

# weekly **Worker**



**Third period Bennism: George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain opposes Labour, not Labourism**

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Towards a mass Communist Party

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## DEBATING WITH THE **OEHLERITES**

## LETTERS



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

## Sparts

Listening to the debate between the CPGB (PCC) and Workers Hammer (Britain) - affectionately known as Workers Hamster - I realised that this, of course, should be a debate about election tactics *inside the same communist organisation*.

For the CPGB this would be no problem, but of course, the Sparts - as orthodox Cannonite Trotskyists - insist on *agreement* from top to bottom of programme, strategy and tactics, sealed inside internal debate away from the prying eyes of the working class. Unity, for them, means sect agreement, debate restricted to ordained acolytes, with sterile dogma delivered to the masses on tablets of stone. A dead end for the working class.

The fight for communist unity isn't a kumbaya non-aggression pact around 'abstract ideas'. The fight for communist unity is the unrelenting struggle for a consistent, democratic communist programme - a concrete strategic plan. Organisational and programmatic questions are directly connected. The Sparts do not understand this. That was obvious in the debate.

It was therefore unfortunate that Mike Macnair started off by 'defending the third and fourth Congresses of the Comintern'. This played straight into the Sparts' comfort zone - discussing holy text devoid of context.

I was surprised as comrade Macnair regularly chastises this approach in his articles and his pamphlet *Revolutionary Strategy*.

The starting point needs to be the reality in front of us, informed by theory. In most advanced capitalist countries the ideas of socialism and communism are absent as mass forces and there exists no organised communist party to educate and organise the working class to fight for its interests. A far cry from 1920, when both existed.

The Spart position, to limit its 'united front work' to Tusc, is bizarre. In reality it is a smash and grab raid. The united front tactic must apply across the entire labour movement and engage with workers voting for people like Jeremy Corbyn, George Galloway and Zarah Sultana. It must reach people voting Labour in general.

In the absence of being able to pose the question of who should rule society (despite the Sparts' abstract "Workers must rule"), engaging with mass illusions in Labourism is essential and central.

On what grounds is a boycottist approach to Labour viable? The crimes of Arthur Henderson as World War I Labour leader are ones that Sir Keir Starmer merely aspires to - and even in the aftermath of Labour betrayal in 1914-18, communists fought to engage with and win workers voting Labour.

While the CPGB strategy of raising the flag of communism and the need for a communist party is essential, this seems abstract, passive and not enough. Neither is a blank cheque for Labour in seats where there are no socialist candidates.

In the absence of standing its own candidates, communists need to urge active intervention in the election by supporting socialist candidates where they exist, sure, but also campaigning around a minimum platform of working-class defence to draw out divisions

in the labour movement around concrete questions of the day. What that platform should be is a tactical question designed to maximise mass political clarity and highlight the need for communism to solve the myriad crises of capitalism.

**Martin Greenfield**  
Australia

## Empire robbery

A new report by the Institute for Economic Affairs claims to show that "colonialism and the slave trade were, at best, minor factors in Britain's prosperity and may have been net loss makers". The IEA's goal is to refute an "increasingly prominent anti-capitalist narrative", which sees the empire as the basis of Britain's wealth; it seeks to prove, instead, that there was no such 'original sin'.

I intend to prove that, regardless of which interpretation is true - whether the empire was a major or minor contributor to the British economy - the same moral judgment holds: the empire was a monstrous crime. It was a crime that flourished alongside capitalism, and the two cannot easily be separated.

Let us suppose that the empire was indispensable for Britain's prosperity. It follows that Britain was enriched by the robbery and brutalisation of millions; that industrialisation and the improvements in living standards that accompanied it were bought with the blood of poor, often destitute, innocents around the world. The evil of the crime is manifest.

Now suppose that the empire was a minor aid to Britain's prosperity: that it delivered concentrated benefits to a few, but imposed costs and burdens on the rest of society. The evil of the crime is not in the least diminished; on the contrary, the evil is even greater than that of the former interpretation. If the empire was essential for economic development, then the crime was at least accompanied by benefits to a large number of people in Britain (that does not, of course, justify the crime). But if the empire only brought minor benefits to a small class to mitigate its evils, then the crime was even worse. The IEA's report, therefore, delivers a more damning judgment of British imperialism than those 'radicals' who maintain that the empire was crucial for growing Britain's wealth.

I confess that I do not see why this should cause us to respect and admire capitalism more than we did previously. If it was the IEA's aim to rid capitalism of the moral stain of imperialism, it has failed dismally.

**Talal Hangari**  
London

## Stop genocide

Hamas's leader has released a statement endorsing a ceasefire deal negotiated through intermediaries with the United States and Israel. However, the Israelis have not yet accepted the proposal. This means that, while the people of Rafah celebrate their apparent deliverance at the 11th hour, nothing is set in stone yet.

The details of the ceasefire have not currently been released, so it is only possible to speculate about its contents. While this is a major development in the Israeli genocide against the Gazan people, no-one should be under any illusions. Until the Israel Occupation Forces withdraw from Gaza, the war will continue. At the same time, the families of hostages have made

demands for acceptance of the ceasefire.

We should note:

(1) Israel is a democratic country - for its Jewish citizens. While Netanyahu has made major steps to overturn Israeli democracy, he still has to contend with a loud and boisterous public. The interests of the Israeli opposition and the interests of the resistance may intersect, and it may be possible to divide Israeli society against itself. Guerrilla movements don't have to win: they just have to not lose.

(2) The political tasks in the United States remain the same: keep pressuring Biden and the Democrats to demand a ceasefire. Demand that America stop supplying Israel with weapons, which may already be happening in some areas (ammunition).

(3) If Israel does invade Rafah, we have to raise hell in every western national, district and local seat of government. We must make the world stop and the heavens shake to prevent this genocide, and we have to begin to establish a global, internet-based socialist party that can unite all struggles into one revolutionary united front!

**Ian Hartman**  
USA

## Vicious enemy

Tony Greenstein really is a most poisonous creature. I am sorry to be so blunt, but his foul, bitter, personal and vicious attacks on both Unite the Union and its elected general secretary, Sharon Graham, are really completely and utterly beyond any sort of pale ('My Zionist general secretary', April 25).

I was personally absolutely delighted when Sharon Graham was elected general secretary of Unite in 2021. Like very many others, I was very fearful that rightwinger (and Starmer-backed) Gerrard Coyne would be elected. Sharon has more than fulfilled and delivered on her promise and has provided outstanding leadership and as a woman a fantastic role model for female members of all trade unions.

The notion that she is "apolitical" is a complete nonsense. She is an advocate of real working class power being built up from workplaces and through organisation and militancy. She is absolutely not in the pocket of the Parliamentary Labour Party, is not offering cosy chats and cups of tea with Keir Starmer, but is perfectly well aware that effective trade unionism has a necessary political dimension, including in the parliamentary arena, and is prepared to exercise Unite's power and influence in the interests of our members and the wider working class.

It seems on planet Greenstein that anyone who doesn't say or do exactly what he says they should or when they should, with regard to Palestine and Gaza more specifically, is automatically some sort of running dog of the most reactionary sections of pro-Zionist imperialism and by implication (often stated more explicitly) somehow in favour of the appalling war and consequences being conducted by the Israeli state against the Palestinian people.

It should hardly need saying, but this is the polar opposite of the stated views, policies and actions of Unite the Union (and indeed I would expect every labour movement organisation), its elected general secretary, Sharon Graham, and its elected leadership at all levels, up to and including the national

executive council.

It is one thing to criticise the union and its leadership for specific wordings of statements, specific actions or absence of specific wordings and actions, etc. But to then assert from these issues of perhaps nuance, timings and tactics that Unite and its elected leadership are acting as (or are) agents of the most extreme reactionary factions of pro-Zionist imperialism is completely, totally and utterly unacceptable.

To claim that Unite and any of its elected leadership bodies are somehow in any way in favour of the genocidal onslaught and 'ethnic cleansing' (a far too sanitised expression) of the Palestinian people is a disgusting and repulsive total pack of lies.

To even contemplate, let alone put in writing, such a pile of sheer garbage and filth into a two-page article just shows how twisted, bitter and hostile Greenstein has become and not only how far from the labour movement he now operates, but the fact that he is clearly now acting as a vicious and active enemy of the labour movement, using Unite as some sort of stalking horse.

Apparently oblivious to the fact that Unite has a membership of 1.2 million, Greenstein is just one poisonous individual. With just one flick of its collective finger, Unite could ensure Greenstein ceased to exist (metaphorically speaking, of course).

While some will point to Greenstein's alleged pro-Palestinian activism as some form of mitigation, I think that - by his whole personality and his disgraceful and disgusting behaviour, words and conduct - he does far, far more damage in total to the Palestinian cause. One might be tempted to ask, in whose real interests is Greenstein acting?

Just thinking more broadly and hopefully a bit more positively, why can't the *Weekly Worker* publish significant articles on Palestine/Israel from the *Palestinian* perspective - and, ideally, from those within the secular, Marxist, communist traditions within the Palestinian resistance and national liberation movement, of which there are vast quantities of material available? This would be much more in line with the *Weekly Worker's* stated aims of being in favour of Marxism, national liberation and socialism, and an international communist movement.

Relying on Greenstein's personal bile and hatreds obviously should be stopped, while Moshé Machover, as an expatriate Israeli with a very specific and sectarian political history, provides a far too narrow and exclusionary take. He just repeats his ancient historical views over and over and over again, constantly claiming how many of his "predictions" turn out to be right, but in fact is just like the proverbial stopped clock: yes, occasionally right, but mostly simply wrong.

**Andrew Northall**  
Kettering

## Drug regulation

Humans have taken mind-altering drugs for thousands of years and will continue to do so.

The so-called 'war on drugs' has failed and led to organised crime and South American drug cartels making hundreds of billions of dollars each year. Far better to have the state legally regulate all drugs. Due to economies of scale, this would put all illegal drug factories out of business.

Cannabis should be made available from independent shops licensed by local authorities, as happens in Canada and 15 states in the USA. Cocaine and ecstasy should be made available from specially licensed pharmacies. Heroin should be made available to registered addicts through doctor-led clinics, as happens in Switzerland.

The Office for National Statistics estimates that the UK cannabis market comes to £10 billion a year. A 10% sales tax on the sale of cannabis through independent shops would bring in £1 billion a year to the treasury. This money could then be spent on public services and on a public health education campaign about drugs aimed at teenagers.

By the state legally regulating all drugs, billions of pounds each year would be taken out of the hands of petty dealers and organised crime.

