

weekly **worker**



Notes on the war: Zelensky is on the back foot when it comes to artillery shells, men and trenches

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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Israel's war on Gaza has reached new depths of depravity - but it won't stop there

LETTERS



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

Good-natured RCP

A membership of tens of thousands may seem feasible in the short term, but Mike Macnair has sounded a good note of caution about the plans of the Revolutionary Communist Party ('Repeating past failures' March 28).

Looking at the bigger picture, comrade Macnair mentions the US "containment of communism" strategy in post-war Europe. What if this happens again? Perhaps a new cold war, combined with ecological concerns, will result in a turn to "climate socialism", as it has been termed in these pages. It would be the path to sustained membership growth into the tens of thousands for a party without open factions, recreating the dynamic which existed between the CPGB and Labour during the cold war.

This would be another way that a past failure is repeated. But isn't there often a secret hope on the left that the bourgeoisie will again make major concessions, allowing the reformists to advance ahead of us and demonstrate the limits of reformism in government? Perhaps this is an expectation of the authors of the RCP's theses, even as they rule out the possibility of a revived reformism.

Although its model might not be different to that of the Workers Revolutionary Party, Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party in England and Wales in the *form* of organisation at its launch, should we be cautious about assuming a similar trajectory for the RCP, given the *content* - those comrades who have been drawn to the RCP already? The power is in their hands and, as Lawrence Parker has recently observed on his blog, the active members are "generally open to other leftists on an individual basis. There is a seemingly genuine effort to involve people of a more critical bent in meetings and the [International Marxist Tendency] is inviting non-IMT comrades to the founding conference."

This sense of openness was exemplified by the generally good-natured response from IMT members to the front page of the *Weekly Worker* edition carrying the first of comrade Macnair's recent pieces on the RCP, featuring a photograph in which *The Communist* was prominently displayed.

What we are dealing with is not a hardened confessional sect, which imagines itself to only be going directly to the masses, but an organisation whose cadre are used to engaging with an out-group of individual and organised communists. So the barriers to growth may not be a lack of accuracy in RCP perspectives documents, but rather the rules of its constitution and its programmatic method.

Without the constitutional right to form open factions and contest elected leadership positions, its members will, at worst, be at risk of the problems with abuse of power which ruined the WRP and nearly did the same to the SWP. At best, they will be hit by periodic and unproductive splits if such rules are adopted.

The RCP would be premature if it were to expect, in the next few

years at least, to gain communist representation in parliament, but it cannot neglect this aspect of the class struggle out of a fear of failure. To convince reform-minded workers that revolution does not equal a party-state, and even that revolutionaries want Labour to succeed in the unlikely event of its left leading it again, both the concept of an enabling act to nationalise the monopolies and the demand for a constituent assembly to create a democratic workers' republic remain essential. Even without giving immediate priority to electoral work, a revolutionary party needs a programme with democratic demands.

Ansell Eade
email

Welcome RCP

Mike Macnair's two pieces on the launch of the RCP amount to a declaration of revolutionary pessimism ('Delusions of "official optimism"', March 21; and 'Repeating past failures', March 28).

As a former Workers Revolutionary Party member for 10 years (1976-86), I recognise some of the criticisms as correct - like those I made myself after the expulsion of Gerry Healy in 1985. But I have endeavoured not to throw the baby out with the bathwater, not to reject the revolutionary optimism of the Russian Revolution, of the Bolsheviks of Lenin, Trotsky and consistent Trotskyists up to today,

despite the degeneration of many currents bearing the name.

Let us declare our continued allegiance to Trotsky's transitional programme (TP) of 1938 and reject the pessimists who complain that history did not turn out as Trotsky predicted. As the opening lines of that document, 'The death agony of capitalism and the tasks of the Fourth International', say, "The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat. The economic prerequisite for the proletarian revolution has already in general achieved the highest point of fruition that can be reached under capitalism ... Growing unemployment, in its turn, deepens the financial crisis of the state and undermines the unstable monetary systems. Democratic regimes, as well as fascist, stagger on from one bankruptcy to another."

If Alan Woods and Rob Sewell have now rejected clause four Fabianism and adopted more openly the perspectives of the TP, then that is an entirely progressive thing, and we must welcome it. We should point out that Trotsky was not predicting the future as such in the TP, but outlining a political programme that revolutionary socialists - genuine communists - must adopt to give a lead to the vanguard of the working class, the most militant defenders of the proletariat, to make the socialist revolution.

Stalinism's popular fronts saw

close cooperation alternately with western imperialism, then with Hitler, until he betrayed Stalin in June 1941 in Operation Barbarossa, forcing him back to the west. The popular-front rejection of revolutionary perspectives in order to 'defeat fascism' in alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie, the clergy, etc betrayed revolutionary situations in Spain before the war and in Italy, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Greece and Vietnam in the latter days of the war and the early post-war period. Stalinist leaders who defended that counterrevolutionary orientation were not communists at all, despite the revolutionary motivation of many members in the ranks.

So I welcome the left turn of *The Communist*/RCP. They are right about the revolutionary potential of the coming period, when inequality within and between nations, between the billionaires and the working class and oppressed, was never greater. Fascism threatens in the US, Italy and many other imperialist countries; Israel now has a fascist government, even if the state itself has not yet become fully fascist.

Welcoming the left turn to youth and college students in particular does not mean we have abandoned our historical criticisms of the Ted Grant tradition. Adopting a left version of the Stalinist *British road to socialism* via an enabling act through parliament was a rejection of the TP, now

implicitly acknowledged in the turn. Likewise, the acceptance of concessions from Margaret Thatcher to avoid a joint struggle with the miners in June 1984 was wrong, as was the threat to 'name names', when it came to the anarchists in the Trafalgar Square poll tax riot of 1990, by Steve Nally after Tommy Sheridan utterly condemned the rioters. The Socialist Workers Party, the WRP (both sides) and most others took the far more principled stance of defence of the rioters and the anger which produced that and other riots at the time.

The RCP needs to acknowledge these mistakes if it is to become that new revolutionary force it claims and aspires to be. And to adopt a principled approach to all united front actions and campaigns which would reject the traditional bureaucratic-centralist regimes of Gerry Healy, Ted Grant and Tony Cliff and adopt a democratic-centralist regime like the "seething internal democracy", which Trotsky in *The revolution betrayed* said the Bolsheviks had. The CPGB/*Weekly Worker* are correct in their criticism of that.

Gerry Downing
Socialist Fight

Greens RCP

I would like to comment on the articles by Mike Macnair on Socialist Appeal and Carla Roberts on Owen Jones ('We deserve better') in last week's *Weekly Worker*.

Mike criticises Socialist Appeal's perspective of an imminent revolutionary situation. Carla criticises Owen Jones for calling for a vote for the Green Party and independents in future elections, including mayoral contests and the general election.

Reform UK is a split in the British ruling class as part of the split in the Tory Party. A split in the ruling class is one of Lenin's four conditions for revolution. The second condition is that the middle class are wavering and the third is that the working class are ready to fight. The fourth is the presence of a revolutionary party.

The embryo of such a party are the communists and their new Revolutionary Communist Party. Mike's analogy with the formation of the SWP and the WRP is simply wrong. Socialist Appeal were correct in 2010 to make a turn to students, especially with 50% of school and college leavers now going on to university. Similarly, Socialist Appeal is correct to make a turn to communism, given the radicalisation of young people following the defeat of Corbynism - together with the radicalism of the public in general, following the Israeli state genocide in Gaza.

In the meantime, I have rejoined the Green Party, who could get four MPs in the coming general election. The Greens are the only mainstream political party that stands for a wealth tax on the rich to fund the NHS and public services. Unfortunately the Labour Party, including Rachel Reeves and David Lammy, oppose a wealth tax.

John Smithee
Green Party member

Fairness wanting

I think the game at the moment is to downplay what the Israeli Defence Forces are doing and exaggerate what Hamas and cohorts did on October 7. Those criticising Israel are labelled 'anti-Semites' and that's enough to silence a lot

Lifelong friend and comrade

Tom Kilburn, August 25 1946 - March 17 2024

It is with indescribable loss and a feeling of utter wretchedness that I announce the death of my dearest friend and comrade of 62 years, Tom Kilburn - always known (for some reason, now lost in the foolishness of youth) as 'Black Tom'.

I first met him when I was searching for answers in the turbulence of the 1960s as a fresh-faced youth of 14. Tom was slightly older and already was fluid in the Marxist-Leninist twang, which I thought was the source of all wisdom. I had found him in the musty People's Bookshop in Newcastle and he was already an experienced member of the Young Communist League, which I was keen to join. He was a real proletarian - an apprentice fitter-turner in the giant arms manufacturer that took up so much of the higher reaches of the Tyne. He sometimes came to communist meetings in his boiler suit and donkey jacket, smelling of diesel.

Later through the whirlpool of argument, postures, and the clash of identity and titles we parted political company - he veered off to Trotskyism, while I adopted anarchism - although we never abandoned our social relationship and the same circle of friends.

Tom's impact on the youth scene was powerful and unlikely - as a youth of deeply serious views, he struck an imposing intellectual presence. This was a time when argument art, music and science were aspired to - even among your average beat, or mod (or in Tom's case sheik scruff). He struck the posture of a well-read, witty eccentric - something readily accepted among the youth movement which dominated the town.

Tom was from the Gateshead Jewish community and probably single-handedly infused the Geordie dialect with Jewish expressions such as *schnorrer* (beggar) and *meshuga* (crazy). He was something of an expert on Jewish religion and little-known points of theory - so much so in fact that, when the mood took him, he would let his sideburns and hair grow down over his distinctive Jewish features purely to engage in arguments with random rabbis in the circle of Jewish men in the town. While arguing the toss over this or that, he was, of course, an implacable atheist.

Tom was enthralled for a decade and more by J Posadas and the International Bureau of the Fourth International - as was I. Indeed I was to become a member of the central committee of the Posadist Revolutionary Workers Party, while Tom gorged on Posadas's theories and speculations. I eventually led a split from the RWP of its northern branches and later returned to anarchism, but Tom remained within 'the party' until he found the monolithic centralism too much to stand, although he never strayed too far from the general thrust of Trotskyism. He damned the "infantilism" of my anarchism, my non-materialistic drift to Buddhism and my eternal damn optimism. Tom not only bought into the 'human catastrophe' of climate change: he believed we bloody well deserved it!

Tom spent his last years in Hull, where he had been the senior shop steward at the Birds Eye factory. And, strolling along to the shops one day, I was

regaled by people who not only knew him, but were grateful to him for having cut the hedge, walked the dog, got the shopping in, and generally for being a key person in the community.

Tom loved the outdoors - camping under the stars, walking for miles, at home looking outside at howling gales and blizzards. He loved the rugged coastline, the rocky crags, and had the spirit and endurance of an Arctic explorer. He also had the most rich and wonderful of folk voices. He was rich in the northern border traditions, in the Irish west coast traditions, in the industrial raw music of the Tyne pits and seamen's hearty shanties. His voice was deep and rich like the wind over the moors. He knew many of the famous folk stars of our lifetime - particularly Waterson Carthy and Ian Manuel, amongst many others.

I have not yet taken in that he is gone: how can a man who was such a useful and widely admired person, such a presence, ever be gone? Gone where? He was the wittiest, funniest, most intellectual, kind and generous man I have ever known. I am so proud to say he was my lifelong friend and the greatest comrade anyone could hope for. I will treasure the memory of his company forever.

I could say, 'Farewell, comrade - till we meet again!' But I'd hear his voice boom: 'Douglass, there's that bloody anti-materialistic, mystical nonsense again!'

So I'll just say goodbye: knowing you was a privilege - the best 62 years of our lives ●

David Douglass

of people - which is the tactic, anyway.

The UN security council resolution on Gaza is apparently non-binding - although I think I remember UN resolution 1441 against Iraq in 2002 being binding (yes, that's what I said - binding!), with the USA and the UK pushing for this resolution on Iraq, which they would later argue gave authorisation for their attack. So we have a resolution authorising a ceasefire in Gaza, which Israel can choose whether to comply with or not (with the backing of the USA). Compare this to 1441, which gave Iraq "a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations", but which went further than 'binding' and apparently authorised, in western minds anyway, the destruction of a country: ie, Iraq (the destruction of the moral compass of the UK and the USA may have occurred as well, if it had existed in any form post-World War II).

Add to this the fact that Israel has nuclear weapons, but won't admit to it and the western media is happy to sidestep the issue, acting as complicit partners in the charade. In April 1990, Saddam Hussein offered to destroy his chemical and biological weapons in return for Israel agreeing to destroy its weapons of mass destruction, including its nuclear weapons. The US state department refused the offer.

Saddam Hussein would later make the same appeals for the banning of all weapons of mass destruction in the region as part of a negotiated settlement for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait. The west, again, wasn't interested.

Just a few thoughts and instances which show that fairness in world affairs is wanting, legalities are subjective, democracy is limited, and global governance is one-sided.

Louis Shawcross
Co Down

Inside job

Tam Dean Burn, who says he met the late Israeli-Arab theatre director, Juliano Mer-Khamis, in Scotland in 2007, paid tribute to him in a recent article as

someone "who heroically turned his back on a successful Israeli film career to devote himself to the Palestinian cause through youth theatre" ('Promote a second front', March 28).

This is what he had to say about Mer-Khamis's murder in the Jenin refugee camp in 2011: "Whether he was killed by forces within the camp will probably never be known, as the Israeli authorities took away his car, laptop and other possessions."

