look *less* serious).

The good thing about Collective is that it recognises the need to “form a party”. The bad thing is - it is (so far) operating on an even lower political basis than the many, many groups and grouplets that have clotted together since the defeat of the Corbyn movement. Its programme is centred on the call for an “immediate and permanent ceasefire”, with the five tame demands of the Peace and Justice Project tacked on:

- A real pay rise for all
- Green New Deal
- Housing for the many
- Tax the rich to save the NHS
- Welcome refugees and a world free from war

It seems rather odd that Collective only wants to turn into a party *after* the general election. But we are guessing that this has a lot to do with one Jeremy Corbyn. He wants to contest the next general election as an ‘independent candidate’ and does not want to be dragged down by this or that group - or fellow members of parliament ●

Notes

1. *Not the Andrew Marr Show* March 3 2024: www.youtube.com/watch?v=liBSOSp0Fzg.
2. www.answering-islam.org/Quran/Contra/qe015.html.
3. ‘Short memory syndrome’ *Weekly Worker* February 29: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1480/short-memory-syndrome.
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George Galloway:
some very dodgy views



DISCUSSION



First get one or two MPs ... then

How we should contest

While Corbynism has produced little more than demoralisation, Tusc's approach to elections has been a complete failure. **Edmund Griffiths** offers a contribution aimed at leaving behind puny goals and statistically irrelevant votes

A general election is coming, and it is far from clear that the far left is ready for it. Dissatisfaction with the Labour Party's hard-right turn may create *space* for a left challenge to gain support, but it certainly does not mobilise that support automatically.

In the 2021 election for Liverpool mayor, Tusc - the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition - got 2,912 votes (2.9%). This represents a *drop* from the 4,950 votes (5.1%) the same Tusc candidate had recorded in 2016, when Labour was led by *Jeremy Corbyn*. The detailed picture varies, but local and devolved elections since Corbyn stepped down do not show any unambiguous signs that Tusc, the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain, or other left organisations are making electoral advances. We should not *assume* the general election will be any different: I think it still can be, but getting there will involve some serious decisions about how the far left approaches electoral work. This article is offered not as a definitive answer, but as one (hopefully constructive) contribution.

Obviously, if we had a party with 100,000 members, we could do more than we can today; if we had no organisations at all, we could do less. But the general election will presumably happen before we have had time to build the big party (or to dwindle away to nothing). I therefore want to consider what kind of electoral intervention might be possible *for the far left as it exists today*, without requiring new mass organisations to be conjured out of the air - and, as far as possible, without requiring the existing not-quite-mass

organisations to give up *fundamental* programmatic commitments.

Debates about organisation and programme will and should continue long after this election; but we cannot very well ask the government to postpone polling day until those debates are resolved. A far left strategy for a general election in 2024 (or January 2025) needs to be a strategy that the existing far left is *capable* of implementing.

Many people's hopes have been attached to the idea of Corbyn walking away from Labour and founding his own party. I suppose he may yet have a go, although he is cutting it fine. (He probably deserves some criticism for leaving his potential supporters dangling all this time, instead of explaining his intentions clearly and allowing them to make other plans, if it turns out they do want to break from Labour and he does not.)

But a Corbyn party was not necessarily the right approach anyway. We have already tried building a new party around an ex-Labour big name *twice*, in the form of the Socialist Labour Party and then Respect. Neither achieved durable success. And the likelihood of a Corbyn party developing as anything other than a personality vehicle was always slim. The left is still terribly receptive to personal loyalties and the incorruptible individual; even in the absence of Corbyn himself, there seems to be a degree of interest in the notion of independent candidates standing on a broadly left platform, but accountable only to their own political intuitions.

It is understandable that experiences with Labour have taught some people to mistrust the idea of political parties in general; and the

British-backed atrocities in Gaza add moral urgency to the appeal of candidates who demand a ceasefire. But the problem in Labour surely was not that the MPs *were not independent enough* from the democratic decisions of the membership; and independent campaigns, even when they perform strongly (Reg Keys, a founder member of Military Families Against the War, took 4,252 votes - 10.3% - in Tony Blair's Sedgefield constituency in 2005), do not tend to build into anything sustainable. Independent candidacies will presumably occur whether or not the far left recommends them; but we should not be too hopeful about them as a general way forward.

The same applies in spades to George Galloway and the Workers Party of Britain. Quite a few on the left have recently been saluting his indefatigability in connection with the Rochdale by-election. That may be wise, or it may not; but any suggestion that patriotic Keynesian social conservatism, fronted by a climate change sceptic who voted Tory only three years ago, represents the future (or even, let's be honest, a part) of the British far left is for the birds.

In sharp contrast, the *absence* of any cult of personality around Dave Nellist is uncomplicatedly to the credit of Nellist himself, of Tusc and of the Socialist Party in England and Wales. I would use the word, 'exemplary', except that holding him up as a model to emulate might itself start looking a bit like a personality cult. ('Comrades, let us promote workers' leaders of the Dave Nellist type!')

Unfortunately, Tusc's actual election results so far have been weak. It did not contest the 2017 or 2019 general elections, but in 2015 it stood

135 candidates and received 36,490 votes in total: an average of 270 votes per constituency (well under one percent). Only a few months later, Corbyn - standing for Labour leader on a rather similar anti-austerity platform - got 251,417 votes. He almost certainly received more votes in an internal party election, *in the constituencies Tusc had contested*, than Tusc had managed in a *public* election. The Tusc campaign was therefore a failure: not only did it elect no MPs and keep no deposits, but the result grossly *understated* the support that actually existed for the kind of politics Tusc was putting forward.

Realistic?

We should accept that for *any* candidate (let alone the average candidate) to get less than one percent is not just a defeat, but a humiliation. One percent - typically four or five hundred votes - is not good; but it does not have to *actively demoralise* the people who did vote for you, and it does not have to *actively put off* people who might consider it next time. Anything less really does. That does not mean one percent should be the target. A more sensible target for far-left candidates in this election would be *at least* five percent - the cut-off for keeping the deposit. So what kind of electoral strategy could make that realistic?

One thing Galloway gets dead right (it is not one of his opinions) is that when he stands in a constituency he habitually campaigns on a big scale. He goes into it expecting to mobilise hundreds of volunteers, spend thousands of pounds, leaflet every house, canvass every voter. He prints up posters, banners and placards of different shapes and sizes, in colour,

and gets them displayed wherever he can. He rents or borrows a campaign headquarters. He has been known to tour round the constituency in an open-topped campaign bus.

None of this is a special Galloway invention: politicians of all parties - including far-left parties - were campaigning more or less like that, at least in target seats, before Galloway was born. It is not really a surprise if they have often ended up with more votes than a campaign consisting of a dozen (or half a dozen) activists and a collapsible table.

The average constituency contains roughly 40,000 households. Let us say it takes five minutes to canvass one household - that is a bit of a guess, and it may be a low estimate, but I am only really interested in getting the order of magnitude right. 40,000 households at five minutes per household comes to about 3,300 *person-hours* (assuming you go round in ones; double it if you are canvassing in pairs). Over a six-week election campaign, that makes 550 person-hours per week to cover the constituency.