**John Smithee**  
Cambridgeshire

## Racist mayor

Kim McGuinness, Labour's elected mayor of the North East, has won by cheating. On polling day, she put the 2019 general election result on the front pages of certain local newspapers, from which it was then widely shared on social media, as if it were an opinion poll result. On that false basis, she claimed that only she could "beat the Tories". She has won on a lie by paid journalists who were in fact cogs in the rightwing Labour machine.

Add that to the lie that was the media blackout of McGuinness's racism - coverage of which would have disqualified a candidate of any other faction. In post-war Britain, McGuinness's victory is the far right's biggest ever. It now controls an area with a population larger than that of 13 European territories that the United Kingdom recognised as sovereign states. If any of those fell under the rule of someone like McGuinness, then there would rightly be international uproar. There should be international uproar in this case too (the Labour right in the north-east of England is also a byword for good, old-fashioned corruption). I shall be watching that space, but who else will be?

As a mixed-race person, I am now in mortal danger lest Mayor McGuinness, or one of her staff or supporters, mistake me for a 'gypsy'. The same threat applies to anyone else who is not a pure-blood Northern European and who sets foot in County Durham, Northumberland, Newcastle upon Tyne, Sunderland, Gateshead, North Tyneside, or South Tyneside. The campaign against McGuinness starts now.

I am a candidate for mayor of the North East Mayoral Combined Authority in 2028 - or whenever we could get her out before that.

**David Lindsay**  
Lanchester

## European action

In his recent article Mike Macnair writes: "To deal with the issues of inequality, to plan for health service provision, for housing, for measures to deal with human-induced climate change, and so on - all these need common action of the working class on a European scale to break out of the coercive power of global capital and the capitalist states" ('Foibles, fantasies and failure', May 2).

Well said. But where is our common European programme, and what steps should we be taking now to formulate one?

**Chris Gray**  
London

# IRELAND

## Migrants as a means of diversion

We must reject the scapegoating of asylum-seekers. Anne McShane looks at the facts and figures and issues a call for full citizenship rights and unity

The ongoing row between two governments over responsibility for asylum-seekers reveals a cynical weaponisation of migration politics.

The Irish government is complaining that the passing of the Safety of Rwanda Act by the UK parliament on April 22 has had serious negative repercussions on its ability to control its borders. In other words, Ireland has become an alternative destination for unwanted migrants. Rishi Sunak responded with a disdainful rebuff. The UK will not be accepting the return of any of those who escaped the prospect of forced transfer to Rwanda. In fact he boasted that it showed the success of the legislation as a deterrent.

The Irish government, however, continues to argue about the unfairness, with its Department of Justice announcing that 91% of asylum-seekers - or 6,136 of the 6,739 who applied for protection this year - did so at its offices, rather than at a port or airport. Justice minister Helen McEntee claimed an 80% increase in the numbers entering from the UK across the Northern Ireland border. She pledged that her department would engage more police to counter the influx.

Tánaiste (deputy prime minister) Micheál Martin was later forced into an embarrassing climbdown and admitted her claim was not based on any actual data and that there would not be any physical checkpoints erected. Brexit has already stymied the Irish government in returning those who had previously sought refugee status in the UK. Now the Rwanda Act raises the stakes still higher, with Sunak making it clear that he will not cooperate with any attempt to send asylum-seekers back to Britain.

Meanwhile in Ireland the scaremongering over asylum-seekers has intensified as never before. Local and European elections are dominated by debate on how to prevent the 'mass influx'. Of course, 6,739 asylum-seekers in four months is hardly a deluge in a country of five million. Populist rhetoric deliberately obscures the reality and makes the scapegoat of migrants after fleeing war, persecution and economic hardship. There have been protests outside 'direct provision' centres used to house asylum-seekers, led and encouraged by politicians from right across the spectrum. Sinn Féin has been posting videos all over social media showing how vehemently it opposes open borders. SF president Mary Lou MacDonald has committed to a 'strong and well organised' immigration system, with 'efficient deportations' of those deemed ineligible for asylum.

The question of immigration is deliberately obscured by both governing and opposition parties anxious for the votes of those inclined to blame migrants for the lack of housing and other shortages. It is true that Ireland's population is now higher than at any point in the last 170 years, but that is not because of us being 'swamped' by asylum-seekers. And it most certainly does not mean that Ireland is 'full' - an idiotic claim made by some anti-migrant protestors. The question is actually a great deal more nuanced.

In the 1980s 85,000 more people left Ireland than those who arrived. This was in keeping with the tradition of outward migration, where people were expected to leave in search of work - emigration also



Dublin: anti-migrant riot

being an option for those unable to bear the dominance of the Catholic church and its social and religious oppression. This pattern reversed in 1996 during the Celtic Tiger boom, and the simultaneous decline of the church and rise of secularism. The last years of that decade saw 60,000 more arriving than leaving.

In 1996 Ireland first set up a legislative framework for asylum-seekers. There were 1,179 applicants that year. The upward trend continued into the next decade, with the return home of those who had left in the 1980s and the enlargement of the EU meaning the arrival of mainly Polish migrants in 2004. In 2010 this pattern reversed with the economic crisis. Between 2010 and 2014 there was strong negative migration, with 110,000 more people leaving than arriving.

The media was dominated at the time by scenes of young people heading off in their droves for Canada and Australia, and tearful scenes in airports. Then in 2015, with the arrival of US multinationals and the development of tourism providing job opportunities, inward migration increased again and has remained positive since, albeit variable. For instance Covid-19 produced a drop in net inward migration from 44,700 to 21,800 people in 2020-21.<sup>1</sup>

2022 and the war in Ukraine meant a very significant increase in migrants, with an estimated 70,000 Ukrainians arriving in the year ending in April 2023. These refugees were quite rightly given the same right to work and benefits as Irish citizens, unlike other asylum-seekers. Inward migration rose significantly overall, with 141,600 migrants - a 31% increase over the previous year. However, emigration also continued to increase, with 64,000 leaving in 2022-23 - a 14% increase from the previous year. This resulted in net migration of 77,600 - a 50% increase from the year before.

### Claims

The number of asylum claims has also risen and fallen since 1996. In 2022 there were 13,651 asylum applications and in 2023 13,277. This compares to an overall figure of 107,800 migrants in 2022 and 141,600 in 2023. Thus, while the number seeking asylum has risen from 2,649 in 2021, and is still increasing (perhaps because of the Rwanda Act), it is still a very small number when compared with overall migration.

The key problem is the isolation of asylum-seekers from the rest of the population. If they are lucky enough to be housed, it is in direct-provision centres, where they are crowded into dormitories (and can be sleeping in a room with 14 others). Since 2022 disused hotels have been replaced

by tents - not a good situation in the long, cold and wet Irish winter. And since 2021 the number not given any accommodation has risen dramatically.

In April there were more than 1,700 male asylum-seekers sleeping on the streets. In a bid to provide safety and security for themselves, these men erected tents around the International Protection Office in Mount Street. The camp was forcibly cleared by Dublin City Council and the men, including teenagers, were forced onto buses and taken outside the city, where they were given tents and told to pitch anywhere in the Dublin mountains. They had no toilets or running water. Some returned to join new asylum-seekers and set up camp along Dublin's Royal Canal.

Disease has spread among those sleeping out, and conditions are unhygienic. But, rather than express sympathy and demand proper housing, many politicians rage about the 'eye sore', as the tourist season gets underway. Fianna Fáil TDs demand that they be removed out of sight and put into camps in border areas. Hide them away - always a popular option for Irish politicians.

We are told that the problem is competition for (unavailable) housing. However, the facts say otherwise - the Central Statistics Office reported that there were 163,433 vacant homes as of the April 2022 census, not including another 70,000 or so vacant holiday homes. Yet homelessness is a major problem in Ireland. In March 2024 there were 13,866 people seeking emergency accommodation - not including asylum-seekers, who are not entitled to this option. Hidden homelessness, sleeping on couches or in cramped conditions affects a quarter of the population. House prices are astronomical, and the rental market is dominated by private landlords, whose interests are well represented at the top. While the government announces 'economic miracles', the working class is paying the price.

There was record employment in 2023, with unemployment standing at a mere 4.5% in January 2024. But asylum-seekers are still denied work permits for the first six months. More recently there has even been a clampdown on that, with applicants still being refused work permits. Those from designated 'safe countries', such as South Africa, are processed with speed and without legal assistance, and then left to languish for years in the appeal process, without any access to legal employment. And even those who are granted asylum cannot get housing and are being evicted from direct-provision centres.

It is the government which is making a problem out of this small section of migrants - using them as a scapegoat in order to divert the frustration of working class people. It is the government which has isolated them - refusing to allow them any legally recognised role in society.

We therefore need to point to the real problem - capitalism and its political representatives in the Dáil. The challenge for the left is to demand full citizenship rights for all migrants and take up the struggle so that they become part of our movement - join trade unions and working class political parties and fight in a united way for the interests of our class ●

### Notes

1. www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2023.

## ACTION

### Don't put Britain on the nuclear front line

**Saturday May 11:** Day of action with events across Britain. The return of US nuclear weapons makes the UK part of the US war machine and a target in any nuclear war. Protest to stop these bombs. Organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: [cnduk.org/dont-put-britain-on-the-nuclear-front-line-day-of-action](http://cnduk.org/dont-put-britain-on-the-nuclear-front-line-day-of-action).

### With banners held high

**Saturday May 11, 10.30am:** March and labour movement festival. Assemble Smyth Street, Wakefield WF1. A full day of trade union and community festival activities, this year marking 40 years since the miners' strike. Organised by With Banners Held High: [www.facebook.com/events/182181264957544](http://www.facebook.com/events/182181264957544).

### Race, class and revolution

**Saturday May 11, 11am to 5pm:** Day school, Birkbeck, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1. Showcasing Marxism as an important tool in the fight against racism, colonialism and imperialism. Entrance £10 (£5). Organised by Socialist Workers Party: [www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1013959033633846](http://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1013959033633846).

### Library open day

**Saturday May 11, 11am to 3pm:** Working Class Movement Library, 51 Crescent, Salford M5. Includes hands-on access to material in the upcoming 'Here we stand: the art of international solidarity' exhibition. Entrance free. Organised by Working Class Movement Library: [www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=825783256256885](http://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=825783256256885).

### Boycott Eurovision - protest for Palestine

**Saturday May 11, 7pm:** Protest outside BBC, Media City UK, Salford M50. Condemn the hypocrisy of Eurovision - there can be no party with a state committing apartheid and genocide. Organised by Greater Manchester Stop the War Coalition: [www.facebook.com/events/390782647190021](http://www.facebook.com/events/390782647190021).