Actually, we do know. Forces within the camp were almost certainly responsible. The likeliest suspects are Islamists offended by the daring material that Mer-Khamis's Freedom Theatre presented in a community in which Hamas and Islamic Jihad exercised greater and greater control. Mer-Khamis joked in 2008 that if he was ever killed it would be by a "fucked-up Palestinian" for "corrupting the youth of Islam". So it was no surprise that when the theatre announced it would put on *Spring awakening*, Frank Wedekind's 1906 drama about adolescent sexuality, anonymous leaflets appeared denouncing Mer-Khamis as a "communist, an atheist and a Jew" - his mother was Israeli Jewish, his father Palestinian Greek Orthodox - and warning that "we will be forced to speak in bullets" if the production was not halted (the theatre cancelled it forthwith).

To be sure, other theories have circulated to the effect that the Palestinian Authority wanted him out of the way, because it was unhappy with the way he had needled its officials in his plays. Or that maybe it was people on the PA periphery, or people feuding with the PA, or whatnot. Mer-Khamis had angered a lot of people and presumably had wound up on a lot of hit lists.

But one thing we can be reasonably sure of is that it was not forces outside the camp, which is to say the Israelis, who were responsible. As Adam Shatz said of Mer-Khamis in the 2013 *London Review of Books*, "... though he may have given his life to the Palestinian cause, he was not killed by an Israeli bullet. The man who

shot him was Palestinian, and probably from the camp: no-one else would have known how to navigate those streets, or how to disappear so quickly. The killing appeared to be a message from forces inside the camp.

"Juliano had spoken bluntly about the stifling effects of patriarchy, gender oppression and religious dogma; freedom, he argued, began with individual liberation, and without it freedom from occupation would mean nothing. This did not endear him to defenders of 'tradition'. Nor did the theatre's productions, in which teenage boys and girls appeared on stage together."

Abeer Baker - an Israeli-Arab human-rights attorney hired by Jenny Nyman, Mer-Khamis's wife - pushed the Israeli authorities to launch an investigation - something she would not likely have done if the family thought Mossad or some other Israeli agency was involved. Micaela Miranda, a Portuguese actress who worked with Mer-Khamis, thought the same. As she told Shatz, "I blame the camp. They know who killed Juliano, and they aren't saying."

Saying that the killer's identity "will probably never be known" is therefore a dodge, a roundabout way of saying we don't want to know because we're afraid of what it says about the nature of Palestinian bourgeois politics.

Elsewhere in his article, Burn says that the Communist Culture Club livestream, in which he presented his thoughts about the Palestinian "cultural intifada", was "frustrating", because it was loaded down with extraneous material. This included an extended political analysis of the movie *Dune 2* and a brief talk I gave about George Orwell at host Tina Werkmann's request. As Burn puts it, "I would have thought that the issue of a cultural intifada is a lot more important for Marxists right now than Daniel Lazare's thoughts on George Orwell."

Perhaps. But Orwell may be more relevant than he thinks. The author of *Homage to Catalonia* certainly had his faults, but dishonesty was not one of them. He would never have shaded the truth about the assassination of someone he claims to admire.

Daniel Lazare
New York

Assange MP?

As a Commonwealth citizen who is not serving a term of imprisonment in the United Kingdom or in the Republic of Ireland, Julian Assange is eligible to contest the Blackpool South by-election. He should do so, supported at the very least by the Alba Party and by the Workers Party of Britain - led, as those are, by two of his staunchest supporters - as well as by another such supporter: the independent MP for Islington North, Jeremy Corbyn.

Keir Starmer should live forever in infamy for his role in this affair, although it is a useful indication of what his government would be like. Labour is a party of extremely rightwing people, who lack the social connections to make it in the Conservative Party, and whose two defining experiences were being brought up to spit on everyone below them (which was everyone else where they grew up) and discovering in their first 36 hours at university that they were nowhere near the top of the class system - a discovery that embittered them for life.

David Lindsay
Durham

ACTION

Merchants of death walking tour

Saturday April 6, 2pm: Assemble outside 25 Victoria Street, London SW1. Discover the arms companies in our midst that have facilitated the obscene punishment on Gaza's civilian population. Registration free. Organised by Campaigns Against Arms Trade: caat.org.uk/events/london-caat-merchants-of-death-tour.

Clara Zetkin - socialist fighter

Tuesday April 9, 6.30pm: Online meeting. Clara Zetkin was a leading German communist thinker and organiser. She founded International Women's Day, opposed World War I and opened what became the last session of the Reichstag with a call for struggle against fascism. Presentations from John Riddell and Kate Connelly. Registration free. Organised by Arise - A Festival of Left Ideas: twitter.com/LabourOutlook/status/1773692969763123570.

The work and legacy of Raphael Samuel

Wednesday April 10, 6.30pm: Book event, Working Class Movement Library, 51 The Crescent, Salford M5. Editor John Merrick discusses the new collection of Raphael Samuel's work on 19th century Britain, *Workshop of the world: essays in people's history*. Tickets free.

Organised by Working Class Movement Library: www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=801671655334712.

Towards a theory of revolution

Thursday April 11, 7pm: Online session in the fortnightly 'ABC of Marxism' course, presented by Ian Spencer.

Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: www.whymarx.com/sessions.

The rentier city

Thursday April 11, 7pm: Online book event. Isaac Rose introduces his work, *The rentier city: Manchester and the making of the neoliberal metropolis*, and explains what can be learnt from property development, landlordism and housing struggle. Registration free.

Organised by Manchester rs21: www.rs21.org.uk/event/the-rentier-city.

Five demands to build a real alternative

Saturday April 13, 10am: Conference, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1. To discuss the challenges - and solutions - to the crises we face and how we build a real alternative. Speakers include Jeremy Corbyn and Fran Heathcote (PCS general secretary). Registration £11.50 (free). Organised by Peace and Justice Project: thecorbynproject.com/events.

Bargain books

Saturday April 13, 11am: Book sale, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Get your hands on Marxist classics, socialist histories and rare pamphlets.

Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/450.

Climate justice, climate jobs

Saturday April 13, 11am: Conference for trade unionists, Crowndale Centre, 220 Eversholt Street, London NW1. How to ensure the strength of the working class and trade union movement is at the heart of tackling the climate emergency. Registration £12 (£5). Organised by Campaign against Climate Change Trade Union Group: cacctu.org.uk/conference_2024.

What it means to be human

Tuesday April 16, 6.30pm: Talks on social and biological anthropology, Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street, off Gordon Square, London WC1, and online. This meeting: 'Did matriarchy ever exist?' Speaker: Chris Knight.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: radicalanthropologygroup.org/blog/did-matriarchy-ever-exist.

A celebration of Pat Arrowsmith (1930-2023)

Thursday April 18, 6pm: Public meeting, LSE Library, 10 Portugal Street, London WC2. A peace campaigner, an organiser of the first Aldermaston March in 1958 and an activist for Irish freedom. Speakers include Francie Molloy (Sinn Féin MP) and Lindsey German (Stop the War Coalition). Registration free.

50 years since the Portuguese Revolution

Thursday April 18, 6pm: Films, followed by discussion, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. *Caetano assassino* (Claude Moreira), *República* (Newsreel Collective) and *Viva Portugal* (Cinema Action). Presenters: Ana Naomi de Sousa (filmmaker and journalist) and Francisco Calafate Faria (Migrantes Unidos, South Bank University). Tickets £5 (£3).

Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/460.

Bristol radical history festival

Saturday April 20, 10am to 4.30pm: Free festival at M Shed, Wapping Road, Bristol BS1. Talks, walks, performances, exhibitions and stalls. Themes: Bristolians who went to fight for a better world; mental health and social care in Bristol; radical history: a DIY guide. Organised by Bristol Radical History Group: www.brh.org.uk/site/event-series/bristol-radical-history-festival-2024.

Palestine and the crisis of democracy

Sunday April 21, 12 noon to 5.30pm: Conference, SOAS University of London, 10 Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Huge numbers are resisting Israel's genocide in Gaza - on the streets and at the ballot box. Registration £15 (£5). Organised by Counterfire: www.facebook.com/events/1593061668160981.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

Fighting fund

Just a bit short

I'm sorry to say that we just failed to make our £2,250 fighting fund target for March - but, to be honest, we couldn't have got much closer. Our total for the month was an incredible £2,242!

In the final three days a very useful £146 came our way - thanks go to comrades LM (£80), TK (£30), MD and VP (£10 each) and DC (£6), who all made their donations by bank transfer or standing order. Plus we got a fiver each from CH (PayPal) and comrade Hassan (cash).

So now let's see if we can not only make up for that £8 deficit in March, but go shooting past the target in April. And, after just three days, things aren't looking too bad. Of course, the start of the month is when quite a few standing orders land in the *Weekly Worker* account, and that has been the case in April too.

The most substantial was comrade AC, who came up with his usual £100, while MM transferred £31 and BK, II, MW and SJ each chipped in with £20.

Then there was MD with £18, MT and BG (£15), TM (£13), MM (£11), as well as AN, CP, DI and YM, who all donated their usual tenner. One more SO came from comrade JS (£6), while MF topped things off with a more than useful £50 (PayPal).

All that means that we've already received £379, with exactly four weeks left to get the £1,871 we still need. Yes, we can do it all right, but I was optimistic last month too and we still fell just a bit short. So let's make up for it in April - give your support to the only paper that fights for a single, democratic, Marxist party, uniting the advanced part of the working class into a force capable of bringing about system change.

We can do it! ●

Robbie Rix

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

GAZA

Threshold for genocide met

Death toll will climb and climb. Israel's war on Gaza has reached new depths of depravity - but it won't stop there, warns **Ian Spencer**

On March 26, Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur on Palestine, presented her findings (entitled 'The anatomy of a genocide') to the UN Human Rights Council.

What was obvious to anyone with eyes to see, nearly six months ago, was confirmed in official legalese. She noted the deaths of "more than 30,000 Palestinians, including 13,000 children, and a further 12,000 missing, presumed dead" and "71,000 injured, most with life-changing wounds, made worse by the decimation of the healthcare system". She affirmed that the threshold for genocide has been met.

Moreover, Albanese said that the "colonial amnesia of the west has condoned Israel's colonial settler project" and went on to "implore member-states to abide by their obligations, which start with imposing an arms embargo and sanctions on Israel".¹ The scale of the horror is as revolting as it is unsurprising, given that 25,000 tonnes of explosive, equivalent to two nuclear bombs, has been dropped onto one of the most densely populated areas on earth. Albanese was also forthright enough to say that Israel has adopted the strategy of lying often enough, so that eventually some will believe what it says.

Unsurprisingly, her report was rejected by Israel as "an obscene inversion of reality". US state department spokesman Mathew Miller also dismissed it and threw in the unsubstantiated assertion that Albanese has a "history of making anti-Semitic comments". Despite this, the UN security council managed to pass a resolution on the same day calling for a ceasefire in Gaza - without a US veto. Israel's response was to ignore the resolution and cancel a planned meeting in Washington. We still await the verdict of the International Court of Justice. However, the court too has issued further instructions to Israel, to prevent the commission of genocide, following additional submissions by South Africa, in light of the worsening situation in Gaza.²

Killing

From the outset, the deliberate killing of medical personnel and the destruction of medical infrastructure has been part of the Israeli Defence Forces strategy. Al Shifa hospital has now been totally destroyed, bringing an end to its 78-year history after a two-week siege. Al Shifa was the Gaza Strip's most modern, best-equipped hospital with specialist surgical and paediatric centres. Equipped with 700 beds, Al Shifa was housing up to 7,000 patients shortly before it was finally liquidated, with a siege that saw a further 400 Palestinian civilians killed. Israel produced not one shred of evidence of the " Hamas command centre" beneath it, which had served as the pretext for its destruction.

The IDF left Al Shifa littered with human remains. The courtyard of Al Aqsa hospital was also bombed by the IDF on March 31 - the main target being the tents of displaced civilians, sheltering nearby. The workers of the French medical charity, MSF, were forced to stop work and seek cover during the attack.³ The Palestinian Red Crescent have had 26 members of staff killed by the IDF and there is now not one single fully functioning hospital left in the whole of the Gaza Strip.



Even Israel's apologists are recoiling from the horror

'Genocide Joe' Biden, with one eye on his re-election, has made a token humanitarianism gesture by 'urging restraint' on Netanyahu - there should not be a major ground offensive against the beleaguered refugees in Rafah. In the meantime, the US airforce and the RAF have been dropping aid, none of which comes anywhere close to the barest minimum to prevent famine.

Simultaneously, the US, UK and other Nato powers are supplying the weapons for the annihilation of Palestinians. Recently, this has incorporated an \$18 billion transfer of arms to Israel, including 25 F-35 jets. At the same time, there are other voices in the US and Israel rejecting Biden's pathetic pleas for 'restraint'. Republican congressman Tim Walberg has even gone so far as to call for a nuclear attack to "make it like Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Get it over quick."⁴ The barbarism is only just getting started.

On April 2 seven people working for the food aid charity, World Central Kitchen (WCK), were killed by the IDF. The food convoy used clearly marked vehicles, travelling along an agreed route, at a time pre-arranged with the IDF.⁵ Three British nationals were killed, along with a dual US-Canadian, an Australian, Polish, and Palestinian citizens, when they were attacked in Deir al-Balah.