Is it plausible that 10 activists could do it, by each putting in 50 or 60 hours a week (crammed into evenings and weekends, when voters are likely to be in)? I would say it is not close to plausible. Is it plausible that a hundred activists could do it? I would say: getting there. Maybe you would not manage quite the whole constituency. Two hundred would certainly be better. But these are back-of-the-envelope calculations anyway: I think it is reasonable to conclude that if you have a hundred activists you can *start* thinking about running *something like* a proper election campaign in a constituency, and if you do not then

GEOPOLITICS

Anglo-Iranian relations *longue durée*

It is vital not to promote illusions in any capitalist global power, argues Mike Macnair. This is an edited version of the online talk given to the 'Voice of Revolution' discussion group

will start by working backwards in time, then go forwards, and finally discuss possible political conclusions. So we start with the fact that the 1953 coup against the Iran regime under Mohammed Mosaddegh was a British, not just a US, operation, and that that it was the British, to a considerable extent, who persuaded the USA that Mossaddegh represented a 'threat of communism', while what they were really concerned about was UK interests in Iran.

In 1941 Reza Shah was overthrown by an Anglo-Soviet invasion purely for the geopolitical reason that they intended to ship supplies through Iran to the Soviet Union for the purpose of the war effort against Germany. Reza Khan (as he then was) had been put into power in 1921, having been groomed by British general Edmund Ironside. Ironside had previously been commander of the British intervention force against the Russian Revolution in north Russia, and after that was the commander of Britain's intervention forces against Kemal Atatürk in Turkey - it was from there that he was moved to Iran and became backer of Reza Khan.

In 1914 at the outbreak of World War I Britain and tsarist Russia invaded Iran in order to prevent it from remaining neutral, because Turkey had decided to go with the 'Central Powers', and the Iranian government was looking for a sort of neutrality which would be more or less friendly to them.

In 1907, an Anglo-Russian convention, responding to the beginning of the 'constitutional revolution' in Iran in 1905, divided it into spheres of influence between Russia, which was to take the north, and Britain, which was to control the south. The Iranians were not party to this discussion. The British had positively encouraged the constitutional revolution. The decision to divide the country between British and Russian spheres of influence was thus an astonishingly cynical betrayal of the people whom Britain had encouraged to rebel.

In 1872, the 'Reuter concession' gave banker and businessman Paul Reuter the right to control roads, mills and factories, to conduct mining and to build railways in Iran. Protests from other capitalist countries led the British to support the Iranian government in reducing the scope of the concession (but not to cancel it completely).

In 1856-57, there had been an Anglo-Persian war. The British invaded Iran to force its government to back down over the Iranian claim to Herat in what is now western Afghanistan - in 1839 the British had, in fact, already threatened war over the Iranian claim to that city. This was in violation of the mutual defence treaty of 1814 between Britain and Iran.

Already in 1825, war had broken out between Iran and the Russians, and the British, in violation of the 1814 treaty, refused any aid to the Iranians, because they had agreements with the Russians in place, and instead, after the Iranians had been defeated, paid a substantial sum of money to buy out the positive obligations of mutual aid under the 1814 treaty. The British would still be under an obligation not to attack Iran, which they threatened in 1839 and actually did in 1856-57.

In 1810-14 there was, in fact, a British military mission supporting the Iranian crown prince, Abbas



'As between friends' Punch - December 13 1911. Caption ran: "If we hadn't a thorough understanding I might almost be tempted to ask what you are doing there with our little playfellow"

Mirza, against the Russians in a war in the Caucasus. After an initially successful operation, this ended in defeat. The British then immediately abandoned the Iranians, and strong-armed them into agreeing to a very disadvantageous treaty with the Russians in 1813. They did this because the tsar had changed sides - from alliance with the French to opposing them - since the time when the British started supporting the Iranian crown prince against the Russians. The 1814 mutual defence treaty was the *quid pro quo* for the Iranian acceptance of the disadvantageous treaty with the Russians in 1813.

But the 1810 support for Iran in itself had been a sudden turnaround, because, in fact, in 1807-10 the Iranian government had attempted to make an alliance with Napoleonic France, and the British had threatened the Iranians with war over that.

But the Anglo-Iranian relationship goes back significantly further - to 1622, when the British East India Company entered into an alliance with the Safavid shah, Abbas I, to evict the Portuguese from the island of Hormuz. They successfully did so and in thanks for this, the East India Company was granted a trade *farman* (decree),

which gave it very extensive trading privileges and exemptions in Iranian customs and tolls, which were not available to other European traders, as well as a factory at Bandar Abbas. And in exchange for this *farman*, the East India Company, for its part, supplied naval muscle, which enabled the Safavid regime (and, after the fall of the Safavid dynasty, the regime of Nader Shah in the mid-18th century) to dominate the Gulf.

We can say in a sense that this was an imperialist/semi-colonial relationship, because the British succeeded to the position of the Portuguese. But it was much more like a *quid pro quo* relationship: the East India Company did not control the 17th or 18th century Iranian regimes' policies: it merely received trade privileges in exchange for the supply of naval services.

Others have made the point that the East India Company substituted supplying Indian raw silk for what Europe previously received from Iran. This, however, is an aspect of the *general* phenomenon of the Cape of Good Hope route between Europe and India, which tended to impoverish not just Iran, but also the Ottoman empire (including Egypt).

So I have taken us backwards to 1622 - and I guess I could push even

further back and say, 'When did the Portuguese get control of Hormuz?' That was 1515.

Forwards

But now let us go the other way. We start somewhat earlier in the late medieval Mediterranean and North Sea.

In this period a new shipping technology emerged, which allowed bulk shipping. This was not *absolutely* new: there had been Roman shipping on this scale. But that was basically *state-operated* grain ships running from Egypt to Constantinople, from north Africa to Rome, and from Britain across the North Sea to the Rhineland garrisons. In contrast, 14th century bulk shipping was privately operated. Equally, looked at globally, it was smaller than the larger end of Chinese junks. But the power relation between private merchant shippers and medieval European states was markedly more favourable to the merchants than the relationship of Chinese merchant shippers with the Chinese state. And the new ships were radically bigger than those that had been in the Mediterranean and the North Sea up to that time.

That meant substantially larger docks to serve these substantially larger ships, many more dock workers

and cranes powered by workers in treadmills. Similarly, because these ships were much larger, shipbuilding grew to an industrial, rather than artisanal, scale. This new shipping technology is, then, one of the central forms involving what Karl Marx called the "real subsumption of labour to capital".

The "formal subsumption of labour to capital" is the 'putting-out system', where the merchant capitalist has an effective monopoly on the supply of raw materials and an effective monopoly on the purchase of the finished output, so that the merchant capitalist makes the small-scale artisans, who do the productive work, dependent on him, though they are *formally* still independent contractors rather than wage-labourers.

But the "real subsumption of labour to capital" is where numerous wage-labourers have to perform coordinated work, defined by the requirements of large-scale machines. This is obvious in modern industry. But the seamen and dockers are just as much subordinated to the large-scale machine as modern industrial workers: it is just that the machine was the large-scale ship, and its ancillary equipment - docks and shipbuilding.