### Stop the war in Gaza

**Tuesday May 14, 6.30pm:** Public meeting, SET Woolwich, Riverside House, Beresford Street, London SE18. Speakers include Lindsey German (Stop the War) and Andrew Feinstein. Organised by Stop the War Greenwich: [www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=10159527247741423](http://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=10159527247741423).

### What it means to be human

**Tuesday May 14, 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: [www.facebook.com/events/743344194549972](http://www.facebook.com/events/743344194549972).

### Communist Culture Club

**Thursday May 16, 7pm:** Fortnightly online meeting. The Russian avant-garde with Roger Silverman. Also mass public singing in the early Industrial Workers of the World. Organised by Labour Left Alliance and Why Marx?: [www.whymarx.com/sessions](http://www.whymarx.com/sessions).

### Nakba 76: end the genocide, stop arming Israel

**Saturday May 18, 12 noon:** National demonstration. Assemble BBC, Portland Place, London W1. 76th anniversary of the ethnic cleansing that saw 750,000 Palestinians driven into exile. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [palestinecampaign.org/events](http://palestinecampaign.org/events).

### Free Julian Assange

**Monday May 20, from 8.30am:** Protest outside Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London WC2. If the extradition is allowed, moves to transfer him to the USA could begin immediately. Defend press freedom - journalism is not a crime. Organised by Free Assange: [freeassange.org](http://freeassange.org).

### Revolutionary theory and practice

**Thursday May 23, 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](http://www.whymarx.com/sessions).

### A very British conspiracy - the Shrewsbury 24

**Thursday May 23, 6.30pm:** Book event, Working Class Movement Library, 51 Crescent, Salford M5. Eileen Turnbull discusses her book, *A very British conspiracy - the Shrewsbury 24 and the campaign for justice*. Registration free. Organised by Working Class Movement Library: [www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=819158960252648](http://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=819158960252648).

### A walk through radical Clerkenwell

**Thursday May 30, 6.30pm:** Assemble at Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. David Rosenberg leads a stroll through the streets of Clerkenwell. Ticket required (free). Includes light refreshments and a display on local radical history. Organised by Marx Memorial Library and Islington Council: [www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/463](http://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/event/463).

### War, peace and Palestine - trade union issues

**Saturday June 8, 10.30am to 4.30pm:** Trade union conference, Resource for London, 356 Holloway Road, London N7. Facing up to the warmongers and sharing experiences of building pro-Palestine initiatives in unions and workplaces. Tickets £10. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk/events](http://www.stopwar.org.uk/events).

### 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.

# SPARTACISTS

# Debating with Oehlerites

With the general election fast approaching, Eddie Ford reports on the Online Communist Forum debate. While the Spartacist League fetishises opposition to the person of Sir Keir Starmer and throws in its lot with the Tusc opportunist lash-up, the CPGB emphasises communist unity as the only serious route towards mass work

The very fact that there was an open discussion on the question of the 2024 general election is to be welcomed. We look forward to more debates between ourselves and the Spartacist League (and, of course, others on the left).

The CPGB has long advocated that the left should stand as a single, coherent force in elections, but has always insisted that this needs to be done on the basis of fighting for a genuine Communist Party (to make the point once again, while we have the party name, we are not a party; we are an organisation fighting for a party, mainly using polemics and propaganda).

During her opening contribution to the May 5 Online Communist Forum, Eibhlin McColgan said the Spartacist League (the British section of the International Communist League) supports the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and thinks the CPGB should do the same.

Two necessary points: the Spartacist League has over recent years undergone a death and now a rebirth. Having denounced their founder leader, James Robertson - he ran the organisation as a private fiefdom and had a thoroughly debauched reputation - there was a period of rectification and reconsideration, after which the Sparts arose from the ashes. As for Tusc, it was established in 2010 at the initiative of the Socialist Party in England and Wales with a view to building a Labour Party mark two (the real thing having been declared a bourgeois party, similar in essence to the US Democrats). The CPGB never had any illusions in such a hopeless project, but, mainly to engage with the SPEW comrades, we applied to affiliate and were duly turned down because we had "insufficient social weight" (as if any organisation on the left has any *real* social weight).

Anyway, comrade McColgan went on to say that the tasks facing communists in the forthcoming general election consists of "two inseparable goals" - working class unity and communist hegemony. This is essential if the working class is to "defend its interests against the British imperialist rulers". She went on to claim that "the Tories are finished" and "the country is in ruins." How working class unity around Tusc's famished and thoroughly economic programme can be achieved went unexplained. So did establishing communist hegemony through Tusc - a loose federal conglomeration which gives every affiliate veto rights over political and organisational matters.

Nonetheless, according to comrade McColgan, the various left leaderships tell voters to support a Keir Starmer government, despite him being widely hated because of his complicity with the genocide in Gaza and his promises to stick to Tory austerity. What she meant by this is that "various left leaderships", including doubtless the CPGB, call upon voters to support Labour when the only other choice on offer is the Tories, Lib Dems, Reform UK, the Greens, etc. Except in Holborn and St Pancras there is no Sir Keir on the ballot paper. So the Spartacist slogan 'No vote for Starmer' serves to promote the already pernicious



Following in the footsteps of Hugo Oehler and the Oehlerites

influence of presidentialism in British politics.

Hence, she issued a challenge to the CPGB - does it think communism is "relevant" to this situation? For her, the CPGB "shrugs its shoulders" at the election - maybe it will vote for Tusc, or George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain, or perhaps the Communist Party of Britain, which called for a "Starmer vote" in the local elections. Maybe the CPGB will call for a Labour vote in the general election. For comrade McColgan, this boils down to whether the CPGB "will cross class lines or not" - perhaps it will side with the working class, or perhaps not.

We shall certainly call for a vote for the best placed left candidates, maybe even the lone Spartacist, in the general election. But we certainly do not think that there is any principle involved in voting Labour. Voting is a tactical question. Those 'Trotskyists' who elevate *not* voting Labour into a principle clearly stand in the tradition of Hugo Oehler. He broke with Leon Trotsky in 1937 because he could not countenance entry into social democratic parties - instead Oehler briefly invested his hopes in Spain's POUM.

As for crossing 'class lines', is Labour just another bourgeois party? When did it stop being a bourgeois workers' party? It is also worth adding that, while the Bolsheviks strove to stand independently before working class voters, they were quite prepared for their delegates in the tsarist curia system to do deals with other parties, including voting for them - eg Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries and Constitutional

Democrats. Did they 'cross class lines'? Well, yes, but rightly so, because it boosted Bolshevik numbers in the duma and, yes, citing the lesser evil, reduced the number of Black Hundreds (ie, the far right).

Comrade McColgan argued that SL joined Tusc because "it offers the possibility of a united working class opposition" to Starmer, and aims with its one candidate to wage the best campaign possible "to show in practice" that Tusc's appeasement of the Labour left is a barrier to unity. Therefore, we were told, SL will "draw a sharp line" against imperialism and Starmer - something which is "unacceptable" to SPEW because that would be unacceptable to Jeremy Corbyn, left Labour MPs like Zarah Sultana, and suchlike.

Indeed, declared comrade McColgan. Tusc's own programme undermines it as a working class opposition to Starmer, as it is "not even putting up a fight for its own united front". So she thinks, rightly, that Tusc is absolutely toothless, as it "passively accepts" that George Galloway, for example, should be able to operate on his own turf - leaving the opposition to Starmer weak and divided. In conclusion, comrade McColgan returned to her original challenge to the CPGB - is communism relevant to the coming election or is it "an abstract idea to be preserved for better times ahead"? She urged the CPGB to "think again" and join the battle for working class unity.

### Main difference

In his opening contribution, Mike Macnair from the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee, explained that

there were "substantial differences" between the two organisations. Firstly, the CPGB stands on the basis of the third and fourth congresses of Comintern in relation to the united front. Ultimately, Labour remains a bourgeois workers' party despite being very rightwing. In reality, when it was founded in 1900, Labour was a liberal imperialist party just like when it was refounded in 1918 as the party of the war - in the process setting the stage for excluding the communists.

Nonetheless, communists doggedly argued that fighting for working class unity requires the pursuit of the united front - including from above with rightwing leaders of the labour movement. We do not simply regard them as "social fascists": ie, as untouchables. The SL's claim that voting Labour is crossing class lines, or to vote for anybody who would back a Starmer government crosses class lines, argued comrade Macnair, is what Leon Trotsky dismissed as the "third period" theory of Comintern. It saw the world - despite the abundant evidence to the contrary - as standing on the precipice of mass radicalisation and social convulsion and, therefore, the necessity of direct, revolutionary assault.

Secondly, in relation to Tusc, yes - the CPGB was excluded. But, more recently, Galloway's WPB was refused entry too because every affiliate has a veto - sadly not something Tusc got rid of when they lost support from the trade union bureaucrats. In fact, it is something that SPEW still *promises* the trade union bureaucrats as a safety guarantee. The upshot being that what Tusc proposes is, in one respect, *worse* than the Labour Party, as it would be reconstituted more unambiguously on the dictatorship of the *trade union bureaucracy*, and hence would be more unambiguously created as a *bourgeois* workers' party than the existing one currently led by Sir Keir.

Okay, said comrade Macnair, in the current concrete situation we are willing to say that Tusc candidates represent a left alternative to an extremely rightwing Labour Party. But the CPGB does not see the Tusc project in any way superior to the *Morning Star's* CPB standing in certain constituencies - or the WPB for that matter.

Yes, replying to the SL challenge, communism *is* relevant - by presenting a communist political programme, not by virtue of calling for a split with the Starmerites as the first task to be conducted. Then the question is: what elements of our programme are we attempting to insert into this election campaign?

Furthermore, as a logical extension, comrade Macnair stated that the question of communism poses breaking with the *method* of broad frontism and struggling for the unity of the communist left - meaning not necessarily only those who specifically call themselves communist. In that context, the Tusc regime with its economic programme and vetoes is by no means a vehicle for working class unity. Rather, it is a vehicle for what comrade Macnair called "third period Bernsteinism" - sectarian

purity politics are combined with sub-reformism. In fact, continued the comrade, the commitment to building a new Labour Party based on the trade union bureaucracy and a federalist structure means that Tusc is unambiguously *anti-communist*.

In summary, comrade Macnair said there was not a matter of a fundamental principle at stake. Rather, a debate around *tactics* between different left groups about how to promote the fundamental ideas of communism in an election dominated by the transition from capital's first eleven to the Labour second eleven. But, given that capital's second eleven remains also the dominant party of the working class, it is still necessary, to the extent that we can, to pursue a united front policy towards Labour - not just certain left groups.