As if more were needed, the hypocrisy has been topped up further. While Benjamin Netanyahu claimed that the killings were unintentional, the IDF achieved its intended result, as WCK halted all relief operations. Australia's prime minister has demanded "full accountability" for the attack. David Cameron and Rishi Sunak have both responded with sorrow at the killing of the British aid workers, while displaying blithe indifference to the murder of hundreds of Palestinian health workers since October 7, many of whom were deliberately targeted - or in hospitals that were bombed without even the pretence of being ' Hamas command centres'.

The withdrawal of WCK, which provided meals to many thousands, via a sea route from Cyprus, must be seen in the context of Israel's

attack on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (Unrwa), which was the biggest food aid provider in Gaza. The US, UK, Germany and others suspended funding for Unrwa after unsupported allegations, made in the Knesset, that 12 of its staff were complicit in the October 7 attack on Israel by Hamas. Complying with proven liars is a political choice. By contrast, other countries, such as Spain and Eire, have increased their contributions. Over 152 Unrwa staff have been killed by the IDF since the beginning of the current Israeli orgy of violence - it is alleged that Israel has tortured Unrwa staff into making false admissions of complicity with Hamas on the October 7.⁶

Manufactured

From the outset, Israel's aim has been the ethnic cleansing of Gaza and the genocide of the Palestinian people. Famine is not, as in some wars, an unintended consequence. Residents now depend entirely on food aid from outside, controlled and restricted by Israel.⁷ Aside from the indiscriminate killing of civilians, reminiscent of the carpet-bombing of Dresden by allied airforces in World War II, there has been the targeted destruction of food production, supplies and supply infrastructure. The IDF have destroyed farmland, greenhouses, fishing boats, shops, flour mills and bakeries and even turned their weapons on hungry people queuing for food aid.

And the strategy is working: famine is imminent throughout Gaza. The food supply has been restricted since at least 2007, with the population dependent on carbohydrate for most of their calories. The consequence was that even before the current genocide vitamin deficiency was widespread. As most of the food supplies come through Israel, they have been severely restricted. All agencies agree that the most efficient way to deliver food aid is by road. Prior to the start of the genocide around 500 trucks a day were necessary to do this, but that is now limited to around 150 - for a population in even greater need than before October 7.⁸ Over

677,000 of the 2.3 million population of Gaza is already suffering from 'famine' - phase 5 in the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification⁹ - while 39% of the population is in phase 4 (emergency), and the entire population in Phase 3, 'crisis'.

People are resorting to eating animal fodder to survive. Also, 97% of the ground water supplies are unfit for human consumption. Desalination plants, if not destroyed, are unable to work because of a lack of fuel.¹⁰ In famines, one of the biggest single killers of children is diarrhoea, contracted from contaminated water, but Israel has deliberately prevented the delivery of water purification tablets.¹¹ Northern Gaza is particularly susceptible, where a third of children are suffering from acute malnutrition.¹²

While some children have already been recorded as having died from starvation, the main killer will be disease, spreading through a severely immunocompromised population. Even if most of the population survives, the long-term consequences for ill health will be felt for generations. There is substantial evidence that malnutrition in early pregnancy increases the likelihood of conditions as diverse as type-two diabetes and schizophrenia, owing to epigenetic damage to the foetus, in part due to folic acid deficiency. Even malnutrition in late pregnancy can lead to growth restriction in the child (there are an estimated 52,000 pregnant women in Gaza).¹³

While the ICJ has debated the precision of the definition of genocide, war crimes are being perpetrated by Israel in plain sight and with the complicity of the imperialist powers. Even the British government's legal advice is that Israel has breached international humanitarian law in Gaza and the UK should cease all arms sales to Israel. (Naturally, Lord Cameron failed to make that public, but it was leaked to *The Observer*.¹⁴) Collective punishment, the denial of water, food and medicine, the deliberate targeting of facilities expressly protected by the Geneva conventions, and the ethnic cleansing of the entire population, if it were being conducted by Serbia,

Russia or any Nato opponent, would lead to a demand for the government responsible to face trial for war crimes in the Hague.

Now the people of Gaza face the prospect of an intense ground war on the 1.4 million refugees in Rafah. Ostensibly, this has not taken place so far, owing to a temporary restriction on violence for the period of Ramadan. The likelihood is that the US construction of its vaunted pier will soon be complete, but it is hard to avoid the suspicion that the objective is not so much to bring in food aid, but to facilitate the potential removal of the Palestinian population - it is not difficult to see how this might be rationalised in 'humanitarian' terms.

Starvation

The epidemiological forecasts projecting future deaths in Gaza from all causes, including epidemics, range from over 48,000 to nearly 200,000 by August 2024.¹⁵ Famine, beyond a certain point, requires careful medical management. Refeeding syndrome in those who have been suffering from starvation can be a potential further cause of death, due to electrolyte imbalance.¹⁶ Careful medical management is one thing that the IDF have ensured the Palestinians do not have. In the meantime, in Egypt, along the border between the Rafah and Kerem Shalom crossings, construction machines are levelling the ground on a narrow strip of land. Satellite images show an area intended to accommodate Palestinian refugees. The walled enclosure will have a capacity for more than 100,000.¹⁷

Given all we know about the conduct of Israel and its allies - the lies, the brutality, the growing support for a final completion of the Zionist project of removing the entire Palestinian population, the wilful disregard for international law - an attack on Rafah is highly likely and is certainly being planned. Of course, that could be prevented, but, whatever the outcome of the elections in the USA or UK, the drive to war will continue - and not just in Rafah ●

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MEDIA

Through fog of war

First casualty is the truth. Paul Demarty says Al Jazeera should be congratulated for presenting what is probably a fair and accurate account of the October 7 events

The viewer of Al Jazeera's hour-long documentary on the October 7 attacks¹ is warned, in the usual way, that "this film includes scenes that some viewers may find disturbing". Frankly, the idea that any viewer would find *nothing* in it disturbing is not pleasant to contemplate.

Whatever else it is, this film - produced by the admirable AJ investigative unit, or I-unit - is a lean and unsparing portrait of the events of that day, and also the immediate production of increasingly lurid tall tales about what went on. At first, I was irritated by the flashiness of the production - transitions between bodycam footage of the carnage and CGI maps, the appearance of a giant digital clock as a continuity device. But before long I had to admit that these were no mere fripperies. Cheesy as they were, these techniques imposed order on the first half of the film, which might otherwise have devolved into an incomprehensible snuff montage.

Much of the discussion of the film has focused, understandably, on the I-unit's dissection of the various salacious pieces of atrocity propaganda that circulated widely after the events. Yet it is worth covering its account of the attacks themselves. As of the beginning of last year, the Palestinian cause was in a perilous state. A series of peaceful demonstrations from 2018-19, the marches of return, had been met with sniper fire (the film does not mention the deliberate targeting of limbs by the snipers). Meanwhile, the administrations of both Donald Trump and Joe Biden pursued a policy of relative withdrawal from the Middle East, a key part of which was the normalisation of relations between Israel and the Gulf states.

The October 7 Hamas plan was hatched to upend this process, and



Dashcam footage shows Israel caught completely unawares

ensure that the Palestinians could not be ignored in such negotiations. The film interviews Hamas official Basem Naim, who confirms this rationale, although he notes that only a very few people within the organisation had any real view of the overall plan.

Preparations were nonetheless necessary. Hamas and its allies made no attempt to conceal its rehearsals and experiments - impossible in any case in as comprehensively surveilled a tract of land as Gaza. Videos circulated online of fighters blowing holes in dummy fences, mucking about with paragliders, and so forth. How can the Israelis not have noticed? One Israeli historian quoted, Uri Bar-Joseph, calls it the most severe intelligence failure in modern history, which seems a little harsh, but the fact remains that this activity was noticed by

lower-ranking individuals, who were ignored. Their bosses just could not believe that Hamas could have the capability of making a serious attack on Israel.

Even early on the morning of October 7, Israelis noticed the sudden hubbub of Hamas fighters assembling at their posts. No attempt was made to put IDF border posts on high alert. Israeli troops were - literally in some cases - caught napping.

This is an important feature of the overall picture. According to the film, the plan was to attack military bases, cause a lively panic, give the occupiers a bloody nose, and signal to the world that Hamas and Palestine could not be ignored. An 80%-90% casualty rate was expected (and no doubt a revenge exercise that would cost the usual 100 or so Palestinian lives for each Israeli killed).

What took place instead was a stunning and total victory. With cheap drones, Hamas succeeded in cutting communications between IDF bases. Each one was taken by surprise. Soldiers were slaughtered in their dozens. In the space of an hour, the entire military cordon around Gaza was utterly destroyed.

Hannibal

It is here that things started to turn really nasty. The militants had no orders to follow after that. There was no clear command structure that could have improvised a coordinated follow-up attack. What happened instead was that squads of militants continued into Israel, where they found a series of kibbutzes and a music festival. Large massacres of civilians ensued. Meanwhile, hundreds of Gazan civilians followed the militants through the broken security fences, and travelled to nearby Israeli settlements, which were looted, with further hostages taken. The footage assembled by the I-unit of all this - mostly from Hamas bodycams - leaves no doubt that large numbers of unarmed civilians were deliberately killed.

Yet they were not the only people doing the killing. The film argues persuasively that Israel had revived some variant of the infamous 'Hannibal directive', whereby a fatal casualty is preferred to a living hostage. Footage of Israeli attack-helicopters indiscriminately blasting at vehicles that plausibly contained

hostages is added to evidence that in one kibbutz tanks deliberately destroyed buildings full of people. It was, ironically, one of these buildings where babies were supposedly discovered in an oven; not for the first time in human history, a real atrocity was hidden under a fake one. The film says that 18 civilians are known to have been killed by Israeli security forces, but that a large number of bodies discovered in the rubble of destroyed buildings were very plausibly victims of 'friendly fire'.

Having mentioned the fake atrocities, the film goes on to undertake a survey of the most widely retailed stories, and unsurprisingly finds the evidence wanting. Not much of this material is new. Most notably, the accusation that Hamas deliberately committed systematic rape - given prime billing in *The New York Times* - has been debunked repeatedly, by outlets as diverse as the tankie-leaning *The Grayzone* and the more-or-less respectable *Intercept*. None of the eyewitness statements of rape have been corroborated, never mind the most lurid ones.

The film concludes, as reasonable people familiar with how wars are actually fought must, that it is vanishingly unlikely that no women were raped amidst the general carnage. (Naim did specifically deny it, but then he also denied in earlier interviews that Hamas fighters had killed civilians, which is obviously and comically false.) Yet to declare that rape was deliberately used as a weapon of war is to lay claim to a *casus belli* for which there is no real warrant. Perhaps a serious investigation would find real evidence, but Israel refuses to allow one, considering all plausibly competent authorities - the UN, for instance - to be enemies.

As for the butchered babies, sworn to largely by overexcited activists for a state-backed Orthodox 'charity' called Zaka, the matter is almost embarrassingly straightforward. Not only were these reports rejected by the governments of the kibbutzim, where the crimes allegedly took place: one can simply check the records and discover that not nearly enough infants were reported dead to account for them. It seems to be a lie spun out of wholecloth.

Yet these and other fantasies have continued endlessly. The grisly truth is simply not grisly enough, as one interviewee notes, to justify the scale of retaliation. Ruthlessly shooting hundreds of civilians to death is one thing, but how can that justify an onslaught that has killed tens of thousands, mostly women and children? Something more is needed: something that will paint the victims as little better than animals. The willingness of 'good liberals' in America (like Anthony Blinken, Hillary Clinton and the *NYT*) to retail these blood libels will be remembered, we hope, for a long, long time.

Accomplished?

The film concludes by asking the question: did it work? Was the operation a strategic success, as well as a tactical masterpiece? The opinion of the filmmakers appears to be: yes, it was. Chuck Freilich - a former Israeli intelligence official, who is now an academic in America - mournfully asserts that, by destroying all the careful diplomacy between Israel and the Arab states, Hamas has dealt a serious blow. Naim, rather more happily, agrees. There is also the loss of Israel's sense of invulnerability. The scale of the devastation inflicted upon Gaza is interpreted as a way of warning off any repeat: sure, you *can* do it, but would you want to?

That is all true enough, but oddly missing from the film is the alternative interpretation of Israel's retaliation: that the endgame of all this slaughter is to empty the Gaza Strip of Palestinians, by killing as many as possible through fire and famine, and forcing the majority of the survivors into the Sinai. Already there is word of land in Gaza being parcelled up and sold, including to the family of Jared Kushner, who ran Trump's Middle East diplomacy. The cramming of millions into Rafah, the endlessly touted assault on that city, strongly suggests that that is the aim, but it was already discernible months ago, and quite predictable from the historic behaviour and elementary *Staatsraison* of Israel. Endless provocations against Iran and Hezbollah - most recently the bombing of the Iranian embassy in Damascus - are senseless except as attempts to draw the US in fully, therefore providing unassailable cover for ending the Gaza 'problem' for good.

October 7 was a tactical masterclass in irregular warfare. But such warfare has enabling conditions. Mao Zedong famously said that the guerrilla must swim like a fish in the sea of peasants; but what if your adversary does not need the peasants? What if it is happy to poison the ocean altogether? Bleak as it is, the film does not go there. The word, 'genocide', is not used once.