This new shipping industry involves heavy capitalisation. But this means that the merchant capitalist *needs* to subordinate the suppliers of raw materials and the intermediate production stages to himself. He cannot work with the level of competition which exists in either artisan markets or, for that matter, traditional bazaar merchant markets. Too much capital is at risk: so he needs tighter control, and to cut the degree of competition. Hence, for example, the Venetian state operates state-sponsored convoys and a state-controlled shipbuilding industry in the Arsenal. The Genoese in the same period invented marine insurance and related financial operations, which created the effect of centralising capital in the way in which capital is centralised in modern times by mergers and so on.

Cloth was shipped in bulk. There seems to have been significant demand in the Islamic world for west European woollen clothing: for example, at a relatively late stage, part of the East India Company's reasons for operating in Iran was that there was significant demand in Iran for British woollen clothing.

Another part of the merchant shippers' operations of the late Middle Ages was the sugar industry. This was again bulk-scale shipping.

A third element was spices. These were low bulk and high value, so that they could affordably be traded without bulk shipping. It is easy for this reason to think of spices as a luxury. But actually they were not, because they were needed for food preservation. Thus, for example, the Netherlands produced pickled fish on an industrial scale; this involved the use of spices which were imported from the Dar-Al-Islam (though originating in reality from south Asia and what is now Indonesia).

The problem which Venice and Genoa faced in the late Middle Ages was that they lacked sufficient coercive control to force the territories controlled by either the Ottomans or Mamluk Egypt and Syria to engage in primary sugar production at a low level, leaving the higher value-added operations to be done by Venetian and Genoese

operators. The states in question were too powerful. Venice was not able to dictate to the Ottoman empire or to the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt and Syria (Syria was the main place where sugar production was carried on in the Islamic world).

In this situation, Venice embarked on slave-worked sugar plantations, importing slaves and fixed capital equipment - in Crete, from the 1200s; in Cyprus, somewhat later. Genoese financial capital went into partnership from the 1400s with Portuguese physical shipping operators, developing Portuguese slave-worked sugar plantation colonies on the Atlantic Islands - starting with Madeira from 1419, then the Azores from 1427, Cape Verde from 1445 and Sao Tome from 1470.

Thus the Genoese-Portuguese nexus creeps down the west coast of Africa with Portuguese sugar plantations. They grew up out of the objective need of the bulk shipping industry to control the inputs for the sugar industry, and its inability to control the inputs for the sugar industry as long as they were basically being produced in Mamluk or Ottoman territory.

In 1497-98, famously, Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope, and the opportunity arose to cut out the Muslim middleman in the spice trade. Portugal then embarked on a very rapid career of conquest of port stations of one sort or another, step by step by step up the east coast of Africa, knocking out Arabic and other towns.

Goa was taken in 1510, Malacca in 1511, Hormuz, which I mentioned earlier, in 1515. This is the moment at which European imperialism begins to become a global phenomenon. I refer here only to the developments which are the more or less direct antecedents of the British involvement in Iran.

Sideways

Now we shift sideways from the Mediterranean to the North Sea, where there was a similar development of bulk shipping - cloth again. Wool was being shipped from England to the Netherlands to be worked up into cloth. Grain was shipped from north Germany, from Poland, from East Anglia to the Netherlands and Scandinavia, where grain production is at a lower level.

As I already said, from the 16th century the Netherlands was running factory ships and fleets, which trawled up the herring and processed them on the ship to produce pickled herring. This is again industrial production - wind-powered, not steam-powered, but industrial production and the real subsumption of labour to capital.

In this milieu of the North Sea - north Germany, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, eastern England - Protestantism develops and takes hold. And, starting from Protestantism, in 1568 the Dutch revolt against Spanish rule and then the Eighty Years' War between the Netherlands and Spain.

Meanwhile, the Portuguese monarchy was extinguished by military defeat in Morocco in 1578 and taken over by Spain in 1580. Spain thus inherited the Portuguese empire. And Spain was not just fighting to get back control of the Netherlands, but was also the Europe-wide champion of the Catholic 'Counter-Reformation'.

In that context the Dutch were forced, in order to win against Spain, to create a navy, and to move into geopolitical operations on a global scale. Hence the Dutch East India Company; and the Dutch taking the Cape of Good Hope, Sri Lanka, parts of Indonesia, Taiwan, and so on.

The English also. The English Reformation was not so obviously

a mass Protestant movement, but it was tied to dynastic struggles, and the Spanish monarchy sought to restore Catholicism both in the Netherlands and in Britain. So the English, then, are also driven to fight the Spanish and Portuguese on a global scale. And during this war, in 1600, the English create their own East India Company and embark on their own career of creating international trading posts and seizing this, that and the other. There was also settler colonialism in North America (but we can leave that on one side for present purposes). This is the context of the English East India Company taking Hormuz in 1622.

In the mid-1600s Spain's reconquest project was unequivocally defeated. Peace was made with the Netherlands in 1648 and with France in 1660; Portugal had started a fight for independence from Spain in 1640 and the Spanish finally accepted defeat in 1668. The Cromwellian regime in Britain had made a treaty with Portugal in 1654 and, when the British monarchy was restored in 1660, the alliance with Portugal continued to hold, and the Portuguese gave Britain as part of the dowry of Catherine Braganza, who married Charles II, Tangier and Mumbai. Mumbai further strengthened the East India Company.

So Spain was down. Hence France under King Louis XIV took on the role of leader of the campaign for the restoration of Catholicism across Europe. I say restoration of Catholicism, but it is also very clearly the restoration of *feudalism*. We can see this, for example, in canal-building. The Netherlands demonstrated the utility of canals for transport infrastructure. When the English copied the Netherlands by introducing more canals, they set up trusts or corporations. Louis XIV's government 'infeudated' the strip of land on which the intended canal was to be, granting it in feudal tenure, to be held by the grantee, on condition of providing so many knights to the king's armed forces - a remarkable piece of visible reaction. Similarly, French colonial settlement in Canada was explicitly feudal.

With the French as the flag carrier for feudal restoration, there was a succession of world wars after the British revolution of 1688. I literally mean world wars, because they were on a global scale, between Britain and France, and varying allies on both sides - in 1689-97, 1702-13, 1740-48, 1756-63, 1778-83, 1791-1802, 1803-15. Of course, 1791-1815 is after the French Revolution. It is now the British who are seeking to restore the French monarchy (achieved, temporarily, in 1815), since a French capitalist competitor is even more of a problem for the British state than a French feudal-restorationist government.

In this context there was a series of proxy wars in India between the British East India Company and their Indian clients, and the French East India Company and their Indian clients - but with regular British and French army and navy forces also involved on both sides. The end result of these proxy wars was that the British East India Company ended up taking over what remained of the Mughal Empire in northern India, and acquiring control of the large northern Indian military labour market.

The East India Company thus became a territorial potentate in India, and what had been the normal pattern of capitalist imperialism - the creation of military-trading bases, unequal treaties to enforce the subordination of local production to merchant-shipping capitalist interests, limited island and exclave plantation colonies - was mutated into a large-scale empire. British territorial control of India produced

in its turn by way of imitation French territorial colonialism, German territorial colonialism, and so on.

But it also produced the result that the British were now endlessly concerned with the geopolitics of protecting their position in India. They were frightened that the French might get into India following an invasion of Egypt (Napoleon's aim in 1798) or by an alliance with the Iranians, and thereby be in a position to invade India. From the 1840s on they began to be concerned that the Russians would get into India through Afghanistan or Iran.