### Nonplussed

As part of his presentation, SL's Vincent David hammered home the message that the task is quite simple because Starmer has drawn a clear class line - he hates anything to do with socialism, the working class, or Palestine. Thus, since the central task for comrade David is to build a working class opposition to Starmer, he was seemingly nonplussed by the idea that the CPGB might actually advocate a Labour vote "in the name" of Comintern's third and fourth congresses. No, said the comrade, the SL also stands with the early Comintern and you "cannot use Lenin to justify voting for Starmer".

Lenin understood that unity with the opportunists actually means subordinating the working class to their own national bourgeoisie and splitting the revolutionary unity of all countries. This sort of unity was catastrophic for the workers' movement, believed comrade David, just as unity with Starmer is catastrophic.

For the comrade, the fundamental lesson of Leninism is that communist unity can only be achieved through a "rupture with opportunism and centrism". Fast-forward to today's Britain - Lenin is still completely relevant. The CPB, which called for a Starmer vote in the local elections, has "many people" in leading trade union positions and is an integral part of the pro-capitalist bureaucracy. The Socialist Workers Party too has people in the leadership of the National Education Union and offers nothing but excuses for betrayals. It was the same with SPEW in Unite - comrade David saying their main activity "consists of maintaining a bloc" with Sharon Graham, describing her as an open supporter of Nato and Israel.

As a result, during last year's strike wave, he said, while the trade union bureaucracy was leading the struggle to defeat, these groups refused to oppose the bureaucrats in order to preserve their posts. It is this alliance between so-called communists and the labour bureaucracy, in the opinion of comrade David, that "directly ties" the working class to Starmer and the imperialist bourgeoisie.

Returning to the CPGB, comrade David mocked our perspective of communist unity with the other left groups - a single Communist Party

based on firm principle and freedom of debate. This is not communist unity, insisted the comrade, but unity with opportunists like Mick Lynch or Sharon Graham. It is a “complete repudiation” of Leninism and part of an open embrace of the social democratic Second International, which is “constantly praised” in the *Weekly Worker*. More damningly, for the comrade, the CPGB knows that all these left groups are opportunist - yet does not see that “breaking such alliances” is the central condition for real communist unity. What is that if not the very illustration of opportunism? If working class opposition to Starmer is not our “starting point”, then what is?

In his finishing remarks, Vincent David thought it was the task of communists to use the elections to advance the split with opportunism and split the left groups along class lines - for or against unity with the bureaucrats and Labourites? That is the question that SL poses to the left, especially the CPGB - urging it to “reorientate”.

## Last

In the last of the four opening contributions, Jack Conrad of the PCC said the main question is not a split with Starmer, let alone not voting Labour at the next general election. Instead, the two key strategic issues are the fight for a genuine Communist Party and breaking the working class from Labourism.

Comrade Vincent has quite rightly described SPEW as opportunist, said comrade Conrad - so in that sense SL is joining the opportunists by entering the Tusc project. In and of itself there is nothing wrong or unprincipled in doing that. We did apply to affiliate to Tusc but were rejected. The CPGB has also joined with SPEW in various organisations, such as the Socialist Alliance. But the crucial question is that when the CPGB acted alongside such opportunists, it was precisely to fight for *unity around communism* - certainly not who might or might not be the next prime minister.

No, we fight for communist unity around our minimum and maximum programme and the project of building a mass Communist Party which unites the advanced part of the working class and can realistically pursue the politics of manoeuvre in relationship to other classes and social strata. We do not demand agreement with every dot and comma: rather acceptance of the programme as the basis of unity in action.

What the SL comrades fail to see, comrade Conrad said, is that fighting for the unity of the existing left under the banner of a Communist Party inevitably involves splits. The idea that all we need to do is get chummy with SPEW's Hannah Sell, the SWP's Alex Callinicos or Counterfire's John Rees is a complete fallacy. We do not believe in ‘live and let live’. We want principled unity.

For example, if we look back at the history of the original CPGB, it came about as a result of a series of *splits and fusions*. There was the Communist Unity Group, which split from the Socialist Labour Party. We had the comrades who split from Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers' Socialist Federation. There was also, of course, the British Socialist Party, which split with Henry Hyndman. The notion that we want *communist unity* with the likes of Mick Lynch or Sharon Graham is just plain dumb. But we are committed to freedom of debate, yes, including the right to form public factions. Without that there can only be broad-frontist lowest-common-denominator politics, eg, Tusc, or yet another confessional sect headed by this or that labour dictator (eg, Tony Cliff,

Peter Taaffe, Gerry Healy, James Robertson, Alan Woods).

The SL comrades may say voting Labour is crossing class lines, said comrade Conrad. But it would be interesting to hear from them as to exactly *when* the Labour Party ceased to be a bourgeois workers' party - under Keir Starmer, Jeremy Corbyn, Gordon Brown or Tony Blair? The CPGB's assessment is that, while the class nature of Labour has always been under question, at this moment the contradictory nature of the Labour Party remains unresolved. In the view of Jack Conrad, it remains that “peculiar thing” - a workers' party in terms of its electoral base, trade union links and rank and file membership. But it always was and remains thoroughly bourgeois in terms of politics. After all, Labour tops joined the war cabinet during World War I. That did not stop the newly formed CPGB applying to affiliate or urging workers to elect a Labour government (with the full backing and support of Lenin).

## Wide ranging

After the four openings, there was a wide-ranging debate around numerous issues - only a few of which we can mention here due to space limitations.

Simon from the Spartacists said that Tusc is the “obvious vehicle” as a united front for left organisations not able to stand directly in elections. Labour is still a bourgeois workers' party, thought the comrade, and there are still people in Labour “who have hope” - but if there is no alternative, workers “will turn to worse” (presumably meaning the far right). Comrade Simon argued that what the Spartacists propose is not a third-period policy (it does not call anybody “social-fascist”) - but is trying to draw a class line against the capitalist misleaders of the working class. He pointed to the fact that Jack Conrad said that it would not be unprincipled to join Tusc, but also claimed that Tusc is “an alliance of opportunists on an opportunist basis” - how can these ideas be reconciled?

Alan Gibson of the Bolshevik Tendency addressed questions to both sides. On Tusc's ‘core policy platform’, he noted that the Spartacists disagree with it because it is left social-democratic - so will they call for votes for candidates who support the platform? In particular, the call for the restoration of full trade union rights for prison officers - he asked if this traditional Spartacist position to *oppose* the trade union organisation of prison officers has been abandoned (the Prison Officers Association, note, was once a Tusc affiliate). As for the CPGB, Mike Macnair argued that elections have to be used in an *agitational* way, but the CPGB is very clearly a propaganda group - how can it do agitation?

Propaganda, is, of course, defined as getting over many ideas to the few, while agitation is getting over one or a few ideas to the many (Georgi Plekhanov). Concretely in 1992, for example, the CPGB used its general election candidates to get over to the many, and not just in the four constituencies where we stood, that ‘Communism lives’. The Eurocommunists had liquidated the ‘official’ CPGB and the Soviet Union, and other such regimes in eastern Europe, had collapsed. There was bourgeois triumphalism. In terms of press, publicity and public recognition, we were more than pleased with the results.

Comrade Gibson also agreed with the CPGB that the question of how to vote among left candidates is a tactical one, but do candidates stand for the independent interests of the working class? For him, that rules out the Labour Party in this election.

Tina Becker, a CPGB supporter,

said she had attended the Tusc conference. Eibhlin McColgan was the best speaker and had argued effectively against the ridiculous veto. But, in November 2023, the Spartacists were calling for Labour lefts to “stay and fight” in the Labour Party; now a vote for Labour would be unprincipled - what, she asked, has qualitatively changed? Comrade Becker thought we should pursue a conditional support tactic, putting questions to Labour lefts like Zarah Sultana and so on. However, she disagreed with Mike Macnair on the Workers Party of Britain. While the WPB might be better on key questions like imperialism, she emphasised that George Galloway “has put a lot of effort” into associating the organisation with his own conservative, chauvinist politics.

Meanwhile, Gerry Downing of Socialist Fight was pleased that the Spartacists had taken a “left turn” by positively engaging with the rest of the left - it was also a “left turn” that they had now repudiated their previous social-chauvinist stand on the Malvinas/Falklands war. Conrad and Macnair are correct, argued comrade Downing, that Labour remains a bourgeois workers' party - hence we should vote for Labour against the Tories where there is no viable left opposition, calling it “unconditional but very critical support”. Conversely, *in relation to the left*, comrade Downing believed that what is posed is unconditional but critical support for any substantial opposition to Labour - saying that “self-identified or subjective” Trotskyists are not the same thing as Stalinists or social democrats.

Eibhlin McColgan briefly came back to say that the discussion is not an “abstract discourse” about who to support. Starmer is about to become the most rightwing prime minister in Labour's history, and it is urgent to build an opposition to him. Mike Macnair countered this by questioning if Starmer is really qualitatively different from Arthur Henderson, who urged hundreds of thousands into the World War I mincing machine - or Jimmy Thomas who authorised the use of poison gas in Iraq.

Jim Nelson of the CPGB said it was important to argue against voting Green or Liberal Democrat, an idea some leftwingers are affected by - this is the context of calling for a Labour vote in the absence of a left alternative. The CPGB are not “simple unity-mongers”, asserted comrade Nelson - we argue for splits so far as necessary to *enable* principled unity. In his viewpoint, *Workers' Hammer's* slogan, “Dump Starmer to defend Palestine”, and the claim that “everyone hates Starmer” is a radically unrealistic judgment of the political situation. After all, on May 2 millions voted Labour in metro and local council elections ... and opinion polls put Labour some 20% ahead of the Tories. That is not the result of hatred of Sir Keir.

Returning to the debate, comrade Vincent David criticised the CPGB because it “works on abstractions” - the idea that Labour is a bourgeois workers' party is divorced from the political context in the country. A vote for Starmer is no better than voting Tory, as far as he was concerned. However much you may ridicule Tusc, it stands for no votes for Starmer. Contrary to the CPGB, there is no contradiction between “stay in and fight” in the Labour Party and “no votes for Starmer” - it is to build a working class opposition to Starmer, as he and Eibhlin McColgan had been saying.

Of course, the Spartacist League was nowhere to be seen in the 2015-20 class war which raged inside the Labour Party. The CPGB,

by contrast, through Labour Party Marxists, played a leading role in Labour Against the Witchhunt. And, though it rightly calls for Sir Keir and the pro-capitalist trade union misleadership to be “cleared out” of the Labour Party, that cannot possibly be achieved by adhering to a ‘don't touch in case you are infected’ purity politics. So the real abstraction here is the perspective of the new Spartacist League.