All this helps demonstrate that the appalling possibilities currently unfolding put even greater responsibility on the solidarity movement - both in the neighbouring countries and further afield: in the heartlands of the imperial system ●

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Notes

1. The film can be watched on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Oatzea-mPY.

Online Communist Forum



Sunday April 7 5pm

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

UKRAINE

Notes on the war

At this particular juncture the west's proxy finds itself on the back foot, says **Jack Conrad**. Doubtless that explains why Donald Tusk is warning Russia that a wider war in Europe is "a real threat"

After the long, hellishly cold months of winter, spring has finally arrived and, when it comes to Ukraine, the talk turns to a Russian offensive. Some altogether silly armchair generals have a spring offensive: you see, the ice has melted and the sunshine is drying out the ground. Except, of course, it isn't - well, not in Ukraine anyway.

Winter makes military operations difficult, but perfectly feasible. Tanks, howitzers, armoured personnel carriers, infantry and, crucially, lorries can move swiftly over solidly frozen ground and this allows for attack and manoeuvre. But spring and autumn in Ukraine bring the rains and therefore the *rasputitsa* - not dry ground, but deep, thick, squelching mud. Everything, especially lorries - vital for supplying the frontline with rations, munitions, fuel and reinforcements - gets bogged down.

The *Sun* vividly reports, for example, that the "biggest challenge" faced by the British-supplied Challenger II, is that it keeps getting stuck in what are in Ukrainian terms ordinary puddles. Mighty diesel engines roar, but tracks dig deeper and deeper into the mire, to the point where the 74-ton monster almost buries itself.¹

Remember, while phase one of the Ukraine war began in late February 2022, Russia sent its tanks mainly along conventional roads and highways, not through boggy fields, woods and rough ground. True, that gave Ukrainian soldiers - equipped as they were with shoulder-launched Javelin and Nlaw missiles - sitting targets in what turned into a turkey shoot. But a tank-led invasion across a wide front was hardly a realistic option. The *rasputitsa* would have brought everything to a gooey, gluey, ghastly halt.

So we should not expect a full-scale Russian offensive in 2024 till well into May. And here is where Donald Tusk, Poland's prime minister, and his remarks about war in Europe being a "real threat" find at least some kind of purchase. It is not that Vladimir Putin is just about to open a western front with Nato and order the invasion of the Baltic countries, let alone Poland. But, after months of incremental advances, with Avdiivka successfully captured, a concerted Russian push towards Kharkiv, Ukraine's second city, in the north-east and/or Odessa in the south-west is quite conceivable. Taking Odessa would all but landlock Ukraine - meaning a strategic victory for Russia by giving it effective control over the entire northern Black Sea coastline.

Russia has certainly ramped up war production, militarily adjusted to the needs of a slow, grinding war and has just mobilised an additional 150,000 young men into its much expanded army. By contrast, Ukraine finds itself badly wrong-footed.

In part that is down to factors beyond its control: ie, Donald Trump and the Republican Party in America. Grandstanding over migration and the southern border with Mexico has seen the Biden administration repeatedly fail to get its \$60 billion aid package for Ukraine through Congress. Maybe that is about to change. Mike Johnson, Republican House speaker, says it will if "innovations" are included, such as the provision of loans to Ukraine and the REPO for Ukraine Act is used -



Phase one: tanks are now sitting ducks

it allows for the seizure of sovereign Russian assets.² We shall see.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's recently appointed commander-in-chief, colonel general Oleksandr Syrskyi, bitterly complains that, with US supplies blocked, Russia has a 5:1 advantage when it comes to artillery shells. Russia routinely fires 10,000 daily, whereas Ukraine can only manage 2,000. That very much matters on the battlefield. Neither strategic nor tactical *advance* is possible without massive artillery bombardment. That was certainly true in World War I, World War II and even the Iraq war, as shown by Verdun, Stalingrad, El Alamein, Fallujah and other such battles.

Even tactical *defence* is problematic without strong artillery support. That explains, says Syrskyi, the commander in Bakhmut, who was prepared to sacrifice countless men to hold this strategically *unimportant* town, why he ordered the evacuation of Avdiivka. Supplies of artillery shells were running dangerously low. Of course, all this might be part of an elaborate ruse designed to push the US Congress into agreeing Biden's package. But the idea, touted by some armchair generals, that artillery has been made irrelevant by drones and other such high tech weaponry, is obviously false. No, nowadays, it is surely tanks - once the prime instrument for delivering shock and awe on the battlefield - which have largely been rendered ineffective. By contrast traditional artillery, yes, coupled with drones for forward observation,

create a "lethal and efficient deep fire affect" (former UK minister of defence, Ben Wallis).³

Artillery systems serve four main functions: firstly, suppress enemy fire or counter-battery fire; secondly, take out high-value targets; thirdly, break up enemy force concentrations; fourthly, provide fire support for battlefield manoeuvre. Drones are brilliant for taking out high-value targets: eg, tanks, electronic jamming stations and command posts. However, drones "cannot create the firepower necessary for enemy fire suppression or for breaking up enemy force concentrations".⁴ They simply cannot lift the necessary payload. In other words, drones have not made artillery irrelevant: rather, in many cases, drones have made artillery more effective and precise. Then there is the price tag: whereas the top-end MQ-9 Reaper drone costs \$28 million, a MQ-1B Predator drone \$6.7 million and an Abram tank \$10 million, an artillery shell comes in at a mere snip - \$5,000.

The EU has pledged to plug the gap by upping production to one million artillery shells annually. Yet so far there has been a considerable shortfall. Meanwhile, the US is capable of producing 1.3 million shells annually - but, of course, deliveries are stymied because of the narrowest political calculations (showing, surely, the dysfunctional nature of the US constitutional order).

Ukraine has other problems though - not least the shortage of

manpower. Once, fuelled by patriotic fervour, there were queues snaking around recruiting offices. Now supplies of the willing have all but been exhausted. Hundreds are dying on the front line daily, while others return home badly injured or horribly mutilated - leading, understandably, to an increasing reluctance to serve in the military. More and more are "fleeing conscription".⁵ The BBC recently put the figure of those who have sneaked abroad - mainly to Poland and Slovakia - at 650,000. That despite a ban on males aged between 16 and 60 from leaving the country.⁶

Average age

Strangely, the average age of a Ukrainian front-line soldier is an extraordinarily high 43 - explained in good part by the fact that till just a few days ago only those over 27 faced conscription. In December president Volodymyr Zelensky said 450,000 to 500,000 extra soldiers would be needed to fight Russia in 2024. Ukraine's parliament, the Rada, had for weeks been dithering over new legislation, which would reduce the minimum to 25. The age was, in fact, lowered in separate legislation last May and approved by the Rada, but Zelensky only got round to signing it into law on April 3. The ten month delay in implementing the change has not been seriously explained.

Given that we are repeatedly told that Ukraine faces an existential threat, Zelensky's lethargy is curious, to say the least. After all, the newly established French Republic responded to invasion by aristocratic Europe by introducing near-universal conscription (*levée en masse*).

Deputy Jean-Baptiste Jourdan, along with Lazare Carnot, drafted the decree agreed by the National Convention on August 16 1793. Its first sentence reads: "From this moment and until all enemies are driven from the territory of the Republic, all French persons are placed in permanent requisition for the service of the armies." This characteristically Jacobin measure enabled the creation of the *Grande Armée*, "the nation in arms", which overwhelmed the professional armies fielded by Austria, Prussia, Spain and Russia. All unmarried men between the ages of 18 and 25 were immediately drafted into military service. The elderly, married men, women, even children were expected to provide economic, logistical and moral support. At a stroke, the *levée* replaced all previous theories and legal claims about war upheld by the *ancien régime*.⁷

Why Zelensky refrained from mobilising Ukraine's young men is something of a mystery to me. Are anti-war sentiments particularly strong amongst them? Perhaps. It is unlikely, though, that this age cohort will have anything much in the way of sympathy for the war aims of Russia. After all, they, in their vast majority, are Ukrainian-Ukrainians, who have reached adulthood after the 2014 Maidan coup and the eruption of what was in effect civil war between Russian-speaking partisans in the south and east of the country, and Ukrainian official and unofficial state forces.

Ukraine has also woefully failed to prepare adequate defences. In late November 2023, Zelensky ordered the "construction of an extensive network of fortifications".⁸ However,

little seems to have happened till early February this year, when a new working group within Ukraine's defence ministry was given responsibility to coordinate construction. There is a budget of \$800 million available and, according to Zelensky, the aim is to "build new fortifications along three lines of defence totalling 2,000km by the end of spring".⁹ A tall order.

Three lines of defence is, of course, exactly what Russia put in place in the winter-spring of 2022-23 along the entire front line, and then arching up following the internationally recognised border between the two countries. Typically, there are: firstly, wide anti-tank ditches; secondly, earth berms, tightly packed minefields and three rows of dragon's teeth; thirdly, there comes the network of trenches and bunkers sheltering troops. Attackers also face deadly fire raining down upon them from well-protected artillery and howitzer positions located in the rear. No wonder Ukrainian attempts to make a breakthrough with its summer offensive in 2023 came to naught.

Euphoria over Russia's surrender of Kherson in the south and retreat from the gates of Kharkiv in the north-east, assured of unwavering western support and confident that Challenger, Abram and Leopard tanks would allow Ukraine to punch through Russian defences and get its forces all the way to the warm waters of the Black Sea - meant that the construction of fortifications behind the front line went neglected. So after the forced withdrawal from Avdiivka in February, the Ukrainians had no defences to fall back onto.

Hence, Ukraine will be vulnerable to a Russian summer offensive ... unless Zelensky's "end of spring" deadline is met. That is why, at least in my opinion, we have Donald Tusk touting a 'Weimar Triangle' uniting Poland, France and Germany to support Ukraine and thereby *warning Russia* about the danger of a wider conflict in Europe.

Once a dove, now a hawk, Emmanuel Macron has even raised the possibility of deploying French combat troops to Ukraine. True, he promised, in his televised address delivered from the Elysée, that France would "never" take the "initiative" in any offensive in Ukraine. However, he insisted that, while France is "not at war with Russia ... , we must not let it win".¹⁰

In part this is about domestic politics. As the National Assembly voted to approve the 10-year Franco-Ukrainian security agreement on March 12, the president saw an unmissable opportunity to round on Jean-Luc Mélenchon's left-reformist France Insoumise, which opposed the agreement, and Marine Le Pen's far-right Rassemblement National, which abstained. The president's party, note, is trailing far behind in opinion polls ... and European and presidential elections are looming.

Nonetheless, across Europe there is a drive by mainstream bourgeois politicians, opinion makers, arms manufacturers and the top brass alike to win a sceptical public to accept bigger military budgets in the name of 'not letting Russia win'. Already Poland spends 3.9% of its GDP on the military, Greece some 3% and the UK, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia and

Romania around 2%.¹¹ But the trend is upwards with all Nato members ... and between January 2022 and January 2024 some \$165 billion has gone to finance and arm Ukraine.¹²

Logically this choice of guns over butter should be wholeheartedly welcomed by the social-imperialist 'left'. Some mealy-mouthed representatives of this camp - eg, Branko Marcetic, a *Jacobin* staff writer - oppose the delivery of "offensive weapons".¹³ The more honest, the more brazen - eg, Stephen R Shalom of the Mandeliste 'Fourth International' - rightly says that the distinction between offensive and defensive weapons is meaningless.¹⁴ Unashamedly, they constitute themselves outriders of the Weimar Triangle and demand 'Arm, arm, arm Ukraine'.

By contrast, we stick with Wilhelm Liebknecht's time-honoured slogan, "Not a man and not a penny for this system!"¹⁵ Socialists - genuine socialists, that is - take no responsibility for the 'defence budget' of capitalist governments. We maintain that position because of political principle, because we are a party of extreme opposition, not out of economic calculation. After all, it is argued that military expenditure (milex) stimulates economic activity - a line taken by military Keynesians and Marxists such as Paul Baran, Paul Sweezy, Michael Kidron and Ernest Mandel. Doubtless the profits of the arms companies are boosted with increased state orders for the means of destruction. However, the main burden is borne by taxpayers, not least other sections of the capitalist class. Dan Smith and Ron Smith conclude that the effects of milex are "complex and contradictory": it maintains capitalism, but suppresses overall economic growth.¹⁶

Such debates aside, everything else being equal, more on milex equals less on local government grants, sickness benefits, transport projects, etc. The social-imperialists ought, therefore, to take responsibility for that choice next time they march with their Banderite buddies. 'Arm, arm, arm Ukraine' should be accompanied with calls to 'Cut, cut, cut ... services and welfare'.

Western front

If Ukraine manages to put in place its three lines of defence along the whole front line and the whole Russia-Ukraine border by the end of spring, admittedly a big 'if', then a Russian summer offensive in 2024 will have as much chance of success as Ukraine's summer offensive in 2023. Well, unless Russia strikes via Belarus.

In other words, we have a situation similar to the western front in World War I, but with the addition of drones, glide bombs, cruise missiles and electronic warfare. Successful surprise attacks become all but impossible. Instead there is siege warfare.

In World War I the background to this was remarkably similar to Ukraine. Having been forced onto the defensive in 1915, the Germans responded by fortifying their front: lines of trenches, barbed wire, machine guns, concrete bunkers. To have any hope of breaching such awesome defences required the delivery, via rail and lorry, of huge quantities of artillery shells, prolonged bombardments and then massively costly infantry assaults (artillery conquered and infantry held any territorial gains).

Trotsky, at the time, it should be noted, devoted several, typically incisive, articles to trench warfare, including 'The trenches' (September 1915) and 'Fortresses or trenches?' (October 1915). He dismissed fortresses as anachronistic - artillery bombardment quickly reduced them

to rubble. Hence, Trotsky declared, "trenches" had triumphed and to such an extent that both militarists and pacifists worshipped them.¹⁷ Deluded pacifists imagined that state borders protected by trenches could finally abolish war.