British-Iranian relations in the 1700s were fairly straightforwardly economic - trade privileges in exchange for the deal whereby the British East India Company provided the Iranian regime with the navy in the Gulf. But in the 1800s they became purely and simply a matter of geopolitics - and it is the geopolitics which results in the phenomenon of a perfidious Albion. The expression, 'perfidious Albion', had older roots, but was popularised by French revolutionaries: Britain is dishonest and untrustworthy, and you cannot expect their leaders to abide by their word in any agreement.

But this is actually just the geopolitical position of the world hegemon state. In the first place, there is nobody to stop the world hegemon state doing what it chooses, so that there is no penalty for its dishonesty. And, secondly, the world hegemon state has to constantly manoeuvre and shift alliances to keep down possible 'peer rivals'. Since it has to constantly shift sides, it can never give any real guarantees to anybody. It is *forced* to be endlessly dishonest in its diplomacy and in its alliances of one sort and another. As I say, Iran is an extraordinarily striking example of the inability of the British state, while it was the world hegemon, to give any sort of serious guarantees of abiding by its agreements or offer long-term consistency in policy.

Oil

The 20th century history of Anglo-Iranian relations is commonly linked to oil, and in particular the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) - renamed in 1935 as the 'Anglo-Iranian Oil Company' (AIOC), whose assets in Iran were nationalised by Mossadegh. It is easy to imagine this as a purely economic issue, but it is, in reality, more geopolitics.

There was a gradual growth of what were initially luxury uses of refined oil products in the late 19th century, and then in the early 20th century people begin to think that these might have real military uses. This was in the first place about converting naval ships from coal-fired to oil-fired. A smaller number of mechanics replaces a large number of stokers, and oil storage took up less space than coal storage. It takes until roughly the middle of the World War I before road-transport internal combustion engines were doing anything seriously significant in military terms. For aeroplanes, on the other hand, once the Wright brothers succeeded with heavier-than-air powered flight in 1903, there was a very rapid development of planes for military use - initially for scouting, with other uses developing rapidly in 1914-18.

But, essentially, the idea that oil was going to power ships meant that oil became a strategic resource; and APOC-AIOC is a part of that story. The D'Arcy oil prospecting concession was granted in 1901, but the 1907 Anglo-Russian agreement came before the actual discovery of oil in 1908 and the creation of APOC in 1909: the 1907 agreement aimed to regulate Anglo-Russian competition all along the line, Iran-Afghanistan-Tibet, preparatory to war with Germany.

But the starting point for the 1916 Sykes Picot agreement, as James Barr has shown in *A line in the sand*, was to draw the borders in such a way that the oilfields in Iraq would be British-controlled, and that there will be a continuous flow of oil through British-controlled territory, via a pipeline running to the Mediterranean coast in the north of what is now Israel. The ideological *representation* of that partitioning is then the ideas of a British-protected homeland for the Jews in Palestine, and a French-protected homeland for the near-eastern Christians in Lebanon, with the Muslim Arabs to get Transjordan and Syria.

The British choices involved are about the need to control oil supplies. This is not about the need to control the oil as a primary product for civilian industry - for that, normal unequal trade agreements of the sort that exist for all sorts of other primary products would work perfectly well. The need to control the oil arises because if you control the oil supply you can throttle your potential peer rivals' military capability.

In March 2023 General Michael 'Erik' Kurilla, commander of the US Central Command (Centcom, covering the Middle East), remarked that the extent of Chinese reliance on Middle-Eastern oil and gas means that "God forbid there's ever a conflict with China, but we could end up holding a lot of their economy at risk in the Centcom region." The case of the military uses of oil is even stronger. The French and Germans are *today* vulnerable to US control of the oil taps ...

The Anglo-Persian Oil Company could be considered as a particular form of control mechanism. It is also true that all through the inter-war period APOC-AIOC was scamming the Iranian government as to the royalties which were chargeable on oil sales. But the US, although it overthrew Mossadegh, did not give back AIOC's exclusive rights. Instead, a cartel of British, French and US oil companies - later called the 'seven sisters' - took over. US power replaces British. It is the military strategic point which is the central point rather than the commercial point.

Normal

My final point is about capitalism. Imperialism is normal capitalism. I argued this at length in a series of supplements in the *Weekly Worker* called 'Imperialism and the state' in 2022.

The basic point is that it is *capitalist* imperatives which force the Venetians into the creation of plantation colonies in Crete and Cyprus, or Genoese finance and Portuguese shipping into the creation of plantation colonies off the west coast of Africa, which leads in turn with Vasco da Gama to the beginning of the regime of European imperialism. These are imperatives created by the nature of capitalism - by the fact that capitalist production on an industrial scale requires 'competition' of a sort which is *anti-competitive*.

I added in the series that capitalism requires credit money, and therefore routine state enforcement of debts, which in turn requires the state to discriminate against the citizens or subjects of other states, so that every state is mercantilist. There is no such thing as a non-mercantilist state. The British *pretended* to be non-mercantilist in the later 1800s, but in reality they were using very extensive 'non-tariff barriers' to protect British interests, particularly in India. The Indian government required its citizens to pay for the army which held them down - by supplying raw materials to British industry.

The United States, of course, *talks* about freedom of trade endlessly.

But in fact it consistently maintains protectionism. There was a shock in the liberal media over Trump raising tariffs against China, but the USA has continuously operated protective tariffs and 'non-tariff barriers' since the 1861-65 civil war.

From the idea that imperialism is *not* an endemic feature of capitalism, but a feature of the last or 'highest' stage of capitalism, came the idea that the workers' movement can create a long-term strategic alliance, as opposed to short-term tactical agreements, with the 'democratic bourgeoisie' or with the 'national bourgeoisie' (with the 'democratic bourgeoisie' against fascism, or with the 'national bourgeoisie' against imperialism).

In the present, the alliance with the 'democratic bourgeoisie' is represented by the leftists who imagine that 'the west' will deliver Iran from the tyranny of the Islamic Republic. That is just as illusory as the belief that the Brits were going to support the constitutional revolution in 1905 - which they supported until it levered out the existing government, but then betrayed instantly in the 1907 spheres-of-influence deal with the Russians.

Equally, we were told by sections of the left in 1979-81 that the Khomeini movement was one of 'national capital' and that it was the duty of the working class to support this 'national capital' against international imperialism.

It turned out in reality that the Khomeini movement betrayed any alliance which might have been imagined to exist with the working class. Surprise, surprise - 'national capital' turns out to be not national. We can find numerous examples of this sort in recent history. The reason behind it is precisely that the imperialist world order - a structured hierarchy of states with a hegemon at its top - is inherent to capitalism as such. It is not a sign of the *decay* of capitalism.

So equally it is illusory to imagine that the Putin administration in Russia is going to be anti-imperialist. Russia is not now an imperialist country, but, if it wins the current war in Ukraine, it will *become* an imperialist country - just as in 1861 the US was still settler-colony, albeit expansionist, but the capabilities it created to win the Civil War in 1861-65 launched it on a career of overseas imperialism. After winning the Franco-Prussian war in 1870-71 Germany was launched on a career of naval expansion and overseas imperialism. Similarly victory in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95 launched Japan immediately on a career of overseas imperialism.