Because it supposedly does not draw a clear line against Starmer but aims for unity on the basis of a party programme, comrade David claimed, somewhat bizarrely, that the CPGB's project *is* Labourite. Quite how a principled communist programme is Labourite or social democratic remains a mystery left unexplained. Clearly the near crazy old polemical methods of James Robertson continue to cloud minds.

On the subject of Tusc, Alan Gibson mentioned that the Spartacists say that they constitute a revolutionary minority on the prison officers' issue. But will this be only a fight within Tusc, or will it be an open fight and refusal to call for a vote for those candidates who stand for prison officers to have trade union rights? Comrade Gibson castigated the whole Tusc ‘core platform’ as reformist rubbish - the Spartacists are reducing the entire problem of left Labourism, which *includes* Tusc, to the individual, Keir Starmer. A well aimed point.

For his part, Stan Keable of the CPGB spoke in favour of trade union rights - we fight for trade union rights not only for prison officers, but also for the police and soldiers - something that is heresy for some on the left. But the task is to *split* the state's armed forces, insisted comrade Keable - how else do we make revolution?

## Responses

In her summary, comrade McColgan said that the debate showed a misunderstanding about the united front. The question is how to undercut the pro-capitalist leaders of the workers' movement - hence, on Starmer, she once again urged the base of the Labour Party to throw him out. The CPGB, she maintained, thinks it is in the interest of the working class to have a Labour

government. Well it is certainly not in the interests of the working class to have another Tory government ... and there is absolutely no chance of a Tusc government in 2024 or of the Spartacists being junior coalition partners.

Comrade McColgan was convinced that there is mass hatred of Labour for its rightwing policies, saying that the “the issue is the same” as that argued by Lenin during World War I in works like *Imperialism and Socialism and war* (with Zinoviev). She concluded that there can be no working class unity with Labour MPs, because that would be unity with British imperialism against the working class.

Mike Macnair in his response described the Spartacist position as “classic ultra-leftism” of the sort attacked in Lenin's *Leftwing communism* - it mistakes the mood of a section of the advanced part of the class for the mood of the broad masses. Yes, there is hatred of Starmer expressed by hundreds of thousands on Palestine demonstrations, but *millions* are supporting Labour in elections. They are not doing so under the illusion that Labour will bring socialism, or that it defends the fully independent interests of the working class. The illusion is that Labour will *partially* defend workers' interests within the frame of the constitution and the nation; and that Labour is the trade unions' party and it is better to have its leader in Downing Street than another Tory.

Reiterating what he and Jack Conrad had said previously, comrade Macnair said the CPGB supports left candidates against Labour in this election. But Tusc is no better than the other left options - WPB, CPB, etc. It is explicitly a project to *repeat* the Labour Party experience with the same dominance of the trade union bureaucracy in place, making the same mistakes all over again.

The working class deserves a better future, concluded comrade Macnair on behalf of the CPGB ●

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The opening contributions to the debate can be viewed at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=99Q4BYsCGU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99Q4BYsCGU)

## Online Communist Forum



Sunday May 12 5pm  
**Elections, defections and expectations - political report from CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion**

Use this link to join meeting:  
[communistparty.co.uk/ocf-register](https://communistparty.co.uk/ocf-register)

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Labour Party Marxists: [www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk](https://www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk)  
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[Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk)

A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: [youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain](https://youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain)

## POLLS

# Local election barometer

Things are on course not for a hung parliament, but a thumping Labour majority. As for the left, apart from George Galloway's WPB, the results were statistically and politically almost irrelevant. **Mike Macnair** says the way forward lies with principled unity which will allow for effective mass work

On Monday May 6 *The Times* chose as its front-page headline 'UK heading for a hung parliament, says Sunak'. The basis of Rishi Sunak's claim (which has been extensively rubbished in the same issue of *The Times* itself, as well as elsewhere) is the analysis by Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher of what the vote share in these local elections would produce, if directly translated into parliamentary elections. Rallings and Thrasher have been producing analyses of this type after every England-wide set of local elections since the mid-1980s.<sup>1</sup>

Comments on the argument make the point that inferences from local election results to general elections are seriously problematic. In the first place, turnout in general elections is in recent years usually in the mid-60s percent,<sup>2</sup> while in local elections the mid-30s. But it has fallen further this year; for example, the Manchester ward turnouts were predominantly around 30%, but in a couple of cases down to 20%-21% and only in a few cases above 40%.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, the barriers to small parties and independents are much higher in parliamentary elections than in local elections. So the issue is posed as to how to analyse where 'independent' votes will go in a parliamentary election. In the present election, some independents were anti-war candidates - will the voters still vote for anti-war independents in a general election? Others were pro-car candidates (anti-emissions controls, against 'low traffic neighbourhoods' and 20mph speed limits), who will presumably return to voting Tory or perhaps go with 'Reform UK' in a general election.

Sunak is obviously clutching at straws for anything that might help Tory morale - their retaining the Teesside executive mayoralty has been bigged-up, as has the narrowness of their defeat in the Birmingham mayoralty. But the main burden of media commentary has been the disastrous character of the Tories' results, and this judgment is plainly correct.

What about the intervention of the left? Phil Burton-Cartledge, who has in the past analysed left election interventions on his blog, so far has not produced detail, but only a polemic.<sup>4</sup> The Workers Party of Britain stood in a limited number of wards, and has published the results: it has won four and achieved respectable minority results in the majority of the others.<sup>5</sup> The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition has stood in many more wards, but at the time of writing has not yet published the results.

It is worth looking at a couple of prominent mayoral results where left interventions were involved, as well as those in three very different localities: the London Assembly; Manchester City Council (where the WPB, Tusc and Communist Futures all stood); and Oxford City Council (a moderately sized town, where I happen to live, which also saw this year an (over)-ambitious attempt by Tusc to stand in several wards). Hopefully these examples will illustrate some issues regarding the elections.

## Mayors

Directly elected executive or metro mayors were introduced by the Blair government, starting with London in 2000. The form is an



Everything points to a Labour government headed by Sir Keir

Americanisation and an extension of the principle of monarchism or 'one-man management'. It was also supported by the Murdoch press in the expectation that, as in the US, it would give more political power to the corporate media barons. Further extensions have occurred since then, with central government leaning on local government to adopt the form.<sup>6</sup>

Trevor Phillips in *The Times* argues that "Mayors are the political disrupters we need" (May 6), meaning that they are as an institution anti-party. The reality is that directly elected executive mayors, together with all sorts of other cuts in local democracy (judicial review, central government intervention powers, police commissioners), lie behind the notorious recent incompetence of central government: by destroying local democratic political life, they tend to undercut the foundations of political life at the centre, restricting the political career to the passage through trainee and 'adviser' positions, to Renaissance-style court clique intrigues at the 'courts' of Blair, Cameron, Johnson ... the Tory descent into chaos, under Johnson and since his fall, *results from* the principle of the directly elected leader. The problem of court clique-style intrigues was already present in the London mayor's office under Ken Livingstone and Boris Johnson ...<sup>7</sup>

The Tories engaged in a good deal of hyping up regarding the prospects of their candidate in London, Susan Hall, but in the event there was a swing from Tory to Labour.<sup>8</sup> There was no left intervention in the election, but it is perhaps significant in relation to results elsewhere that the Greens (on just under 6% of the vote) were only 70 votes behind the third-placed Lib Dems.

In the West Midlands mayoral, Labour narrowly defeated the Tory incumbent. But it has been widely noticed that third-placed was independent pro-Palestine candidate Ahmed Yakoob with 69,621 votes (10.4%). The Green candidate (4.7%) was slightly behind Reform UK on 5.2%, but well ahead of the Lib Dem (1%).<sup>9</sup>

In July last year, Kevin Ovenden argued in the *Morning Star*: "There is now the possibility of a left independent - Jamie Driscoll in the north-east of England - winning a major mayoralty before the general election and a probable Starmer-led

government."<sup>10</sup> Driscoll did indeed stand, and achieved a respectable result: second-placed with 28.2%. But Ovenden was over-optimistic: Labour's Kim McGuinness, the sitting Police and Crime Commissioner, won with 41.3%.<sup>11</sup>

## London Assembly

The London Assembly is elected by a complex combination of a party list system plus constituency candidates. The *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain stood in the party list element, while candidates from the Socialist Party of Great Britain and Tusc stood in constituencies. The party list element was headed by Labour (38.4%), followed by the Tories (26.2%), Greens (11.6%), Lib Dems (8.7%) and Reform UK (5.9%). The CPB ranked 13th at 0.4% (10,915 votes) - an improvement on last time, when it obtained 0.3%.<sup>12</sup>

Among the constituency candidates, Labour took 10 seats, the Tories three and the Lib Dems one, with the Tories taking the 'white flight' areas of outer east London and the Lib Dems the outer south west, reflecting the Tory decline in Surrey.<sup>13</sup> Outside the one seat the Lib Dems won, the Greens tended, though not invariably, to outpoll them. On the left, the two SPGB candidates both came in last, with just one percent of the vote.

Among the Tusc candidates, in City and East Lois Austin came in 7th (after an independent) with 4,710 (2%); April Jacqueline Ashley in Croydon and Sutton was 6th with 2,766 (0.7%); Andy Walker in Havering & Redbridge was 7th with 2,145 (1.3%); and Nancy Taaffe in North East was 6th with 5,595 (2.7%). These results show Tusc polling in the same range as the SPGB, though ahead of the CPB.

## Manchester

In the Manchester City Council elections, the Labour Party took 29 seats, the Tories none, the Greens one, the Lib Dems one, and the WPB one. The Greens outpolled the Lib Dems in 27 seats, and the Lib Dems outpolled the Greens in four.<sup>14</sup>

The WPB, as already indicated, won one council seat of the six contested - Shabaz Sarwar in Longsight. Beyond this, Syed Ataur Rahman in Burnage came third with 707 votes (16.8%); Chowdhury Murtahin Billah in Fallowfield also came third with 331 (15.6%);

Muhammad Iqbal in Levenshulme came second with 1,200 (23.4%); Naznin Hussain in Rusholme was also second with 823 (22.1%); and Tanvir Marth in Whalley Range came third with 663 (16.4%).