Certainly, as a "temporary sanctuary" trenches served as "decisive boundaries, the smallest crossing of which by either side is paid for with numerous victims". But conditions in the trenches were terrible. Trotsky called them "disgusting dumps". German, Austrian, Italian, French and British troops alike found themselves crouching in mud, water and filth. They thought not about the grand plans of monarchs, ministers and generals. Nor did they think about killing the enemy. No, their overriding concern was getting a crust to eat - that and survival. Trotsky quotes testimony from men at the front about how they would enter into a silent agreement not to fire upon the other side.¹⁸

However, fortress warfare continued, albeit in different form. German chief of staff Erich von Falkenhayn promulgated a military doctrine that allowed for no retreat. As with a fortress under siege, the "standard response" was that any breach of the defences had to be met with swift counterattacks, no matter what the cost.¹⁹ Given that German forces had behind them a thousand square miles of captured French territory, such a doctrine was militarily unnecessary, but ensured that the final outcome ultimately depended on who could produce the most munitions and who could sustain the greatest losses in human life.

The US and UK top brass - above all their political masters in Washington and Whitehall - seem quite prepared to let hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians die for the sake of their imperial ambitions: subordinating France and Germany, degrading and dismembering the Russian Federation and strategically surrounding and strangling the People's Republic of China.

There is, inevitably, the possibility of a frozen conflict. To this day, for example, the war on the Korean peninsula continues, but as a prolonged ceasefire - there is no peace treaty, no settlement. But that does not look like being on the cards any time soon when it comes to Russia and Ukraine. Nor do peace negotiations.

True, the US paymaster told Zelensky to drop his intransigent position of 'no negotiations till the last Russian soldier leaves the last piece of pre-2014 Ukrainian soil'. While Zelensky instantly fell into line, this owed more to public relations than any moves towards a peace deal. Indeed there is plenty of evidence showing that the US and UK governments worked hard to block a "peace deal" in the first months of Russia's 'special military operation'.

Former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder testifies that such a Russia-Ukraine deal was nearly reached in the spring of 2022 and included four main points: firstly, Ukraine would abandon plans to join Nato; secondly, bans on the Russian language in Ukraine would be removed; thirdly, Donbass would remain in Ukraine, but function as an autonomous region; fourthly, the UN and Germany would oversee security agreements. Crimea was to be left to the future.²⁰

According to David Arakhamia, parliamentary leader of Zelensky's Servant of the People party, Boris Johnson flew into Kyiv and told Ukrainian officials not to "sign anything with them at all; just go to war".²¹ Apparently, a clincher.

Trench warfare, because of its static nature, allows for - encourages - fraternisation. Ordinary soldiers, especially those in non-elite units, dread the prospect of being ordered over the top. The chances of death are exceedingly high. Meanwhile, they endlessly wait and wait, and do their best to reduce the discomfort, suffering, boredom and dangers. There is an obvious interest in not being sacrificed in useless military operations. Rank-and-file soldiers and their NCOs frequently take a common stand against the non-combatant officer class safely located in distant headquarters. Men in the trenches bond, form a close-knit community. Staff officers are with very few exceptions held in utter contempt: self-serving, out of touch, arrogant and determined to save their children from the meat grinder.

Live and let live

Away from the most active battle zones, with their fanatical stormtroopers, human waves and mass casualties, there is 'live and let live'.²² If you do not shoot us when we are bucketing out our waterlogged trenches, we will not shoot you when you are bucketing out yours. The same goes with the retrieval of the dead and the badly wounded from no-man's land. A tacit, always illicit, truce is observed. The antithesis of the official 'kill or be killed'. Veterans instruct newcomers in the arts of peace as well as of war.

Morally, there grows a recognition of mutual suffering. The poor buggers on the other side endure the same cold, the same mud, the same infestations of rats, mice and lice as we do. They get to know their neighbours in the nearby trenches not only through the drones buzzing overhead, the shells whizzing in and the night raids. They hear the agonised screams, the curses, the familiar songs and the messages shouted in a closely related language. They also smell what the other side is cooking. Fellow feeling, empathy, can easily develop, as was famously the case with Christmas 1914 in World War I.

This was, though, argues Tony Ashworth, "neither the first nor the last instance of 'live and let live'".²³ Perhaps things began with coinciding mealtimes, perhaps it was night sentries not firing upon each other. Whatever the exact case, on December 25 1914 German troops began setting up Christmas trees above their parapets, lighting candles and singing carols. The Tommies joined in. A few brave souls ventured out of their trenches. They were met not with a hail of bullets. Instead, other brave souls joined them. Smiles, handshakes and hugs, the exchange of small presents and games of football, followed. Some 100,000 are thought to have been involved across the whole of the western front.

Naturally, the internationalist left - not least Lenin and the Bolsheviks - celebrated the 48-hour unofficial Christmas truce and used it to considerable polemical effect against the social-imperialists and their social-pacifist and centrist apologists. Lenin quotes Karl Kautsky, the former 'pope of Marxism', saying: "There is only one practical issue - victory or defeat for one's country". Lenin's reply is damning: "[I]f one were to forget socialism and the class struggle, that would be the truth. However, if one does not lose sight of socialism, that is untrue."²⁴

There can be no argument that one of the key preconditions for the Christmas truce and other spontaneous acts of fraternisation lay in the prior history of mass anti-war propaganda and agitation carried out by the parties of the

Socialist (Second) International. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that, while most British *front-line* troops came from a working class (ie, Labourite) background, that was not the case with German forces. Most came from rural areas and therefore were of peasant stock. They were not natural social democrats. However, the trenches themselves, the commonality imposed by life on the frontline, the technology of industrial warfare, proletarianised them.

The dangers of fraternisation were all too apparent for the officer class. On December 5 1914, general Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, commander of one of the two corps which made up the British Expeditionary Force, issued this revealing warning:

Experience of this and of every other war proves undoubtedly that troops in trenches in close proximity to the enemy slide very easily, if permitted to do so, into a 'live and let live' theory of life. Understandings - amounting almost to an unofficial armistice - grow up between our troops and the enemy, with a view to making life easier, until the sole object of war becomes obscured and officers and men sink into a military lethargy, from which it is difficult to arouse them when the moment for great sacrifices again arises. The attitude of our troops can be readily understood and to a certain extent commands sympathy. So long as they know that no general advance is intended, they fail to see any object in understanding small enterprises of no permanent utility, certain to result in some loss of life, and likely to provoke reprisals.

Such an attitude is, however, most dangerous, for it discourages initiative in commanders and destroys the offensive spirit in all ranks. The corps commander therefore directs divisional commanders to impress on subordinate commanders the absolute necessity of encouraging offensive spirit, while on the defensive, by every means in their power. Friendly intercourse with the enemy, unofficial armistices (eg, 'We won't fire if you don't', etc), however tempting and amusing they may be, are absolutely prohibited.²⁵

Such orders were, of course, powerless to stop fraternisation. In subsequent years sentries were posted with instructions to shoot anyone tempted to repeat the Christmas truce.

A similar story could be told about French and German, Italian and Austrian, and Russian and German troops. High commands on both sides issued instructions forbidding the slightest manifestation of fraternisation. Those who disobeyed were to be charged with high treason. Nonetheless, life in the trenches creates a tendency towards fraternisation, even if it is only at the level of 'live and let live'.

The same goes for the Ukraine war. Anything smacking of fraternisation horrifies Volodymyr Zelensky and Vladimir Putin alike. Not surprisingly, therefore, each belligerent imposes strict media censorship and tightly controls access to the front.

The claim is that this guards against spies, lies and fake information. Nonsense. No, it is obvious, Moscow and Kyiv are united in a mutual fear of honest, objective and truthful reporting. Sometimes, though, the real picture can be gleaned, even if it comes via indirect evidence.

Ukrainian rank-and-file troops face draconian punishment: five to eight years in prison for

disobedience, 10 years for desertion or failure to appear for duty without a valid reason. "Threatening commanders, consuming alcohol, questioning orders" and many other misdeeds are dealt with equally harshly.²⁶ Such punitive measures would be entirely unnecessary if discipline was internally generated, if there was no refusing of orders, no desertion, no drunken cursing of corrupt politicians and high-handed officers.

Ukrainian and Russian conscripts alike endure appalling conditions, suffer from the same mud, cold and rain. Together they object to risking their lives in pointless military operations and inevitably develop fellow feeling for the grunts on the other side of no-man's land.

That is not something the social-imperialists want to hear. Instead of promoting fraternisation, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, Anticapitalist Resistance, RS21, Labour Representation Committee and their like deny the self-evident fact that the US and its Nato allies are fighting a proxy war, urge Ukraine's *oligarkhiya* regime on to complete victory, oppose any talk of ceasefires and complain that the short-sighted west does not "provide enough weaponry".²⁷

For these traitors to socialism - for that is what they are - the draft dodgers, the endemic conflict between conscripts and the officer caste, and above all the unofficial, tacit ceasefires on the front line come as bad news. For them it is 'Kill or be killed' ●

Notes

1. *The Sun* March 8 2024.
2. thehill.com/homenews/house/4566836-johnson-says-ukraine-aid-will-come-up-right-after-recess-and-will-include-some-innovations.
3. www.gov.uk/government/speeches/defence-secretarys-speech-on-defence-reform.
4. defence.nridigital.com/global_defence_technology_jan21/why_modern_militaries_still_need_artillery.
5. www.dw.com/en/ukraine-to-shake-up-recruitment-as-troops-prove-scarce/a-67348780.
6. www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/cd1px4z922wo.
7. See Alan Forrest, 'Le partie en danger' in D Moran and A Waldon *The people in arms: military myth and national mobilization since the French Revolution* Cambridge 2006.
8. *The Wall Street Journal* December 1 2023.
9. *Financial Times* March 28 2024.
10. www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/ukraine-macron-accepts-possibility-of-need-for-troops-in-ukraine.
11. www.bbc.com/news/world-44717074.
12. Figure arrived at from www.statista.com/statistics/1303432/total-bilateral-aid-to-ukraine.
13. B Marcetic *Jacobin* March 27 2022.
14. SR Shalom *International Viewpoint* April 22 2022.
15. See Wilhelm Liebknecht's November 30 1893 speech to the Reichstag during its debate on the imperial budget: www.marxists.org/archive/liebknecht-w/revolt/11-not-one-penny.html.
16. D Smith and R Smith *The economics of militarism* London 1983, p100.
17. Mistranslated by Isaac Deutscher as "French" in *The prophet armed: Trotsky: 1879-1921* Oxford 1979, p228n - see ID Thatcher *Leon Trotsky and World War One: August 1914-March 1917* Glasgow 1993, p34n.
18. ID Thatcher *Leon Trotsky and World War One: August 1914-March 1917* Glasgow 1993, p27-28.
19. A Jones *The art of war in the western world* London 1988, p456.
20. *Berliner Zeitung* October 21 2023.
21. J Wojcik and CJ Atkins *People's World* November 29 2023.
22. The term can also be rendered as 'rest and let rest' or 'let sleeping dogs lie'. During World War I such tacit truces developed into a widespread, unofficial culture of minimising death, violence and suffering - see T Ashworth *Trench warfare 1914-1918: the live and let system* London 2000, p18.
23. T Ashworth *Trench warfare 1914-1918: the live and let system* London 2000, p24.
24. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 21 Moscow 1977, p182.
25. Quoted in A Richards *The true story of the Christmas truce: British and German accounts of the First World War* Barnsley 2001.
26. www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-zelenskyy-war-military-law.
27. *Solidarity* January 11 2023.

POLEMIC

Same old same old

Having abandoned clause four Fabianism, the Woods-Sewell tendency has issued a manifesto with a view to grandly renaming their oil slick international. Mike Macnair asks what, if anything, is new about their Revolutionary Communist International

Socialist Appeal is to rename itself in May as the 'Revolutionary Communist Party', having got up to four figures in membership: 1,100 (0.0016% of the UK population or 0.3% of the Labour Party membership).¹ As is usual with Trotskyist oil-slick internationals, its International Marxist Tendency is to follow the lead of its flagship organisation and also rename itself - as the 'Revolutionary Communist International'. The IMT has now published a *Manifesto of the Revolutionary Communist International* explaining this decision.²

Much of the *Manifesto* is the same sort of journalistic analysis of the political conjuncture, spun towards over-optimistic conclusions, found in Socialist Appeal - RCP's 'Theses on the coming British revolution', which I discussed two weeks ago.³ But the *Manifesto* also provides indications of what the Woods-Sewell tendency 'stands for', in the sense of *what it would mean* for the working class to accept this group as its party or its leadership.

My point is not that it is particularly likely for the Woods-Sewell tendency to achieve more than a short-lived growth spurt, like other Trotskyist groups before it. It is, rather, to raise the question whether it is *desirable* that the RCP should, by bypassing the existing left, make the 'breakthrough' to mass influence that has been longed for by each of the groups in turn over the last 80 years (since the original RCP in 1944).

What lies behind this question is that the far left is reasonably suspected by broad layers (of those who are at all aware of its existence) of being likely to repeat the experience of the Stalinist bureaucratic dictatorship in the USSR and the other 'socialist countries', *which only led by a long detour back to capitalism*. In the light of this outcome it is insufficient merely to stand for communism and/or merely to take moral distance from the old Soviet regime by denouncing it as 'Stalinism', 'not socialism', 'state capitalism' or whatever. It is necessary to have a clear sense of what we stand for: not only in ultimate aims (communism), but also in what we would advocate the working class do with power.