Today China *presents* itself as being more progressive - not like the old nasty imperialists of the west, but offering equal relations with the places where China invests. But this, of course, was just what the French argued, as against the British, in relation to Latin America in the 1800s: France was more modern, egalitarian and republican than nasty old Britain. The United States, similarly presented itself through the first half of the 20th century as being the more open and honest dealer, the more modernising trade partner. But, once the USA actually becomes the world hegemon, it turned out to be the empire of lies - just as Britain was the world hegemon was the unavoidably 'perfidious Albion'.

My political conclusion, then, from this long history is simple. It is that the history of British imperialism in relation to Iran is a striking argument for why it is important not to promote illusions either in nicer great powers, or generally, in the 'national bourgeoisie', or the 'democratic bourgeoisie' ●

USA

A very good week

Instead of fighting in the ballot box, the Democrats fight in the courts. It is almost as if they want Trump re-elected, writes **Daniel Lazare**

For Donald Trump, things are all clicking neatly into place:

- Nikki Haley has formally dropped out of the presidential race and effectively ceded him the Republican nomination.

- Secession fever is building in Texas - a crisis Trump helped propel to new heights last week by paying a much-publicised visit to a section of the US-Mexican border that state officials have seized in the face of what they say is an 'immigrant invasion'.

- Congress is in stalemate over aid to Ukraine, which is good news for Trump, because Joe Biden look weak and incompetent, as the military situation continues to crumble.

- A new poll by *The New York Times* says Trump is five percent ahead and performing unexpectedly well among blacks and Hispanics - groups formerly seen as bedrock Democratic voters. He is even catching up among women despite the Republican jihad against abortion and in vitro fertilisation.¹ His near total sweep of more than a dozen state primaries in this week's 'Super Tuesday' was merely the icing on the cake.

The news is even better on the legal front, where Trump is racking up a string of victories in cases stemming from the January 6 Capitol Hill insurrection, his possession of thousands of classified documents, his efforts to tamper with election results in Georgia, and attempts by Colorado and other states to bar him from the ballot on the grounds that he has been caught red-handed in the act of insurrection.

To be sure, Trump is facing yet another trial over \$130,000 in hush money that his lawyer, Michael Cohen, paid to porn star Stormy Daniels in the final days of the 2016 presidential campaign. But the case, which is scheduled to begin on March 25, is hardly more than a buzzing mosquito at this point, because it involves charges that even inveterate Trump haters regard as weak.

The reason is that Alvin Bragg, the Manhattan district attorney (DA), is out to prove not only that the payoff was embarrassing, unseemly, tawdry, etc, but a secret campaign contribution in violation of the law. The problem is that he is accusing Trump of violating state election law, even though he was running for federal office at the time - and even though the federal government's own election commission decided that the case was such a stretch that it was not worth pursuing back in 2021.

Why would a local DA take on a federal case that the feds rejected? All we know is that Bragg, who ran for DA on a get-Trump platform, is under intense pressure to do something - anything - to bring the big man down. So, if a flimsy far-fetched case is the best he can come up with, it will have to do. Still, it is a last-ditch effort to hold together a Democratic legal offensive that is coming apart at the seams.

Legal wars

America's legal wars are increasingly complex, so it is necessary to run through the cases one by one.

- First up is the Supreme Court's epic decision on March 4 to strike down Colorado's bid to remove Trump from the ballot. Colorado's reasoning seemed simple enough. Section three of the 14th amendment, adopted in



Last time: will there be a second time?

1868, says that no-one may occupy "any office, civil or military", if he has "engaged in insurrection or rebellion". Since January 6 was plainly aimed at overturning a presidential election, then rebellion is precisely what Trump was up to. Hence, he is ineligible to run a second time around.

"All vice-president Pence has to do is send back to the states to recertify and we become president and you are the happiest people," Trump told a rightwing mob shortly before sending it rampaging through Congress. A coup d'état, the first in US history, is thus plainly what he had in mind.

But there are problems. One involves the failure of the US Senate to convict Trump in his impeachment trial five or six weeks after the uprising. While 57 senators voted in favour, that was 10 votes shy of the two-thirds majority required under another section of the US constitution - article I, section three. The Senate is corrupt and unrepresentative in the extreme, so it is not surprising that it failed to uphold democracy. But the effect was to place Trump in legal limbo. He may look like an insurrectionist and sound like an insurrectionist, but acquittal means that he lacks the official stamp.

Another problem concerns political retaliation. If liberals had got away with removing Trump in Colorado, then conservatives would undoubtedly have struck back by removing Biden in Texas and other states. If payback had spread, the race would have devolved from a two-man contest to a series of single-party elections in the separate states.

Democrats - the party of federal authority über alles - were thus championing the ability of individual states to effectively cancel a national election. The decision by the Supreme Court's three remaining liberals to make the anti-Colorado decision unanimous shows the madness of the approach. The gods first make crazy whom they then set out to destroy.

On the other hand, the fact that the court is disregarding a major Reconstruction Era reform has dangerous implications of its own.

With Texas insisting on its right to make its own foreign policy in the ongoing border standoff, it is a sign of how the Old Confederacy is beginning to re-emerge, as if the Civil War had never taken place. With Trump egging Texas on and liberals trying to undermine the election, US democracy is a candle burning at both ends. Neo-Confederates are having a field day, while liberals are lost.

- Trump's second legal victory concerns the Democratic goal of putting him on trial before the presidential campaign hits high gear this summer. With polls showing that Americans are reluctant to vote for a convicted felon, the hope was that legal defeat would lead to political defeat, which would banish the Trump threat once and for all. How Trump was supposed to bounce back and forth between campaign events and three or four criminal trials was left unexplained. Equally unknown was how he would not emerge from the ordeal as even more of a rightwing martyr than he already is. Not only were Democrats determined to follow through, however, but the bourgeois-liberal concept of the rule of law, which grants judicial bodies a high degree of autonomy, ensured that the process would proceed on automatic pilot.

But now it is crashing. In the January 6 trial in Washington, the breakthrough occurred when 'the Supremes' announced on February 28 that they would consider Trump's claim that the doctrine of presidential immunity renders the case inoperative, because he cannot be held liable for acts committed while in office. Democrats regard the argument as Kafkaesque, since it means that Trump is exempt from prosecution by virtue of heading up the government that he was simultaneously trying to overthrow.

They are right, of course. But they would be on stronger ground if the Senate had voted to convict in 2021. Not only is Trump betwixt and between as an apparent, but not quite, insurrectionist, but his actions on January 6 are similarly ambiguous.

The immunity question is more complicated than Democrats want us to believe.

Besides, US presidents commit illegal acts all the time. The constitution, for instance, places the power "to declare war" squarely in the hands of Congress. But that did not stop Thomas Jefferson from going to war against the Barbary pirates in 1803 without congressional authorisation, or subsequent presidents doing the same ever since. Bill Clinton bombed a Sudanese pharmaceutical factory in 1998 for reasons that Washington subsequently admitted were untrue. George W Bush invaded Iraq on equally false pretences. Barack Obama held regular 'Terror Tuesday' meetings to decide which US enemy to drone next, all without a formal declaration of war.² Yet none suffered legal consequences. So why should Trump?