Tusc and Communist Futures had much less success. Tusc only stood one candidate: Sam Hey came last with 81 votes (3%), although he was only 33 votes behind the Lib Dem candidate! Communist Futures stood three candidates, all of whom came in last, with around one percent. Credit to the comrades for a first attempt at electoral work that is a gesture, but not significantly worse than Tusc's results and slightly better in percentage terms than the CPB achieved in London.

## Oxford

Oxford offers a rather different picture. In this set of elections Labour took 10 seats, the Lib Dems five, the Greens four, and the recently created Independent Oxford Alliance - actually a pro-car campaign against LTNs and related initiatives - four, plus backing one successful candidate who stood simply as an independent.<sup>15</sup> It is possible that the Independent Oxford Alliance will morph in due course into a means for the Conservative Party to recover lost ground.

In one ward the Greens stood down in favour of one of the councillors who broke with Labour to become an Independent Socialist over the Gaza war (she lost to Labour, but got 13.6% of the vote). In the other wards, the Greens were ahead of the Lib Dems in 16 wards; the Lib Dems were ahead of the Greens in seven wards.

Tusc stood in nine wards, concentrated in East Oxford, where Labour holds the parliamentary seat. They agreed that the WPB, whose branch in Oxford was formed at the last possible time to nominate candidates, could take on one of the wards they had originally intended to contest. Tusc obtained significant votes in Blackbird Leys, where two seats were being elected and one of its candidates, with 52 votes, outpolled the Liberal Democrat and one of the Greens; and in Churchill ward, where the Tusc candidate outpolled the Liberal Democrat with 111 votes (10%). All the other Tusc candidates, as well as the WPB candidate, came last, with votes ranging between a high of 31 (WPB) and a low of 14.

## Lessons

What are we to learn from this? The areas I have discussed are areas of Labour strength, and it is noticeable that the Greens seem to be in process of superseding the Lib Dems as the 'non-Tory alternative to Labour' in such areas. In addition, the toxicity of the Tory 'brand' promotes various forms of small-C conservative independents - as it has in the past produced 'non-political' (Tory) clubs and 'moderate' (Tory) candidates.

What about the left? Phil Burton-Cartledge argues rightly that Tusc is a decidedly uninspiring project. But what he proposes as the alternative is to abandon SPEW's "narrow, Leninist view of themselves", since "their allies in Tusc, the rest of the labour movement, and so on are but foils for their grand ambitions", and go instead for a version of the 1960s-70s 'Liberal revival' through the example of Nadia Ditta: she came second in Southampton Bevois

ward with 848 votes (32%)<sup>16</sup> as a "community rooted campaigner who has and is likely to continue working her seat". It seems to have escaped comrade Burton-Cartledge's attention that the Greens' approach to local government has been much more ideological than the old 'Liberal revival' and present-day Lib Dem one.

Meanwhile, comrade Burton-Cartledge doubts whether we should "count George Galloway's 'Workers Party' as a leftwing organisation" (he is probably too young to remember the pre-Eurocommunist orthodox Stalinism to which Galloway's and the WPB's politics are close), and contends that the WPB is "giving the enemies of the labour movement another stick to beat us all with". This latter point underestimates the extent to which we are now past peak "equality and diversity" because of the close tie between this ideology and neoliberalism.

The WPB has been able to 'leverage' George Galloway's victory in the Rochdale by-election. It has the advantages of apparent novelty, for this reason. It is totally clear on its anti-war and anti-Nato line and, unlike Tusc (and equally unlike Communist Futures), it is a clear party project that new people can just join up to, not a coalition or a mere name.

The far left in general is blocked from real electoral effect by the Monty Python image of the Judean People's Front competing with the People's Front of Judea. Each group *imagines* that it radically outweighs the rest and fails because it does not: hence the generally poor performance. The path to progress does not lie through 'mass work' in elections (or in the Labour Party, or in trade unions), but through demanagerialisation to the possibility of unity, and from unity to the ability to do effective mass work ●

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## Notes

1. news.exeter.ac.uk/faculty-of-humanities-arts-and-social-sciences/esteemed-research-centre-which-predicts-election-results-now-part-of-the-university-of-exeter.
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DEBATE

# Third period Bennism

Should we support George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain in the coming general election? **Carla Roberts** gives her take on the politics, programme and perspectives

It was a strange decision for that usually shrewd political operator, George Galloway, to agree to sit down for a 90-minute interview with *Novara Media*, which in Galloway's view is very much part of the "woke chatterati" - and that a few days before the May 2 local elections. It is even stranger that he thought he should use an interview with this ostensibly leftwing media platform (it is all relative) to volunteer his very reactionary views on gays and what he calls "transmania". But it borders on the bizarre for Galloway to complain afterwards that he was somehow "stitched up".

Galloway now fumes that *Novara Media* had "assured me that they would not publish the interview until the Sunday after the local elections".<sup>1</sup> Which they stuck to. On May 1, they did, however, publish a short, now infamous, excerpt: "I don't want my kids to be taught certain things - for example, that gay relationships are exactly the same and as normal as a mum, a dad and the kids. I want my children to be taught that the normal thing in Britain is a mother, a father and a family."<sup>2</sup>

"Pulling out these edited quotes, partial snippets - that was misleading," he complains. He also walked out of an interview with *LBC Radio* after it played the excerpt, furiously complaining: "This is a clip of a clip. It is an edited clip of an edited clip", adding: "I have got a simple answer. Listen to the whole thing tonight."

Well, we did. And it does not make Galloway look any better. Quite the opposite. It transpires that Galloway in fact *volunteered* his obnoxious views to Aaron Bastani, proudly explaining: "I ain't no liberal, bruv. I have always had a more conservative mindset on social and moral issues than the rest of the left - perhaps even more now. The older you get, the more religious you get. You'll see," he teased.

And he certainly delivered. *Novara Media* did not even show the worst bits in the short clickbait video - the publication of which is, incidentally, an entirely normal thing for a mainstream media outlet to do. If Galloway had some kind of watertight agreement about the publication date, I am sure he would have shown it publicly. The key point is this: the short video was not edited to make it appear that he said something other than he did.

In the full version, while talking about Jeremy Corbyn, he suddenly says:

I've voted for gay marriage and the rest. But I don't want my children brought up to believe that men in frocks and all the transmania that's around - no, I don't want my children exposed to that. I think Jeremy is probably quite comfortable with that.

Galloway now claims: "I have never said gay people are not normal - that is deeply dishonest. I said normal in the meaning of 'typical'."<sup>3</sup> Actually, no, he did not - even though Bastani offered him that way out, Galloway kept repeating what he believes to be "the norm":

There have always been men who wanted to be women, and I treat them like I would like to be treated. But if you ask me to accept that,



George Galloway: long record of solidarity with Palestine

with his dick swinging, he could change next to my seven-year-old daughter, then the answer to that is no ... I am gay-friendly. I just don't want my kids to be taught that it is the same if you decide to take the direction of Adam and Steve, when the norm and the most happy and the most stable basis for society is mum, dad and the kids.

It would probably be too cheap a shot to mention at this point that having six children from four marriages does not sound like a particularly "stable" home life.

## Contradictions

But then Galloway is a man of many contradictions. He (and his many defenders on the left) complain that the short excerpt was meant to harm the electoral chances of the Workers Party of Britain by cutting out the bits where he explains:

I voted in favour of gay marriage and I was one of the few Labour MPs who voted to reduce the age of consent to 16 and not 18. That's what got me a Stonewall Award. But I am talking about kids here. Being in favour of gay marriage does not mean it should be promoted in schools.

Promoted in schools? Leaving aside that it is very questionable that there are indeed any teachers who actively 'promote' homosexuality rather than simply speak about it, it very much sounds like Gorgeous George mourns the repeal of Margaret Thatcher's infamous section 28 of the Local Government Act, which prohibited the "promotion of homosexuality" by local authorities.<sup>4</sup> Would he vote in favour, should it come up in parliament? We can only guess.

Ditto on the question of abortion: "I am absolutely against abortion, but I am not forcing my beliefs on anybody else and I think there should be free abortion for everybody," he told Bastani - with the caveat "up to three months, but not after that". It's a shame that Bastani did not push him on the fact that the current legislation allows for a woman to have an abortion up until week 24. Would he vote in favour of attempts to bring it down to three months? Probably.

He would "definitely vote against euthanasia", he says, because "I think god decides when you die". Again, Bastani unfortunately did not press him further on this ridiculous

point. What about the Iraq war then? The slaughter of the Palestinians? Is that really a god deciding who should die? Galloway would probably have said, 'No, that's different: that's man-made by politicians'. As is the fact, we would argue, that millions of people have to die in pain and agony because of a lack of investment in healthcare and medical advances.

Amazingly, Bastani also failed to ask him about his well-known, national chauvinist views on immigration (more on that below).

Why then did Galloway give such an interview, which he knew would inevitably lead to tons of criticism across the left? James Meadway (advisor of the treacherous John McDonnell during the Corbyn years) writes rather convincingly:

This is a calculated move. Galloway chose *Novara* to deliver this message because he wants a security lock against left joining WPB - he needs clarity on his strategy, which is to find the populist 'diagonal' between left and right and build an oppositional movement on that line.<sup>5</sup>

That looks, broadly, correct. Galloway wants to appeal to the soft pro-Corbyn left, yes, but does not want troublesome members of the hard left in the party challenging him. His experience with the 'Trotskyites' of the Socialist Workers Party in Respect will have cemented his views on that.

But he also wants to appeal to pro-Palestinian Muslims, many of whom hold socially conservative views. It is the issue of Gaza that currently allows the WPB to appeal successfully to both. But, once the plight of the Palestinians has been relegated to the inside pages again, this will become increasingly difficult. And it was, of course, the tension between those two sections which ultimately led to Respect's implosion.

## What programme?

That fault line is reflected in the programmatic output of the party. The WPB describes itself as "a socialist party" and its *Ten-point programme*<sup>6</sup> reads like the typical 'motherhood and apple pie'-type demands of much of the economic left, including Transform, Left Unity, For the Many, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, etc - it is broadly supportable.

But dig a bit deeper and it

gets more complicated. He might have separated from the Stalin-worshipping Brar family, who went their own way in November 2022, but the WPB still retains some of the stuff written by them: "We defend the achievements of the USSR, China, Cuba, etc"; and there is talk of the "positive historical legacy of the Soviet Union". No problem for Galloway - he is, after all, a typical representative of the 'soft left' of Labour national chauvinism with pro-Soviet leanings that existed in the post-war era.

Then there is the recently-published *Our Manifesto*<sup>7</sup>. It is very long - and it is highly problematic. For a start, there is no definition of socialism: only the platitude that "we are not utopian, nor are we bound by abstruse theory. We have a common-sense analysis and a practical mission. The Workers Party is committed to the redistribution of wealth and power in favour of working people." In other words typical British philistinism.