The *Manifesto* only provides limited information on this front. It needs to be read together with the 'What we fight for' column in *The Communist*, and with the document, 'How communists are preparing for power in Britain', and the draft constitution of the new RCP, which indicate what new RCP members will be signing up to.

As I said earlier, the *Manifesto* is largely a journalistic analysis of the political situation, spun towards r-r-revolutionary conclusions. We arrive at the RCI's purported distinctive 'offer' with the subhead, 'The subjective factor'.

This and the following subhead, 'The bankruptcy of the "left"', largely reports common far-left criticisms of the mainstream Labour or socialist leaderships, and of the official lefts as clinging to unity with them. In this respect the analysis has the strength of avoiding the idea that what is wrong with the official lefts is lack of a 'strike and street action' approach (as found in the Socialist



Repackaging cannot hide continuation of bureaucratic centralism

Workers Party and its offshoots, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Workers Power, or Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century.)

But the first weakness is its emptiness - what, concretely, does it mean to "break with the capitalist system itself"? The previous paragraph contains the statement: "It is necessary to expropriate the bankers and capitalists and replace the anarchy of the market with a harmonious and rational system of planning." This is certainly the long-term aim of all communists. But it remains very vague and fails to address either the global division of labour and its implications for single countries, or how far "expropriate the capitalists" extends to small businesses and farms.

Secondly, for a global document, the argument about the official lefts is very British in character. Yes, the Corbynites' clinging to unity with the Labour right led to political capitulation. But Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France, for example, did not become revolutionary by breaking the unity of the Parti Socialiste in 2008. This is merely a single example; the *nationalism* of official lefts is equally a source of political capitulation.

Identity

With the subhead, 'The struggle against oppression', we move to something that is more distinctively an IMT-RCI 'offer'. This is the explicit rejection of 'identity politics' and of 'postmodernism'. This calls for fairly extensive quotation to make the argument clear. The section begins with entirely conventional comments on the oppression of women: increased economic dependence due to state social expenditure cuts, growing violence against women (which may, in reality, be the growing *political visibility* of such violence) and attacks on access to abortion. It then goes on:

The struggle against all forms of oppression and discrimination is a

necessary part of the fight against capitalism.

Our position is very simple: in every struggle, we will always take the side of the oppressed against the oppressors. But this general statement is insufficient in itself to define our position. We must add that our attitude is essentially a *negative* one.

That is to say: we are opposed to oppression and discrimination of any sort, whether it be directed against women, people of colour, gay people, transgender people or any other oppressed group or minority.

However, we utterly reject identity politics, which, under the guise of defending the rights of a particular group, plays a reactionary and divisive role that ultimately weakens the unity of the working class and provides invaluable assistance to the ruling class.

The labour movement has become infected with all kinds of alien ideas: postmodernism, identity politics, 'political correctness', and all the other bizarre nonsense that has been smuggled in from the universities by the 'left' petty bourgeoisie, which acts as a transmission belt for alien and reactionary ideology.

A by-product of so-called postmodernism, identity politics has served to addle the brains of students. These alien ideas have been introduced into the labour movement, where they act as a most effective weapon in the hands of the bureaucracy for its struggle against the most militant class fighters.

Lenin laid stress on the need for communists to fight on all fronts - not just the economic and political front, but also the ideological front. We stand firmly on the solid foundation of Marxist theory and the philosophy of dialectical materialism.

This stands in complete contradiction with philosophical idealism in all its forms: whether

the open, undisguised mysticism of religion or the cynical, disguised and no-less-poisonous mysticism of postmodernism ...

Communists stand firmly on the ground of class politics and defend the unity of the working class above all divisions of race, colour, gender, language or religion. We do not care if you are black or white, male or female. Nor are we remotely interested in your lifestyle or who your partner is, or is not. These are purely personal matters and no concern of anyone - bureaucrats, priests or politicians.

The only requirement for joining us is that you are prepared and willing to fight for the only cause that can offer genuine freedom, equality and genuinely human relations between men and women: the sacred cause of the fight to emancipate the working class.

But the prior condition for joining the communists is that you leave all the reactionary nonsense of identity politics outside the door.

This passage contains three elements. The first is its remarkably 'retro' character. 'Political correctness' is in origin a piece of self-deprecating humour from the 1970s US Maoist and Maoist-influenced left, which was subsequently appropriated for culture-wars purposes by the US right.⁴

'Identity politics' is a product of late 1960s-70s 'soft Maoism', built on the Communist Party of the USA's prior interpretation of the 'people's front' concept of the 7th Congress of Comintern as a race-gender-class 'trinity' coalition of apolitical trade unionists, liberal feminists and black nationalists. It passed from this background *into* the universities, alongside being used by US and British Eurocommunists in the later 1970s-80s as a stick with which to beat 'backward' leftist wings in their own parties. Its internal contradictions have resulted in general rebranding as

'intersectionality' since the 1990s.⁵ Talking today about the rejection of 'identity politics' is to polemicise with a largely dead ideology, ignoring its *current* version.

The same is true of 'postmodernism'. This is, indeed, (unlike identity politics) a product of the academic rather than the activist left; though its promoters have been intimately connected with what became Eurocommunism and its critique of class politics. Starting under the name 'structuralism', broadly the same group of Anglophone left academics rebranded themselves in response to criticism as 'post-structuralist'; then, when that ideology was sharply critiqued, as 'postmodernists' (borrowing the term from architectural fashion); then, most recently, as 'post-Marxists'. (In saying "most recently", I may not be completely up to date with the rebranding process ...). Again, the focus on 'postmodernism' identifies the target of the polemic with the 1980s-90s version of the ideology, rather than the 2020s version.

Vagueness

The second element is the *vagueness* of what is to be rejected. As with 'political correctness', and as with 'wokeness' (which comes from the same stable) 'identity politics' has become a 'boo word' for conservative writers. But what does it mean?

What certainly falls to be rejected is the race-gender-class 'trinity' and all the elaborated variants of this approach; and the 'intersectional' claim that only the oppressed can speak to their own oppression, and therefore all forms of veto rights and/or *compulsory* participation in official women's, black, etc, caucuses that have more rights to voice than factions more generally. Going back to the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, the 1903 decision to reject the idea that the Jewish *Bund* should have the exclusive right to organise all Jews was correct. The ground for rejection is that these projects, besides being founded on the 1935 people's front concept, are opposed to practical solidarity.⁶

On the other hand, it has been a common argument in left groups that the self-organisation of oppressed groups *as such* (women's caucuses, and so on) is to be rejected. The problem with this line is that it is, in fact, a variant on the 1921 ban on factions (as also are bans on 'permanent factions', public factions, and so on). The grounds for rejecting this approach were given in Trotsky's *The Third International after Lenin*: the effect of banning factions is not, in fact, to abolish factions but to ban all factions except one: the full-time apparatus of the party. Political differences then unavoidably appear in the form of court clique intrigues among the apparatus.⁷ The point is just as true of banning *voluntary* caucuses of oppressed groups.

In this context, it has to be added that the following claim - "We do not care if you are black or white, male or female. Nor are we remotely interested in your lifestyle or who your partner is, or is not. These are purely personal matters and no concern of anyone - bureaucrats, priests or politicians" - is hopelessly liberal anti-discrimination politics. As we in the CPGB have argued, the

tradition of the workers' movement of *defending* the discriminatory provision for pregnant women, and so on, is essential socialism - 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their need'.⁸

And this liberal anti-discrimination politics results in failure to grasp *why* the right are able to run effective culture-war politics round issues of the family, gender and sexuality. Thus, for example, Rob Sewell's January 23 2023 article, 'Scotland: Tory culture wars won't wash', which radically underestimated the political mileage the Tory press could get out of the 'gender recognition' issue.⁹

It is a connected point that opposition to 'identity politics' in Trotskyist groups has in recent years been connected with the defence of apparatus members accused of rape or lesser forms of sexual abuse. The underlying cause of the *problem* is that bureaucratic apparatuses based on top-down authority, together with confidentiality rules, naturally produce the same dynamic of sexual abuse by exploiting authority as capitalism itself does, and the same inability to deal with it as the capitalist courts. The public political context of '#MeToo', plus the left's commitments to tailing liberal feminism more generally, has produced a tendency for opponents to explain these abuses by insufficient *feminism* of the groups involved, which has then enabled the apparatus clique to defend their practices by accusing their opponents of 'identity politics'. The IMT has not been exempt from such cases.¹⁰

This is a partial truth, but a deeply misleading one, because it fails to grasp that the abuses and the inability to deal with them are the product of the *bureaucratic-centralist political regimes of the groups* mimicking capitalist managerialism.

Theory

The third element is the claim that "We stand firmly on the solid foundation of Marxist theory and the philosophy of dialectical materialism." This, too, is badly affected by vagueness. Pretty much all Marxists would claim to use 'dialectical materialist' (or perhaps 'dialectical-historical materialist') reasoning. But what they *mean* by that varies very widely indeed. I argued years ago (in 2008) that parties have to be founded on political programmes, not on philosophical commitments, because it is in the nature of philosophical commitments that, being grounded on reflection rather than on *praxis*, a political organisation grounded on philosophical commitments will inevitably involve the personality cult of some individual.¹¹

In the case of the IMT-RCI, the commitment is *presumably* to Ted Grant's and Alan Woods' 1995 book *Reason in revolt* (repeatedly reprinted since), which treats Engels' posthumously published draft, *Dialectics of nature*, as dogma. If so, to "stand firmly on ... the philosophy of dialectical materialism" would involve commitment to a bunch of at best debatable claims about physics.

The RCP and RCI are committed to building a 'party' based on theoretical claims rather than on a political platform: that is, a sect in the utopian-socialist style. The point is reflected in the document *How communists are preparing for power in Britain* at point 13:

The iron core of our Party is the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. It's the highest responsibility of every Party member to perpetually study, conquer and apply these ideas, with a particular focus on the ideas and methods of Lenin in 2024.

The general principle that party members should self-educate (and, as the section goes on, organise education) is sound. But the specification here is not to *education*, which develops the participant's ability to think critically and decide between alternative views, but to *training* in the ideas of the great men of 1844-1940 as a dogma. And "the ideas of Lenin" here means, in reality, the standard Trotskyist narrative of the ideas of Lenin, without any attention to critiques that have been offered of this narrative - for example by Lars T Lih in his *Lenin rediscovered* (2006) and subsequent publications. Again, it may be that Lih's historical arguments and those of other critics of the standard Trotskyist narrative are wrong. But to the extent that SA-RCP members are trained in *ignoring* these arguments, they become unable to *answer* them.

The *Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist Party* develops the point further in Article IV.ii:

Membership requires a serious commitment to study the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, including the lessons of the first four congresses of the Communist International and the founding congress of the Fourth International, which have been built upon over many decades by our predecessor organisations in one unbroken thread.

The "lessons" of the first four congresses of Comintern is a vague idea. In contrast, the International Left Opposition 1933 Preconference referred to "essential principles" of the first four congresses - and proceeded to list these, and to spell out in 11 points principles that the ILO promoted, as against the fifth and sixth congresses.¹² They would then have accepted that there were also "lessons" - negative ones - from the fifth to seventh congresses. The "one unbroken thread" is, of course, nonsense. There is no *institutional* continuity, since the institutions of the Fourth International founded in 1938 broke down in 1940-44, and the institutions reconstructed in 1944-45 are considered to be problematic by comrades from the 'Grantite' tradition. The claim is, in reality, of *theoretical* continuity of the old 1944 RCP majority tendency through the *individual* Ted Grant and his associates in the 1950s-60s.

Personal

This *personalistic* idea of the "unbroken thread" is also reflected in the preamble to the *Constitution*:

... this constitution is no more than a skeleton. The internal life of the RCP comes from its political ideas, which are grounded in Marxist theory. The *only* guarantee of a healthy party is the political and moral authority of the leadership, a solid cadre base, and an active and politically developed membership that is capable of thinking for itself. These things can only be achieved through a long period of collective work, education and experience. That, and not any formal set of rules, is the foundation of our party.

In reality there is *no* guarantee of a "healthy party". And the weight given to the "political and moral authority of the leadership" in this skeleton constitution can be contrasted with principle no11 of the 1933 ILO principles mentioned above:

Recognition of party democracy not only in words but also in fact; ruthless condemnation of

the Stalinist plebiscitary regime (the rule of usurpers, gagging the thought and the will of the party, deliberate suppression of information from the party, etc).

Or Trotsky's 1931 comment on the crisis in the German Left Opposition:

Naturally, as soon as it became necessary, the Bolshevik central committee could give orders. But subordination to the committee was possible only because the absolute loyalty of the central committee toward every member of the party was well known, as well as the constant readiness of the leadership to hand over every serious dispute for consideration by the party.¹³

The Grant tendency - *Militant* from 1964 - claimed that the superiority of Grant's theoretical ideas, producing the "unbroken thread", meant that the tendency was not, unlike the rest of the Trotskyist left, subject to splintering. As soon as serious issues broke out in 1991, this proved to be false. The Taaffeite majority could not countenance a prolonged faction struggle with Grant and his co-thinkers and engaged in all the usual "Stalinist plebiscitary regime" behaviours. *Both* sides have subsequently experienced a series of splits, with oppositions repeatedly complaining of the same bureaucratic-centralist methods.¹⁴ The underlying problem is that a group based on *theory and philosophy* cannot be a party, but can only be a personality cult.