In any event, the Supreme Court's decision to schedule oral arguments in late April means that a trial is unlikely before late June at the earliest, even if it decides Trump is wrong from top to bottom. Since that is when the presidential campaign goes into high gear, the real news is that it is unlikely to take place until after November. And if Trump becomes president, it will not take place at all, since a Trump-run department of justice is sure to quash it in an instant.

- Then there is the federal case in Florida, in which Trump is accused of making off with boxes full of classified federal documents that he then stored in various nooks and crannies at his Mar-a-Lago mansion in Palm Springs, Florida. Jack Smith, the prosecutor in that case as well, is also pushing for a quick trial. But a federal district judge named Aileen Cannon threw a roadblock in the way on March 4 by ruling that Trump's legal team needs more time to comb through thousands of files to prove that the "intelligence community" is out to get him.

This is also Kafkaesque, according to Democrats, since it means that an apparent insurrectionist will be able to review thousands of classified files to show he was justified in making off

with thousands more. But, considering how the 'Deep State' leaked like a sieve in order to feed Russiagate hysteria in 2017-19, Trump's belief that the FBI, CIA and other agencies are biased is hardly unjustified. At any rate, the result is likely to be extensive wrangling that pushes the classified documents trial into summer, fall or beyond. And, if Trump is elected, it will also be a dead letter. A Trump justice department will see zero point in going after the president for illegal possession of classified documents that he now controls in full.

- Finally, there is Georgia. This is where Trump telephoned Brad Raffensperger, a Republican who is the state's top election official, four days prior to the January 6 insurrection to plead with him to rustle up more votes, so he could say he carried the state after all.

"What I want to do is this," Trump said. "I just want to find 11,780 votes, which is one more than we have, because we won the state." Since he lost Georgia in fact by 11,799, that would have been just enough to put him over the edge. The election-tampering charge could not be stronger - except that it is now crumbling, because an elected Democratic prosecutor named Fani Willis turns out to have hired her boyfriend (a local attorney named Nathan Wade) to work on it. Willis paid Wade more than \$650,000 in public money - which he then used to treat her to vacations in California wine country and the Caribbean.

It looks like a classic kickback. Since Willis is so far unable to come up with documentary evidence backing up her claims that she reimbursed Wade in full, it looks like the state will have no choice but to find a replacement - a process that could take years.³ The bottom line is that the Georgia trial will not happen any time soon.

Backfiring

So Trump will likely escape prosecution, as the Democratic offensive collapses across the board. Not only is the Democratic strategy proving ineffective, but it is actually backfiring by earning Trump sympathy points and making Dems look like liberal elitists out to short-circuit the election before Americans get a chance to vote.

"People are trumping up everything they can on him," a Republican retiree in northern Illinois complained to *The New York Times*. "You can't take away people's choice," another Trump supporter said. Even Democrats agree. "Voting is the way," one told the *Times* in Illinois. "I think we should vote and vote him out. That's the way to do it, not ban state by state."⁴

They are correct. So what do ordinary Americans know that high-ranking Democratic strategists don't? Everything the party does seems to strengthen Trump and bring him closer to his goal. If that is not the intention, it is certainly the result ●

Notes

1. www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/03/03/us/elections/times-siena-poll-registered-voter-crosstabs.html
2. See 'Attacks at every level' *Weekly Worker* February 22: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1479/attacks-at-every-level.
3. www.forbes.com/sites/alisondurkee/2024/02/16/will-fani-willis-be-disqualified-heres-what-would-happen-next-if-shes-removed.
4. www.nytimes.com/2024/03/04/us/politics/trump-ballot-super-tuesday-election.html.

CU

Inspiring debate

Given the awful events in Gaza, Ukraine and the threat of wider bloody conflicts, the CPGB's Spring 2024 Communist University was fittingly titled 'Their wars and ours'. **Homayoun Kamran** reports

All wars create unpredictable conditions with effects far beyond the borders of those directly involved in the conflict. However, in my memory, nothing compares with the current war in Gaza.

At least 30,000 civilians have been killed; the Pentagon puts the number of Palestinian women and children killed since October 8 at 25,000 in what can only be described as ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians, aided and abetted by western powers. Children are dying from starvation in north Gaza and aid agencies predict mass starvation in Rafah. In the midst of all this, in the UK we are supposed to feel sorry for politicians (Tory and Labour) who face protests because they support Israel's genocidal policies. Ministers, members of the shadow cabinet, MPs and the media seem more concerned about the threat posed by a few hundred protestors outside the constituency office or the home of a politician (targeted because he or she supports Israel's ethnic cleansing) than the genocide unfolding in the Middle East.

We have marched, there have been vigils, walkouts and mini-occupations. The level of support for the London demonstrations has been huge. There are more people than ever demanding a ceasefire, but in the midst of all this we need to educate ourselves about the background to the current war, the history of colonialism and imperialism in the region, facts about regional players and their 'proxies'. Instead of looking for simple, pacifistic 'humanitarian' solutions, we need to arm ourselves with serious rather than imaginary solutions.

It was against this background that the CPGB's Communist University Spring 2024 was held last weekend. There were five sessions where comrades could question the narratives that perpetuate this war, dismiss the bias often based on false information put forward by the media, and question bourgeois 'solutions' to the current conflict. The talks and subsequent discussions gave a unique opportunity to examine the history of the conflict, as well as the realities of war and its far-reaching consequences.

Bolsheviks

The opening session was Marc Mulholland's talk under the title, 'Marxism and revolutionary defeatism'. Comrade Mulholland explained that a better framing would be on Marxism and war, international relations and international boundaries. Marx and Engels, he argued, generally took sides in wars; usually the anti-Russian side. Equally, they did not argue for a general right of self-determination of nations, but stood for Irish and Polish independence, and in 1848 rejected Slavic independence movements.

The parties of the Second International, he said, generally took for granted existing state boundaries whether national, sub-national or multinational. They recognised that states have a right of self-defence; but the 1907 Stuttgart International congress resolution played this down in favour of anti-war agitation. Only the anarchists pointed out that pre-war manoeuvres make it hard to distinguish who is the aggressor in any war. This turned out to be an acute problem in 1914.



Vasily Vereshchagin 'The apotheosis of war' 1871

Comrade Mulholland said that Lenin had argued that imperialism, being the last stage of capitalism, meant that both national self-defence and regular parliamentary politics were a thing of the past; it led him to shift from the "strategy of attrition" to a "strategy of overthrow". But there was a contradiction in his position, in that, while he rejected wars of national self-defence, he favoured a general principle of self-determination of nations, in contrast to the Bukharin-Pyatakoff tendency among the Bolsheviks.

Though Lenin wrote extensive theory to justify his arguments, it was always hand in hand with the exigencies of Russian politics, where the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party did not propose a "strategy of attrition", but stood for an immediate overthrow of the tsarist regime - whether in alliance with the bourgeoisie (the Mensheviks' policy) or with the peasantry (Bolsheviks). Self-determination of nations looked like a way of breaking up the tsarist regime; once it had been overthrown, the national movements disappeared from Bolshevik strategy, and Poland and Georgia were invaded.