In his *Novara* interview, Galloway elaborated:

I'm not a worshipper of any dead Russians or dead Germans, but, if you want to personalise it, I'm a great admirer of Tony Benn, who I greatly loved. We want to replace the Labour Party in the way that the Labour Party replaced the Liberal Party - with a Bennite Labour Party.

The *Manifesto* is, accordingly, a very mixed bag. On the (very small) plus side, it describes the party as "radically democratic", stating that "the Crown is a problem" and that the monarchy should be abolished. It wants to do away with the House of Lords, but replace it with a chamber of "more regional, trades union and technical expert voices able to scrutinise legislation". It describes the party as pro-Palestinian and "unashamedly anti-imperialist" and says Britain should "leave Nato".

That is as good as it gets. The *Manifesto* goes to great length to show the WPB as "anti-woke", "anti-liberal" and sceptical that there is such a thing as climate change: "We will not be seduced by the more apocalyptic Green hysteria".

But the main tenor is national chauvinism. It moans about benefit scroungers:

We are one class but also one nation. While we do not and will not countenance able-bodied and mentally fit abusers of the system, we do think the good society [!] requires all of us to contribute to helping the least well off and disadvantaged. If this means reasonable and fair redistributive taxation of the wealthier elements in society, so be it.

We all suffer when it comes to scroungers, you see - or "mass migration", for that matter: "We offer a migration policy that reflects the anxiety felt among the working class about an influx of migrants which appears to be out of control" - ditto "escalating numbers of asylum-seekers". The solution:

We will make a regular calculation of the sustainable levels of migration ... Open mass migration strategies without these

measures will break society into identity wars and tribalism, no matter how much we would like it to be otherwise. We will resist them on behalf of British workers.

## Nationalism

The *Manifesto* mentions that "we are one nation" a staggering six times - the whole document is deeply nationalist and also a bit bonkers. It basically envisages the WPB running British capitalism (presumably calling that 'socialism'):

We will become independent trading partners developing friendly relations with the Brics, the rising powers of the world who are building a new multipolar world ... We will seek radical reform of the United Nations to empower it as genuine representative of the global community and help it to resist the domination of Washington, which only undermines its prestige and influence ...

In the point, 'Defence of the nation', we read:

The Workers Party of Britain is proud of our armed forces and its traditions. We recognise their willingness to give their lives for our country ... We will carry out a top-down review of the Royal Navy, army and airforce to ensure that their structures are lean and efficient. Any savings made from restructuring the leadership and administration of our armed forces will be spent on delivering weaponry and equipment for personnel on the front line.

Soldiers do not need trade union rights: they need the best weapons in the world!

Take away the issue of Palestine and there is, in my view, very little in the WPB *Manifesto* that Marxists can support. Yes, we called for a vote for Galloway in the Rochdale by-election, because at the height of the onslaught on Gaza his election was an important victory in solidarity with the Palestinians.

When it comes to the general election, however, things might look different. The WPB intends to stand 500 candidates - including against Labour lefts - because they cannot countenance backing anyone who would "put Keir Starmer into Downing Street", since he is "co-responsible for crimes against humanity."<sup>8</sup> So third period Bennism. Moral indignation substitutes for the united front politics of giving critical, or even, conditional support.

Unless the WPB is the only 'left' choice on the ballot paper, other candidates should be given priority, in my view ●

## Notes

1. Not the Andrew Marr Show May 5.
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3. www.youtube.com/watch?v=etgM5H62OLE.
4. www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28/enacted.
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6. workerspartybritain.org/ten-point-programme.
7. workerspartybritain.org/manifesto-britain-deserves-better.
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**RCP**

# Another sect is rebranded

Carl Collins looks at the factors behind the shift from clause four Fabianism to the Madison Avenue 'communist turn'

**“W**e resolve to found the Revolutionary Communist Party.”<sup>1</sup> So begins the draft document which was presented to the RCP's founding congress over the course of May 3-6. The remainder of its opening preamble highlights the inevitable attacks on the working class in the coming period and the claim that, due to the existing left being “organically incapable” of creating change, a “clean break” with the existing left is needed.

While the ‘communist turn’ of Socialist Appeal is, in general terms, to be welcomed, I aim to bring together some of the points raised in the pages of *Weekly Worker* over the last few weeks about the causes behind it. The ‘communist turn’ is based on three interconnected factors, all of which form the fundamental basis of the newly formed party, as evidenced by the agenda and draft document. These factors are:

- (1) an apparent shedding of the stigma around the term, ‘communism’ and how this is being ‘marketed’ by the RCP;
- (2) the complete failure of the Corbyn-leadership and the whole strategy of deep entryism;
- (3) a (problematic) analysis of the current period.

## Marketing

It may appear somewhat vulgar to place the first trend under the subheading of marketing. I am sure our comrades in the RCP would much prefer the terms, ‘financing’, ‘recruitment’ or ‘party building’. But a section following the draft document on the RCP website is itself entitled “Brand building”, with links to the RCP shop. This is undoubtedly looking to build on the very slick, professional, “Are you a communist?” material produced - with some success - during the recent campaign drive of the same name. As Mike Macnair has proposed in his article, ‘Repeating past failures’,<sup>2</sup> the extent of the success of that particular campaign should be caveated by certain relative factors.

One gets the impression that underneath the shiny new communist image being pushed by the RCP is a very clouded, old set of mistakes which have been made by other sects in the not-too-distant past. On changing Socialist Appeal's name, the leadership states:

‘Socialism’ has become increasingly bland and unappealing. For many, this word is associated with betrayal, and with the false hope of reforming capitalism, not overthrowing it.

We need to draw all the necessary conclusions from this. It has become increasingly apparent that a far bolder and clearer image is needed to take advantage of the radicalised mood in society.<sup>3</sup>

Whilst I happen to agree with the premise of this argument, no evidence seems to accompany this claim. And the use of the word “image” does little to persuade people that the change is anything more than a cosmetic change in the ‘branding’ of the organisation.

Furthermore, there appears to be only one obvious change in the actual programme of the newly formed ‘party’. Socialist Appeal's very *raison d'être* was to oppose ‘sectarianism’ - championing ‘clause four socialism’ and conducting their fight within the Labour Party,



Jan van Horst ‘Market scene’ 1550

viciously attacking the ‘erroneous’ nature of setting up parties opposed to and separate from the Labour Party. No evidence is provided as to when, how or why quantitative changes took place which need to be reflected in a change of approach. A cynic may argue it does seem to coincide with the Labour Party proscribing Socialist Appeal.<sup>4</sup>

Before the turn, Socialist Appeal had argued that the road to the masses was through the Labour Party and the trade unions. It claimed that in revolutionary periods the existing large parties gain as much, or more than, the small groups. Therefore, the old Grantite Militant Tendency - precursor to today's Socialist Party in England and Wales, as well as Socialist Appeal - represented itself as ‘Labour's Marxist wing’ and organised for Labour to be won for the left, with a left Labour government then winning a general election and bringing in socialism through acts of parliament. Militant grew considerably by the 1980s, but in 1991 the Grantites were expelled from Militant, with the Peter Taaffe wing seeking a short cut to membership growth, claiming that Labour had become just another capitalist party and forming what was later to be the Socialist Party of England and Wales.

The Grantites claimed to have been right in continuing their work in the Labour Party, with SPEW forced out to the fringes of the labour movement. Jeremy Corbyn's election as leader and the mushrooming of Labour's membership exposed SPEW's ‘theorisation’ as totally bankrupt and undoubtedly put wind in the sails of Socialist Appeal. In 2018 the Grantites launched a campaign for the restoration of the old Fabian clause 4 of the Labour Party rules. As recently as 2019 articles were published in *Socialist Appeal* calling for a continued fight within the Labour Party, calling those outside Labour as “sectarian”.<sup>5</sup>

The question then is whether Socialist Appeal's communist turn is a genuine move towards open communist political work or merely

a cynical rebranding exercise. If the former is the case, a serious debate about its change from deep entryism to independent ‘party building’ ought to have taken place openly, in public, in the press, in pamphlets, etc.

While the stigma surrounding the term ‘communism’ has lessened somewhat with the collapse of the Soviet Union and much of the ‘official communist’ movement, we should see in this not so much a ‘rebranding’ opportunity, but a challenge to go back and ruthlessly re-examine tired, old, failed, doctrines such as the Soviet Union being a ‘degenerated workers’ state, eastern Europe being ‘deformed’ workers’ states, the inevitability of political revolution and the impossibility of capitalist restoration. That would be the road of science. The same goes with the complete failure of the Corbyn leadership and the inability of the Labour left to rise above clause four socialism and the delusional nostrums of Keynesianism. Instead what we have with Socialist Appeal is a Madison Avenue turn, not Marxist turn.

## Youth

Much of the material produced by the RCP is aimed at the youth, particularly students. In addition to polls suggesting that positive notions about communism are increasing within this layer, the RCP's efforts to recruit from ‘fresh forces’ rests mainly on the newly found discovery of a ‘political vacuum’ on the existing left. With the accompanying analyses that we are “standing on the brink of the most tempestuous years ever faced by British capitalism” and that an open revolutionary crisis is imminent, there is a distinct danger that the RCP leadership is simply following the well-trodden path of the ‘sects’ they so often criticise.

A group of a few hundred reaches four figures, thanks to a phase of rapid recruitment, particularly among the youth. It then sheds all of its previous analysis of the principality of mass organisations and imagines it is on its way to

replacing them. It renames itself as a ‘party’ and focuses on ‘open recruitment’ (the RCP has set the target of every member recruiting at least one person in the next year). The rest of the left are studiously ignored (including those pushing the same sort of the ‘revolution is around the corner’ nonsense and boasting of ever more recruits). The probable outcome will be burn out, cynicism and the usual crop of hopeless splits, breakaways and broad frontist projects.

We have seen it before with Gerry Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party, Tony Cliff's Socialist Workers Party and Peter Taaffe's SPEW. The word ‘party’ is thereby rendered ridiculous. Instead of denoting *part of the class*, the leading party, the vanguard, which has deep social roots and is trusted by many millions of people, we have a plague of sects, each ignoring the others, but in reality desperately competing with them for the latest student influx.

The youth that is drawn to Socialist Appeal/RCP, with the promise of an imminent revolution, are at the moment focused on selling papers on campus, setting up tent cities on college greens, attending demos and studying the writings of Ted Grant, Alan Woods and Bob Sewell. Because they will also study a bit, or hopefully a lot, of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg, some may well survive the bureaucratic centralist regime and its associated personality cult around Grant and his chosen heir and successor.