Dictatorship

The IMT-RCI stands for communism. Very good. How is this concretised? Under the heading, 'What are we fighting for?', the *Manifesto* says:

In essence, the aims of the communists are the same as those of the workers in general. We stand for the complete elimination of hunger and of homelessness; for guaranteed work in good conditions; for the drastic reduction of the working week and the conquest of free time; for guaranteed, high-quality healthcare and education; for an end to imperialism and war; and for an end to the insane destruction of our planet.

But we point out that, under conditions of capitalist crisis, these aims can only be achieved through an implacable struggle, and that this can only ultimately be successful when it leads to the expropriation of the bankers and capitalists. It was for this reason that Trotsky developed the idea of transitional demands ... The communists fight for the total emancipation of the working class, for freedom from oppression and agony of toil. This can only be achieved by the destruction of the bourgeois state, the expropriation of the means of production and the introduction of socialist planning under democratic workers' control and management.

What follows is a commonplace Trotskyist discussion of the idea of "transitional demands".

There are three problems. Two I have already mentioned. The first is that there is no clarity about the implications of the *global material division of labour*. For example, in 2020 the UK imported 46% of the food it consumed.¹⁵ These imports were not paid for by material exports: "The trade in goods deficit widened by £1.4 billion to £49.9 billion in quarter four 2023, while the trade in services surplus

is estimated to have narrowed by £4.8 billion to £34.9 billion." The balance of payments for the quarter was negative at £21.18 billion.¹⁶ In essence, the gap was borrowed.

The result is that a revolutionary regime in the UK alone would be starved by 'sanctions' far more rapidly than regimes in countries that have smaller industrial and larger agricultural sectors. But the converse is that the countries that can survive blockade lack the industrial capabilities ... The working class could take *Europe as a whole* out of the capitalist world order, but not any individual European country.

Secondly, there is no clarity about the relation of a workers' regime to the middle classes. We are invited to imagine that the "expropriation of the bankers and capitalists" leads immediately to a regime of socialist planning. But suppose that we take power in Europe as a whole - or *a fortiori* in any continent outside Europe - the question of the correct relationship of a workers' regime to small businesses and farmers will inevitably be posed.

The *Manifesto* hand-waves away this question. The disastrous experience of forced collectivisation is attributed simply to 'Stalinism'. Under the heading, 'Stalinism versus Bolshevism', this is said to be "a horrible, bureaucratic and totalitarian caricature that bore no relation to the regime of workers' democracy established by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1917", and that "Stalin carried out a political counterrevolution against Bolshevism, basing himself on a privileged caste of officials that rose to power in a period of the ebb of the revolution following Lenin's death." This is personality-cult reasoning - a negative personality cult of Stalin set against a positive personality cult of Lenin.

There is no mention of the rise of the bureaucracy in Lenin's time, of his 1921 characterisation of soviet Russia as "a workers' state with bureaucratic distortions",¹⁷ or the history narrated in Moshe Lewin's 1969 book, *Lenin's last struggle*. There is no discussion of the severe difficulties in relations with the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie that led to the 1921 New Economic Policy.

It is connected to this that the IMT-RCI can offer no accounting for the debates of the Russian communists about economic policy and relations with the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie in the period between Lenin's disablement by his second stroke in December 1922 and the police coups within the party to exclude the left wing in late 1927, and the right wing in early 1929, which inaugurated the actual regime of 'Stalinism'.

The third issue, which is related, is: what is "democratic workers' control and management"? The personality-cult reasoning that treats Soviet history of the 1920s as a simple story of good Lenin - bad Stalin *cannot answer this question*, because the Russian communist leadership broke with workers' control in favour of 'one-man management' in industry in 1919,¹⁸ and moved away from the sovereignty of soviet democracy as a principle with the theorisation of the dictatorship of the proletariat as necessarily taking the form of the dictatorship of the party at the Second Congress of Comintern in July 1920.¹⁹

The IMT-RCI offers no critique of decisions taken in *Lenin's time*, nor even the level of explicit critique of the institutional forms of bureaucratic-centralism offered by Trotsky in 1929 in *Third International after Lenin* or by the ILO in 1933 in the passage quoted

above. In this context, we have to understand the IMT-RCI's "offer" on what counts as "democratic workers' control and management" as *actually* meaning a regime like the internal regime of the IMT organisations - which is, in essence, the same as the internal regimes of the SWP, SPEW, and so on.

For all the denunciations of Stalinism in the *Manifesto*, this offer is actually - Stalinism, with Alan Woods as a 'little Stalin' like Gerry Healy, Tony Cliff, Pierre Lambert, Nahuel Moreno, James Robertson, David North, Bob Avakian, Aravindan Balakrishnan, and so on and on ●

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Notes

1. By doing so they have *probably* - at least on paper - overtaken their former co-thinkers in the Socialist Party in England and Wales, but so far remain behind the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and substantially behind the Socialist Workers Party. The figures are from: (SA-RCP) *The Communist* No4, supplement, subhead '7 weeks'; (UK population) www.worldometers.info/world-population/uk-population; (Labour Party membership) www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/labour-membership-gaza-green-policies-b2521064.html; (CPB and SWP) 'Delusions of "official optimism"' *Weekly Worker* March 21 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1483/delusions-of-official-optimism).
2. www.marxist.com/manifesto-of-the-revolutionary-communist-international.htm.
3. 'Delusions of "official optimism"' *Weekly Worker* March 21 (see note 1).
4. There is a useful overview at www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/30/political-correctness-how-the-right-invented-phantom-enemy-donald-trump.
5. See my series, as follows: 'Intersectionality is a dead end', *Weekly Worker* June 7 2018 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1206/intersectionality-is-a-dead-end); 'Race and class', June 21 2018 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1208/race-and-class); 'Mistaken versions of Maoism', June 28 2018 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1209/mistaken-versions-of-maoism); 'Getting beyond capitalism', July 5 2018 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1210/getting-beyond-capitalism); and the more general 'Dead end of intersectionality' August 2 2018 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1214/dead-end-of-intersectionality), and 'Intersectionalism, the highest stage of western Stalinism?' *Critique* Vol 46, pp541-558 (2018). Though these articles are just me, nobody has offered explicit criticism of the *historical* claims made there.
6. I argue this point in relation to the 'trans rights' question in 'Effective collectivity is key' *Weekly Worker* March 2 2023 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1432/effective-collectivity-is-key).
7. L Trotsky's *The Third International after Lenin* [1929], New York 1970, pp147-60.
8. D Lazare, 'Not equality to compete' *Weekly Worker* January 19 2023 usefully covers the background of the workers' movement's positions (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1426/not-equality-to-compete).
9. communist.red/scotland-tory-culture-wars-wont-wash.
10. SWP: references to articles by Ben Lewis and Paul Demarty can be found in my article, 'Workers' movement: Bureaucratic "justice" and dealing with sex assault cases' *Weekly Worker* April 18 2013 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/958/workers-movement-bureaucratic-justice-and-dealing-). On the US ISO see M Macnair, 'Transparency and solidarity' *Weekly Worker* April 4 2019 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1245/transparency-and-solidarity); 'Full-timers and "cadre"' April 25 2019 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1248/full-timers-and-cadre). On the IMT see cosmonautmag.com/2023/12/statement-on-the-events-in-canada.
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15. www.gov.uk/government/statistics/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2021/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2021-theme-2-uk-food-supply-sources.
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ECONOMICS

Regulation has failed

Gambling and swindling on a colossal scale. Hedge funds and bitcoin exchanges should be closed down, demands **Michael Roberts**

Last week, Sam Bankman-Fried was sentenced to 25 years in prison. He ran the highly successful FTX bitcoin hedge fund that supposedly made millions for his clients. But Friedman was exposed and convicted of stealing \$8 billion from his FTX customers. He was found to have siphoned billions in customer funds into FTX's sister hedge fund, Alameda Research, to keep it solvent and line his pockets with clients' money.

Friedman lived the good life, spending more than \$200 million in Bahamas real estate and in speculative investments. The Manhattan US attorney Damian Williams said after the conviction:

Sam Bankman-Fried perpetrated one of the biggest financial frauds in American history - a multibillion-dollar scheme designed to make him the king of crypto - but, while the cryptocurrency industry might be new and the players like Sam Bankman-Fried¹ might be new, this kind of corruption is as old as time. This case has always been about lying, cheating and stealing and we have no patience for it.

Currently bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies have been experiencing a massive rise in price. Supposedly, they have now escaped their image of involving fraudsters, scams and wild speculation to join the 'respectable part' of the financial world. The Friedman case has shown that to be a joke - along with a succession of other such 'Friedmans' over the last decade of the rise of crypto.

I wrote on blockchain technology and the crypto craze several years ago.² I argued then that, although bitcoin supposedly aims at reducing transaction costs in internet payments and completely eliminating the need for financial intermediaries like banks, I doubted that such digital currencies could replace existing currencies and become widely used in daily transactions - as their proponents forecast.

Money in modern capitalism is no longer just a commodity like gold, but instead is 'fiat currency', either in coins or notes, or now mostly in credits in banks. Such fiat currencies are accepted because they are issued by 'fiat' by governments and central banks and are subject to regulation. In contrast, bitcoin - conceived by an anonymous and mysterious programmer, Satoshi Nakamoto, just over a decade ago - is not localised to a particular region or country, nor is it intended for use in a particular virtual economy. Because of its decentralised nature, its circulation is largely beyond the reach of direct regulation or monetary policy and oversight that has traditionally been enforced in some manner with localised private monies and e-money.

Now for technology enthusiasts (and also for those who want to build a world out of the control of state machines and regulatory authorities) this all sounded exciting. Maybe communities and people could make transactions without the diktat of corrupt governments, and control their income and wealth away from the authorities - it might even be the embryo of a post-capitalist world without states. (!)



Bitcoin mining: another capitalist scam

Such futurist hopes have been dashed. Bitcoin's value is not backed by any government guarantees, by definition. It is backed just by 'code', and the consensus that exists among its key 'miners' and holders. As with fiat currencies, where there is no physical commodity that has intrinsic value in the labour time to produce it, the cryptocurrency depends on the trust of the users. And that trust varies with its price, relative to a state-controlled fiat currency like the dollar. Its price is measured in dollars or in what is called a 'stable coin' tied to the dollar. Indeed, while the crypto craze has exploded, the US dollar has entrenched itself ever more firmly as the world's premier currency (67% of all settlements, followed by the other fiat currencies, the euro, the yen and yuan).

Fictitious

The price of bitcoin measured in fiat currencies like the dollar has violently fluctuated, but more recently has rocketed to stratospheric heights, as financial assets shoot up to record highs in the expectation of falling interest rates and economic recovery. Indeed, for that very reason, cryptocurrencies are no closer to achieving acceptance as an everyday means of exchange.

So far, its main use has been for speculation. It has become yet another form of what Marx called "fictitious capital" - a financial fiction for real value. The Friedman case shows that nothing has changed

from when Marx wrote about

a new financial aristocracy, a new variety of parasites in the shape of promoters, speculators and simply nominal directors; a whole system of swindling and cheating by means of corporation promotion, stock issuance, and stock speculation.³

With the rise of fictitious capital, he said,

All standards of measurement, all excuses more or less still justified under capitalist production, disappear since property here exists in the form of stock, its movement and transfer become purely a result of gambling on the stock exchange, where the little fish are swallowed by the sharks and the lambs by the stock-exchange wolves.

The nature of cryptocurrency culture was summed up by a firm led by Lord Hammond, a former UK finance minister, sponsoring a party to promote crypto where guests were served sushi off two scantily clad models.

Finance capital is ever-ingenious in inventing new ways of speculation and swindles. In the last 20 years, 'financial fictions' have been increasingly digitalised.⁴ High-frequency financial transactions have been superseded by digital coding. But these technological developments have mainly been used to increase speculation in the financial casino, leaving regulators behind in the wash.

Rather than protecting investors from these predatory crypto schemes, financial regulators and enforcers have only stepped in when "it was time to pick up the pieces and comb through the rubble of millions of people's shattered investments".⁵ Politicians funded by crypto companies have helped to block regulation: the US Congress has been deadlocked on bill after bill, as industry interests pressure them to codify the current state of lax regulation with carve-outs and loopholes: "The crypto industry argues this will allow for continued 'innovation' - despite little innovation to date from the sector, aside from finding new and inventive ways to scam people out of their money."⁶

Yet again, regulation has failed to stop financial speculation, crashes and swindles:

Regulators and lawmakers have failed to make any changes to proactively protect the public, while allowing crypto firms to advertise and recruit new customers who seem far more likely to wind up as victims of yet another collapse as they are to become the next crypto-millionaires. How many people will have to lose how much money before we stop believing the lies from an industry that has preyed on people's trust and hopes for financial miracles, only to dash them on the ground in failure after failure?⁷

Back to Marx here:

The two characteristics immanent in the credit system are, on the one hand, to develop the incentive of capitalist production, from enrichment through exploitation of the labour of others, to the purest and most colossal form of gambling and swindling.⁸

So the finance sector carries on just as before, engaging in speculation and regulators cannot and do not stop them.

The answer is not regulation (before or after the event), but the banning of fictitious capital investment. Close down hedge funds, bitcoin exchanges and exchange trade funding. Instead, banking should be a public service for households and small companies in order to take deposits and make loans - not funding for a massive financial casino where criminals and swindlers gamble away our livelihoods ●

Michael Roberts blogs at thenextrecession.wordpress.com

Notes

1. See www.theguardian.com/business/sam-bankman-fried.
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TURKEY



Kurdish freedom movement

Delight and rising hopes

Esen Uslu highlights the economics and politics behind the huge defeat suffered by Erdoğan's electoral bloc and the opportunities that have opened up

After an unequal and bitter campaign led personally by president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey went to the polls on March 31 to elect local mayors, councils and neighbourhood heads, and the results came early into the night.

Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its election allies lost their position as the leading political coalition across the country, and the Republican People's Party (CHP) emerged as the winner in the major urban centres. The results created elation amongst the left, the Kurdish freedom movement and the secular-liberal milieu - many were delighted and raised hopes for the possible changes that might follow.

Kurdistan

In some districts in Kurdistan thousands of security personnel and serving soldiers were forced to change their domiciles to enable them to vote, and they were taken to the polls on special buses with instructions on how to vote, in an attempt to alter the balance against the Kurdish freedom movement, and that succeeded in preventing the election of some candidates from the People's Equality and Democracy Party (DEM - the current guise of the Kurdish freedom movement's political wing).

But, despite those efforts, DEM successfully swept across the Kurdish provinces. It won three metropolitan cities, including Diyarbakir, Mardin and Van, as well as 58 other cities and 10 large towns. The appointed administrators of the central government in all those councils were ousted.

However, the elected mayor of Van, DEM's Abdullah Zeydan, a former MP for Hakkâri province, was declared ineligible after his election on the grounds of a last-minute quasi-legal administrative intervention. In 2016, in a trial on trumped-up charges, he had been convicted and jailed, together with Selahattin Demirtaş, a leader of the pro-Kurdish Peoples Democratic Party (HDP). They shared the same cell until 2022, when Zeydan was released and the restrictions on his civil rights removed.

Before the elections he applied to the Supreme Council of Elections and after a thorough examination it approved his candidacy. But on March 29, just five minutes before the end of the working day, the ministry of justice objected to the decision to remove restrictions on his civil rights, and claimed he should be ineligible. At the time the minister of justice was campaigning for the AKP candidate in Istanbul - that is Turkish democracy in operation in Kurdistan for you.

Despite that, two days later the

election went ahead with Zeydan on the ballot paper and he was overwhelmingly elected with 245,573 votes. But the ministry then applied to the provincial election board, which promptly annulled his election. It declared that the second-placed candidate, the AKP's Abdulahat Arvas - who won less than half of Zeydan's votes, with just 120,147 - should be declared mayor of Van!

Response

Meanwhile, the Islamist-nationalist, anti-Kurdish bloc led by Erdoğan has already presented its response to its local election defeat in terms of bombs and cold steel. Two major air operations were launched in the occupied Kurdish region of Iraq and allegedly many Kurdish guerrillas were killed. And now the foreign minister, Hakan Fidan, together with the head of the national intelligence organisation (MIT), are on a tour of the USA to garner support for further military action in both Iraqi and Syrian Kurdistan.

However, despite the bravado of the power bloc, it has already started to crumble. The Islamist Kurds and the Islamists on the right wing of the AKP had previously split and formed their own party, the YRP (New Prosperity Party), which supported the Erdoğan-led coalition during the 2023 presidential elections. But in the local elections they issued a statement declaring they would only support the AKP if it met three conditions: the export trade to Israel should stop forthwith; the AN/TYP-2 radar, which is part of the THAAD missile system deployed at the Kürecik airforce base since 2012, should be removed; and pensions should be raised to the level of the minimum wage. When no such guarantees were forthcoming, the YRP stood independently and won more than six percent of the vote nationwide. Most notably it picked up almost 39% of the vote in Urfa mayoral election, ousting the sitting AKP candidate.

Those three unaccepted conditions will surely continue to mar the Erdoğan power bloc in the coming period. So long as the Gaza tragedy continues, along with Erdoğan's chummy relationship with Benjamin Netanyahu, Erdoğan will remain under attack by Turkey's rightwing Islamists. His efforts to satisfy the Biden administration to obtain US support, along with his track record in the Nato expansion saga, will also remain under attack.

On the economic front, Erdoğan's hands have largely been tied, now that the 'hot money' inflow has stopped - foreign debt has skyrocketed, while rampant inflation has eroded the welfare of large sections of society. Meanwhile, the economic programme pursued by the AKP government - as dictated by the World Bank - does not leave any scope at all for the type of populist spending spree Erdoğan engaged in before the 2023 presidential elections.

The sad thing is that neither the CHP nor other smaller left parties have lifted a finger on those issues. The CHP's campaign rhetoric was focused on putting an end to one-man rule, to be replaced with a 'merit-based' bureaucracy, and supporting a 'rational' economic policy. Such a lack of vision does not bode well for the future of the opposition. In fact the crumbling power bloc propping up Erdoğan may reconstitute itself as a strong force to avoid the currently expected defeat in the 2028 presidential elections - which may be called early.

So once more it is clear that the problem of democracy in Turkey is more and more dependent on the working class. Unless it can mobilise to organise, and lead the modern and traditional petty bourgeoisie, around a programme which meets the aspirations of the Kurdish people, the opportunities created by the AKP's defeat in the local elections will remain unfulfilled ●

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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War on the airwaves

Nation shall speak unto nation. Yassamine Mather looks at the truths, half-truths and outright lies being broadcast to Iranians and asks who was behind the stabbing of Pouria Zeraati

News agencies reported on March 29 the attack on Pouria Zeraati, a presenter on Iran International TV (or, as many Iranians call it, 'Mossad TV' - such unofficial renaming, as we shall see, is happening across the political spectrum). Zeraati was stabbed four times outside his home in a quiet London suburb but did not suffer life-threatening injuries. By the next day he was being photographed smiling from his hospital bed.

The British media were quick to blame the Islamic Republic and, despite the denials by the country's embassy in London, it is possible that, given the alleged speedy departure of the two assailants from the UK, they were connected one way or another with the regime. However, I have my doubts.

For a start the Islamic Republic is trying to keep a low profile after the very serious diplomatic threats that came from the United States. So it is unlikely that the regime sanctioned such a high-profile attack. Secondly, if Iran had been behind the attack, Zeraati would almost certainly not have survived - as has been the case with many other victims of the Islamic Republic's terror outside its borders - unless, that is, the intention was to send a none too subtle warning about the station's broadcast content.

Having said that, the channel's relentless support for Israeli operations in Gaza could itself explain why other Islamic individuals or groups might have been behind the attack. In the last six months, the station's coverage of the war in Gaza have been unrelentingly in support of the Israeli Defence Forces and, given repeated comments in the Israeli paper *Ha'aretz* about the connections between Mossad and Iran International TV, it could be that journalists from the station are simply easy targets for agents of the Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRCG) seeking revenge for the systematic assassination of fellow members by Israeli drones and missiles in Syria and Lebanon.

Adam Baillie, a spokesperson for IITV, told BBC Radio 4's *Today*: "Along with our colleagues at BBC Persian, Iran International has been under threat, very heavy threats, for the last 18 months since the IRGC said 'we're coming for you', which they have consistently repeated."

Pouria Zeraati himself is very keen to demonstrate his pro-Israeli stance - not just on the TV programmes he hosts, where he has had unprecedented access to IDF commanders since October 7, but also in his tweets. In the last few days, he has proudly boasted of getting a phone call from Ron Dermer, Israel's minister of strategic affairs and advisor to the prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, condemning the attack on him and emphasising that freedom-loving Iranians and the people of Israel are engaged in a war against a common enemy.



Amidst the Zionist mob: Iranian royalists

As someone who has been on the receiving end of the Islamic Republic's threats and violence, my immediate reaction is to condemn all such attacks. However, in addition to my doubts about the involvement of Iranian state forces, we currently live in a time of unprecedented violence in the Middle East. Over 32,000 Palestinians have died, tens of thousands of bodies remain under rubble, hundreds of thousands face famine.

War crimes

Zeraati and the other journalists who, from the safety of London studios, have played such an active role in defending what is in reality Israeli genocide in Gaza should expect condemnation by millions - not just in the global south, but also throughout the west, where a very high percentage of the population is outraged by the Zionist state's war crimes.

This Iran International TV station and indeed Persian broadcasts from the UK and other western countries have an audience. And almost because the shah's regime and now the Islamic Republic are paranoid about them, a lot of people are inclined to believe them.

Recently BBC Persian celebrated its 80th anniversary and, according to Julia Harris, parliamentary liaison manager at BBC World Service, it has "a weekly audience of over 20 million". She claims it is "one of the

BBC's most strategically important language services" and is the second largest in terms of staff numbers.

It is true that, in the absence of press freedom both under the shah and under the current theocracy, many people listened to BBC Persian radio and now watch BBC Persian TV for more reliable news than the constant stream of crude, unbelievable and often totally boring propaganda coming from Iranian state media outlets.

However, there are most certainly 'divergent views' about BBC Persian's 'impartiality' - especially in the midst of political upsurges and wars. It is after all dependent on the World Service budget which is regulated by the UK foreign office. Having said that, academic research into the channel's 80-year history seems to show journalists and editors have a level of independence, unlike Persian TV channels financed by other states.

According to Massoumeh Torfeh, an LSE academic, writing for *Al Jazeera* in 2017,

Documents of the British foreign office reveal how in December 1940, when BBC's Persian radio first came on air, they were part of the British strategy to counter Nazi propaganda. The broadcasts in Persian included texts written by British intelligence directly targeting the then shah of Iran, Reza Pahlavi, who was suspected

of supporting Adolf Hitler's expansionist plans in Asia. The broadcasts, which are said to have led to the downfall of Reza Shah, criticised his "dictatorial" methods and advocated republicanism.¹

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the BBC played its role in mocking and undermining prime minister Mohammad Mosaddegh, who, to much popular acclaim, wanted to nationalise Iran's oil and bring about democratic change. However as the mass demonstrations and protests against the shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, gained momentum, BBC Persian reported what was going on more objectively. Otherwise it would have lost all trust from its audience. It is well known that the shah constantly complained about BBC reporting in meetings with the British ambassador, Antony Parsons.

The shah later made the ridiculous accusation that the BBC actually instigated the revolution in 1979 and to this day many Iranian royalists continue to blame the BBC for the uprising that overthrew the shah's regime, labelling the station 'Ayatollah BBC'.

According to a paper published by Massoumeh Torfeh and Annabelle Sreberny,

In January 2009, the foreign office released - under the 30-year rule - many documents about the last year of the revolution. They, and other documents in the BBC Written Archive, allow for serious scrutiny of the complicated relationship between the FO and the BBC about Iran ... While BBCPS, as all of the World Service, is financed by the foreign office as part of British long-term strategic goals in the region, BBC journalism did not always go the way the foreign office might have preferred. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that the BBC didn't always play the paymaster's tune.²

None of this stopped the Islamic Republic's antagonism towards the broadcaster, blaming it for "exaggerating" popular protests against it.

Unbiased news?

Given Iranians' thirst for uncensored news, several other countries have followed the lead of the BBC in setting up Persian language outlets. The German-based Radio Deutsche Welle has a Farsi programme and, in addition to Voice of America, there is Radio Free Iran - based in Prague, but financed by the US state department.

Then in 2010 a 'privately' run TV station, Manoto, was launched in London. Initially, it was mainly an entertainment channel, with programmes based on popular UK and US talent shows and musical events, but, after gaining a level of

popularity, the station increased its news and current affairs outputs. This had a clear pro-monarchy slant and at times showed an unbelievable ignorance of basic history. On one occasion, two of its reporters, who were in Russia covering a sporting event, claimed on air that "Marx and Engels" (sic) had lived in Moscow when the Soviet Union was in power!

Since the station refused to disclose its sources of funding, it was accused of being backed by Israel and Saudi Arabia. Manoto TV abruptly announced in late 2023 that it was closing down because of "financial difficulties" and indeed stopped broadcasting in January 2024.

Meanwhile, yet another TV station started up in London in 2017: Iran International. It offered huge salaries to lure BBC and Manoto TV presenters and editors. Allegations were made that the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, was the station's main financial backer. Indeed from 2017 to early 2023, some Iranians called the station 'Bin Salman TV'. Things changed when in March 2023 the accord signed between Iran and Saudi Arabia ended a seven-year conflict between the two countries.

It is assumed that, as part of the deal, Saudi Arabia looked to transfer the TV station to new backers. Given its clear pro-Israeli, pro-royalist line of the last 12 months (Iran's monarchists are pro-Israel and are often seen in pro-Israel protests in Europe and US), given comments made by former and current Mossad officials to *Ha'aretz* about the channel's output, given the closure of Manoto TV, it is likely that finance comes from Israel to further its propaganda war against Iran's Islamic Republic.

The secrecy around the channel's accounts and funding makes it impossible to follow the exact provenance of its astronomical outgoings - it pays at least three times the amount of usual broadcasting salaries. Yet inspection of the accounts of the station's parent company, Volant, which is registered in the UK, show ridiculously low figures for income and expenditure - below £100,000!

Since October 7 2023, the station has done its utmost to blame the Israeli genocide in Gaza on Hamas, while also condemning Iran's role, exactly in line with Netanyahu's narrative. As I have written before, no doubt Iran International TV has played a significant role in reducing support for the Palestinians among its Persian-speaking audience inside and outside Iran.

For Israel that would be money well spent ●

Notes

1. www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2017/10/30/what-is-behind-irans-war-on-the-bbc.
2. eprints.soas.ac.uk/15701/1/The-BBC-Persian-Service-and-the-Islamic-Revolution-of-1979.pdf.