The parties of the Second International more generally, comrade Mulholland argued, were closer to the ideas of the Austro-Marxists Karl Renner and Otto Bauer - trying to find ways of coexistence of nations within the existing states. This reflected the predominantly petty-bourgeois character of the nationalist movements. On the other hand, some leftists tried to ally nationalism and socialism - thus Joseph Pilsudski and James Connolly; whereas on the other hand Rosa Luxemburg offered both good and bad arguments against the idea of Polish independence.

Defeatism, comrade Mulholland said, was broadly the common position of the whole Russian opposition in 1904 and 1916 - even of the liberals. After the February revolution there was a turn to national defence and even the Bolsheviks used arguments blaming the Provisional government for failure to defend Petersburg, and proposed unilateral negotiations (but with a fallback of revolutionary war if they failed). Lenin's arguments for the Brest-Litovsk treaty - that it would provide a breathing space - were unsound, he claimed: the effect was to trigger civil war immediately.

Meanwhile, however, the right of nations to self-determination became a general fetish, by way of Woodrow Wilson's 'Fourteen principles' - which actually only applied to Germany and Austria. Comrade Mulholland offered fairly extensive objections to the workers' movement treating it as a principle; better to fight for iterative processes of democratic

negotiation to address conflicts of cultural claims, but also to be very cautious about forms of irredentism - whether states reclaiming territory, or minority groups with imperialist backing claiming the right to secede. At the same time, however, he argued that voting for the military budget is a form of support for the government, and socialists should not do it.

This dense presentation, raising a large number of important political issues, gave rise to a lively discussion, ranging from the ideas of Comintern to modern national questions. It started the weekend off very well.

War and the west

In the second session, Yassamine Mather explained the passive response of the Axis of Resistance, led by Iran's Islamic Republic, and its complicated relationship with Hamas. She pointed to the absence of any protests in Iran, and the current situation of Hezbollah as a coalition partner in the Lebanese government, which is far more concerned about economic stability in that country. Comrade Mather talked about the changing nature of this organisation from the days it represented the poor in south Lebanon to today, when it advocates privatisation and neoliberal economic policies with supporters amongst capitalists in Beirut and elsewhere in Lebanon. She dismissed the simplistic notion that Hezbollah is just Iran's proxy and also explained the rise of the Houthis in Yemen, their situation prior to October 7, and the fact that, far from being Iran's proxies, they have by all accounts dismissed Iran's repeated requests to end attacks on shipping in the Bab-Al-Mandab Strait.

Moshé Machover's talk was entitled 'Two-state, one-state delusions', and he took up the theme he has spoken about on a number of occasions in recent weeks. When it comes to the 'two-state solution' proposed by the US and its allies (as well as China, Russia and the Middle Eastern states), he is absolutely right to compare this to "people negotiating over how to divide a pizza, while one of them is actually eating part of it as they discuss it."

Comrade Machover clearly has little time for those who advocate a 'two-state solution', considering them as misguided, misinformed or ill-intentioned. He added that, when it comes to a unitary, democratic state encompassing both sides of the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, he does not deem this concept inherently harmful, but considers its current feasibility to be highly unlikely.

He drew attention to the fact that Israeli colonisation is very different in its political economy from the South African one and that the majority of the Israeli Jewish working class has nothing to gain by overthrowing a Zionist regime under a capitalistic economic order. He therefore suggests that the Zionist regime can only be overthrown in a situation where the Hebrew working class in Israel ends its current position as a (relatively privileged) exploited class within a dominant nation to be part of a ruling class without national privileges.

In the next session, Mike Macnair gave a comprehensive history of colonial exploitation in the Middle East, outlining the ways in which the major powers succeeded in outmanoeuvring potential rivals. He

spoke of the significance of the region, when it came to British imperialism's defence of India and the regional role of the East India Company.

He also referred to an argument he has put forward before: that imperialism is essentially an extension of capitalist principles. His main argument revolved around the compelling forces that drove historical entities like the Venetians and the Genoese, alongside the Portuguese, towards territorial colonialism and the establishment of imperialist regimes. According to comrade Macnair, these imperatives mark the genesis of European imperialism and are inherently rooted in the dynamics of capitalism. The essence lies in the imperatives spurred by industrial capitalism on a large scale, necessitating a form of competition that paradoxically undermines competition itself.

Additionally, capitalism's dependence on credit money, which in turn relies on state intervention, fosters a system where states discriminate against one another, as well as their citizens, in pursuit of mercantilist goals. Hence, every state, in reality, operates within a mercantilist framework, despite claims to the contrary.

Fascinating

Finally Jack Conrad gave a historic view of the human attitude towards war. He referred to Steven Pinker's book, *The better angels of our nature: why violence has declined*, where it is argued that violence has significantly decreased over time. As a "bourgeois optimist", Pinker focuses on more recent history, discounting the ancient past up to the Neolithic era, some 12,000 years ago. He asserts that modern society has seen a notable decline in violence, compared to earlier periods.

However, critics argue that Pinker's exclusion of the ancient past from his analysis sinks his thesis, as evidence suggests that prehistoric societies were noticeably peaceful, with systematic violence, ie, war, only emerging with the decay of original communism and the onset of the Neolithic period. He went on to describe the Neolithic as a counterrevolution, not least because we witnessed the defeat of the female sex, the emergence of states and the development of professional armed bodies of men. In hunter-gatherer societies, all male adults are armed for hunting, but in class-based societies, specialised armed groups arose, particularly the warrior class. This class had a distinct societal function beyond defence; they were trained in the arts of war from a young age to protect society's resources, especially with the transition to agriculture, when there was the constant risk of external raids. However, these armed groups often evolved into a parasitic class, living off the labour of others.

This was a fascinating session, and hopefully we will have an article based on this talk in a coming issue of the *Weekly Worker*. Similarly, all the other sessions were also very interesting and, while the live attendance was not great, the online videos and podcasts of the event have already attracted hundreds of viewers and listeners ●

CU videos can be watched at:
www.youtube.com/c/communistpartyofgreatbritain.

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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Courtship by mega-donors

Tories are still capitalism's preferred party of government, but Labour's commanding poll lead helps explain why so many of the filthy rich are shifting their loyalties, writes **Eddie Ford**

Another damning poll suggests that the Tory Party is on course for a historic drubbing. This time it is an Ipsos poll taken between February 21 and 28, exploring public attitudes to the main parties and their leaders in the run-up to the next general election.¹ The Conservatives' share of 20% is the lowest ever recorded by the polling group since its regular political monitor series began in 1978, with Labour on 47% - meaning Labour's lead is 27 points (up from 22 in January).

In more bad news for the Tories, only 62% of their supporters say they are certain to vote, as opposed to 76% of Labour voters. Meanwhile, an extremely large 83% of those who responded are 'dissatisfied' with the way the government is running the country (up five points from January), compared to 10% for the 'satisfied' (down three points). As for Rishi Sunak's net approval rating, it is at a record low of -54, whilst Sir Keir Starmer's net score of -26 is only slightly above his lowest finding of -29 in May 2021. In other words, the UK population are not very keen on either of them, which is more than understandable.

When Ipsos asked which issues are likely to be the most important when deciding how to vote, for Labour voters it was the NHS, but for Conservatives the top issues are immigration and the economy. Perhaps most alarmingly of all for the Tories, given that historically they have always had a lead over Labour when it comes to 'economic credibility' - mainly thanks to press bias, of course - Labour is now seen as having the best policies on managing the economy by a margin of 31% to the Conservative score of 23%. Possibly the icing on the cake for Labour, the British public think that shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves would make the most capable chancellor by a margin of 39% to 24% - up from a 12-point lead in October and June last year.

If you are to believe Ipsos - and there is no particular reason not to, as nearly all the polls have had more or less the same results for some time now (just not quite so bad for the Tories) - then it looks almost impossible to turn the situation around. Certainly Jeremy Hunt's 'giveaway' budget will not do it. Indeed, barring an exceptional set of events, things look set to get worse for the Conservative Party, with the economy going nowhere and the international situation looking highly unfavourable - an Israeli genocide of the Gaza people, for instance, would hardly improve its poll ratings. Some commentators, such as John Rentoul, are writing about the Tories having just 25 seats left after the general election in a 1993-style Canada wipeout.

Labour's commanding lead in the polls helps to explain why sections of big business and the City are engaged in an ardent courtship of Sir Keir and his front bench. No-one believes that the Tories will win the next election, hence the swarm of lobbyists,



Viktor Deni 'Kapital' 1919

business paid researchers, social meet-ups, consultancy services ... and cash donations. Last year Labour took more money from private individuals and business than trade unions - a considerable victory for Lord Peter Mandelson and his Global Counsel lobbying firm. After all, we cannot have Labour reliant on "hard-left trade unions".

Despondent

However, showing that the Tories are still the capitalist class's preferred party of government, money is still flowing into the coffers of Conservative Campaign Headquarters: there is a solid Tory base amongst hedge fund managers, bankers, CEOs and the filthy rich. However, they fear, they know, the Tories are set to lose big time in 2024.

Hence the despondent, fatalistic mood found amongst the mega-donors and supporters, who last week gathered for the invitation-only Tory Winter Ball at Whitehall's former war office-turned-luxury hotel: Raffles London - where the cheapest rooms cost over £1,000. Gallows humour about the Conservatives can be found in abundance within the City (traditionally a party stronghold, of course). Hours before the event kicked off, it is reported that a senior banker asked why anybody who is not still a big donor would even bother attending. Came the reply: "It's the last party on the Titanic" - so why not have a blast, while you still can?"

As for the annual ball - compered by the avuncular Gyles Brandreth, former Tory MP and long-time broadcaster - it is a staple in the party's fundraising calendar that was attended

by prominent donors. They included the billionaire entrepreneur, Bassim Haidar, who arrived in a personalised Rolls-Royce and owns a fleet of yachts, telling *Boat International* magazine in December that his lifestyle at one point resembled the 2013 film, *The Wolf of Wall Street*. On the night, an unnamed Conservative donor paid £25,000 for an exclusive, multi-course Japanese dinner for themselves and three other people with Jeremy Hunt. The prize was one of five multi-thousand-pound lots auctioned during the event. Other wealthy donors spotted included Lubov Chernukhin, a banker married to Vladimir Putin's former deputy finance minister who has donated millions. She had previously bid tens of thousands of pounds to play tennis with Boris Johnson - though we do not know who won. Then there was Mohamed Mansour, the billionaire businessman and former Egyptian transport minister, and Henry Angest, the Swiss-born British banker.

The ball raised more than £200,000 for the party, which brought in just under £16 million in donations in the third quarter of last year, three times as much as Labour - evidence of the Conservatives' continued ability to attract significant donations despite the massive gulf between them and Labour in the polls. For example, John Sainsbury (aka Baron Sainsbury of Preston Candover) left them a record donation of £10 million in his will.

But things are changing, as the number of mega-donors becomes smaller. Tory insiders are well aware they can no longer count on the City in the way they once did - old tribal loyalties are no longer working. During the 2015 election

campaign, ex-party chair Andrew Feldman convinced more than 100 senior executives from companies employing more than half a million people to endorse Conservative economic policies in an open letter. However, at a recent dinner attended by Rachel Reeves and other Labour dignitaries, Feldman was heard saying that there "wouldn't be the same letter campaign from businesses this election" - it would be impossible to play the same trick now.

Summing it up, Charlie Mullins - a former donor and millionaire Pimlico Plumbers' founder, who stopped donating to the party after Brexit - has stated that "all the money in the world won't boost the Tories' election chances". In fact, all the wealthy people he knows "are buying Swiss francs, not giving it to the Conservatives" - a tarnished brand that is in danger of sinking below the water line.

New friends

While the Tories are losing friends in the City, Labour is gaining them, as Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves make a serious pitch as *the* pro-business party. According to Open Democracy, bankers and finance companies have handed Labour £2 million since 2022, on top of that donated by wealthy individuals - such as the other Sainsbury, David, and cousin to John, one of the biggest private financial backers of Labour, along with his philanthropist daughter, Fran Perrin, a former advisor to Tony Blair. Other one million-plus donors include the South African-born ex-Autoglass chief, Gary Lubner, and Dale Vince, founder of Ecotricity - who has an

estimated fortune of £100 million and has given money to both Just Stop Oil and Extinction Rebellion. These are Labour's very own mega-donors.

There is also a growing number of former Tory donors who have switched to Labour - like fund manager Kasim Kutay, who runs life sciences investor Novo Holdings; and entrepreneur and investor Gareth Quarry, who has described the Tories as unelectable. The boss of the Iceland supermarket chain, Richard Walker, has also switched his allegiance, while billionaire property tycoon Nick Candy, who donated to the Conservatives under Boris Johnson, suggested last month that he could support Labour at the next election: "Maybe it's time for some change," he said.

Robin MacGeachy is the owner of Peak Scientific, a world leader in gas generators, which formerly donated to the Tories but has now turned its attention to Scottish Labour. You could also mention Stuart Roden - best known for his time as chair of Lansdowne Partners, who has given £180,000 to the party this year - and Grant Mansfield, founder of the TV production company, Plimsoll, who handed over £50,000 earlier this year. Then we have Sir Victor Blank, former chair of Lloyds TSB, giving £175,000 since 2020, much of which was used to fund staff for Rachel Reeves - clearly anticipating the future. There will be plenty of others beating a path to the party's door, as the election gets nearer, no doubt eager to be associated with the winning team.

In return, Starmer has promised "friendship", saying he wanted to work alongside business leaders to rebuild Britain - "Your fingerprints are on every one of our national missions," he declared recently. Reeves is offering some assurances to business by pledging not to raise corporation tax above 25% in the first term of a Labour government, and to retain the "full expensing" regime that rewards companies with a tax break when they invest in new plant and technology. She also upset people by saying that a Labour government will not re-impose a cap on bankers' bonuses despite the fact that not so long ago she was attacking the Tories for scrapping it - but what matters above all is "fiscal responsibility", so it had to go.

As Reeves explained, "This Labour Party sees profit not as something to be disdained, but as a mark of business." Labour's big business donors can certainly rest assured that their contributions are good investments in the future ●

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Notes

1. ipsos.com/en-uk/labour-lead-economy-and-public-services-conservative-share-falls-record-low.
2. www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2024/03/02/labour-sweep-city-of-london-as-conservatives-tories-panic.