The organisation run by Woods and co is by no means as ghastly as the Healyite WRP, the Cliffite SWP, let alone bonkers outfits such as James Robertson's Spartacist League and the various and many Marxist-Leninist ‘parties’. Members seem prepared to talk with others on the left ... and not only to denounce them with parrot phrases. Many seem capable of serious thinking ... so there is hope.

Finally, there is the third factor: perspectives. Mike Macnair

correctly identifies what the RCP is pushing as “official optimism”.<sup>6</sup>

selecting one-sidedly all the elements of the political dynamics which point towards a rapid leap forward of the revolutionaries, while excluding all those elements which tend either to slow down the process of development or to point in the direction of the victory of nationalist authoritarianism and war.

Such a mistake is widespread on the left, and not only with the Healyites, the Cliffites and the Taaffites. Capitalism is widely presented as being on the edge of collapse because of strikes, political scandal, economic downturn, global warming, even pandemics.

In addition, to the promise of ‘revolution tomorrow’ there is the completely delusional, but comforting, belief of the RCP emerging, as the Bolsheviks did, from a ‘tiny’ organisation to winning a Soviet majority, all in the course of a few months in 1917. Of course, the fact of the matter is that the Bolsheviks were a mass organisation from 1905 onwards. Beginning as the majority faction in the RSDLP in 1903 they won trade union and duma elections, their press was widely circulated ... and far from ignoring the rest of the left, the Bolsheviks were well known for their serious engagement, not least in joint conferences and congresses ... but also in polemics ●

## Notes

1. [communist.red/how-the-communists-in-britain-are-preparing-for-power](http://communist.red/how-the-communists-in-britain-are-preparing-for-power).
2. ‘Repeating past failures’ *Weekly Worker* March 28: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1484/repeating-past-failures](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1484/repeating-past-failures).
3. [communist.red/goodbye-socialist-appeal-the-communist-is-coming](http://communist.red/goodbye-socialist-appeal-the-communist-is-coming).
4. [labourlist.org/2021/07/labours-ruling-body-agrees-to-proscribe-socialist-appeal-and-three-other-groups](http://labourlist.org/2021/07/labours-ruling-body-agrees-to-proscribe-socialist-appeal-and-three-other-groups).
5. [communist.red/reject-the-blind-alley-of-sectarianism](http://communist.red/reject-the-blind-alley-of-sectarianism).
6. ‘Delusions of official optimism’ *Weekly Worker* March 21: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1483/delusions-of-official-optimism](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1483/delusions-of-official-optimism).



USA

# Egging on the mob

Republicans and Democrats alike brand anti-Zionism as anti-Semitism and unleash police and rightwing attacks. But, warns Daniel Lazare, a second-term Trump presidency will move to crush any opposition to Israel

Just when it seemed that US politics could not get any crazier, last week's over-the-top response to a growing anti-Zionist protest movement shows that things are getting even worse.

Hysteria took a quantum leap on Monday April 29, when Columbia University began handing out academic suspensions to students taking part in a pro-Gaza tent city and protestors took over Columbia's famed Hamilton Hall (scene of a similar takeover in 1968) in response. The university sent scores of riot police into the building, who arrested dozens of students.

A day later, Los Angeles police did the opposite, as a rightwing mob attacked a pro-Palestine encampment at the University of California (UCLA). The attackers blared the Israeli national anthem from a loudspeaker while hurling bottles and fireworks. "At times, [pro-Zionist] counter-protestors swarmed individuals," *The New York Times* reported. "They could be seen punching, kicking and attacking people with makeshift weapons, including sticks, traffic cones and wooden boards." Yet the cops merely stood by and watched for close to five hours. After analysing hundreds of videos, the *Times* said that virtually none "show any clear instance of encampment protestors initiating confrontations with counter-protestors beyond defending the barricades."<sup>1</sup>

The assault was thus utterly one-sided. On Wednesday May 1, the House of Representatives approved by more than three to one a bill that would endorse a definition of anti-Semitism formulated by the pro-Zionist International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and make it official US law. Backed by three dozen countries, including the US, UK, Ireland, France, Germany and Israel, the IHRA says that anti-Semitism includes:

- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
- Applying double standards by requiring of it a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
- Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination: eg, by claiming that the existence of a state of Israel is a racist endeavour.

These are all direct quotes. The first is a joke, since Nazi comparisons have long been a stock in trade among Israeli politicians. David Ben-Gurion once mocked Vladimir Jabotinsky, founder of the far-right Revisionist Zionist movement, as "Vladimir Hitler", for example, and described Menachem Begin, Jabotinsky's successor, as "a distinct Hitlerist type" in 1963. The left-leaning critic, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, famously denounced Israeli military intervention in Lebanon and the West Bank as "Judeo-Nazi", while opponents of the Oslo Accords paraded about with pictures of prime minister Yitzhak Rabin in an SS uniform.<sup>2</sup> (Rabin was assassinated by an anti-Oslo zealot in 1995.)

Does that make Ben-Gurion and Leibowitz anti-Semites? How about Albert Einstein, Hannah Arendt, Sidney Hook and other prominent



Columbia: newly reinstated Gaza encampment

Jewish intellectuals who signed a famous 1948 letter denouncing Revisionist Zionism as "closely akin in its organisation, methods, political philosophy and social appeal to the Nazi and fascist parties"<sup>3</sup> According to the IHRA and now the House, they are anti-Semites too.

The second example is absurd, since it is nothing more than an attempt to delegitimise criticism at a time when it is shooting through the roof. As for the third, Zionism has been riddled with anti-Arab racism from the start, as anyone familiar with its history will know. Theodor Herzl described the Jewish state as "a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilisation as opposed to barbarism". Ben-Gurion referred to the "wretched and degrading effect of the Arab heritage". Jewish socialists pointed out that anti-Arab "conquest-of-labour" campaigns mounted by Zionists in 1920s Palestine were all too similar to anti-Jewish boycotts that rightwing nationalists were launching throughout eastern Europe.

"How do we react when the reactionary chauvinists in Poland fight for their 'conquest of labour', meaning prevention of Jews working in Polish industrial and commercial enterprises?" one asked. "How do we respond to the 'conquest of labour' of the Romanians?"<sup>4</sup>

Yet mentioning such incidents may soon be *verboten*.

## Including Jews

May 1 also saw a Republican offensive led by Tom Cotton, an ex-army ranger who is now a far-right senator from the southern state of Arkansas. Two weeks after tweeting that "people who get stuck behind the pro-Hamas mobs" should "take matters into your own hands to get them out of the way", Cotton called a press conference to declare: "These little Gazas are disgusting cesspools of anti-Semitic hate full of pro-Hamas sympathisers, fanatics and freaks."<sup>5</sup>

"The line between protesting and rioting has been crossed time and time again," added John Cornyn, an equally ultra-right senator from Texas. "... Pro-Hamas rioters have taken over buildings [and] threatened Jewish students."

In fact, protestors - many of them Jewish - have been working overtime at keeping anything remotely smacking of anti-Semitism at bay. A video has gone viral of a young woman walking through a

pro-Palestinian protest at Yale with a white T-shirt bearing the words, "Israel" and "Jew". Strolling past three women holding up a banner reading, "Jews for a free Palestine", she shouted: "Look at my face. I am not afraid." Instead of the anti-Semitic abuse she clearly expected to provoke, she was ignored.<sup>6</sup>

May 2 saw more protests and more violence in response. At Dartmouth University, riot police slammed a 65-year-old professor named Annelise Orleck, a labour historian, to the ground. Orleck, who is Jewish, said she went to the rally in response to New Hampshire governor Chris Sununu saying of the protests: "one hundred percent, this is pure anti-Semitism, this is pure hatred".

"Leave our students alone. They're students. They're not criminals," Orleck said she told police. "The next thing I knew, I was rushed from the back."<sup>7</sup> After being arrested and barred from campus where she has taught for 34 years, she told a reporter, "My message is stop weaponising anti-Semitism."<sup>8</sup>

Biden gave a brief televised White House speech on May 2, in which he hinted that the protests were anti-Semitic without quite saying so. "Threatening people, intimidating people, instilling fear in people is not peaceful protest. It's against the law," he said - this just two days after peaceful pro-Palestinian protestors had to defend themselves against violence by the ultra-right. On May 3, finally, white students at the University of Mississippi - the same 'Ole Miss' that exploded in riots when a black man named James Meredith enrolled in 1962 - mobbed a small pro-Palestinian protest, shouting, "Lizzo! Lizzo!" and "Fuck you, bitch", and making animal noises at a black woman taking part.<sup>9</sup>

How did things get so crazy so fast? The reasons are many. America has a highly-developed tradition of street protest - in part because politics are so suffocating that it is the only way to let off steam.

There is also a specifically Jewish aspect. American Jews, well-represented at elite schools like Columbia, Yale and UCLA, are deeply divided between nationalism and anti-racism; between tribalists who believe in Israel right or wrong and leftists who recognise that their well-being depends on the strictest racial and ethnic equality. Highly politicised with regard to the Middle East, they feel duty-bound to speak

out against racist policies that Israel is implementing in their name.

But the real reason America is going bonkers is a perfect storm enveloping both imperial policy abroad and politics at home.

In the Middle East, the Biden administration thought it had a free hand to hammer out a Saudi-Israeli alliance, whose goal was to isolate Iran and bury the Palestinian problem for good, even as ethnic cleansing and anti-Palestinian pogroms continued to accelerate on the West Bank. With control of the Persian Gulf and its vast energy resources a top US priority, the White House had been especially nervous since March 2023, when China brokered a Saudi-Iranian rapprochement. Since the Biden administration saw it as a hostile intrusion onto US diplomatic turf, the purpose of the 'Abraham Accords' was to restore exclusive American control and prevent China or anyone else from butting in.

## Strategy

October 7 2023 turned that strategy upside down. Savage as Hamas's assault was, Israel's even worse response has not only shocked the world, but has put an end to anything resembling consensus back in the US. Led by Jewish organisations such as If Not Now and Jewish Voice for Peace, protests erupted within weeks, as thousands of demonstrators took over New York's Grand Central Station during rush hour and staged a sit-in in Washington.<sup>10</sup> Democrats were torn, as members of the party's liberal wing peeled off in support. Republicans had a field day slandering anti-Zionist protestors as anti-Semitic and slamming Dems as well for coddling demonstrators and failing to support a key ally.

Now history seems to be repeating itself, as anti-Zionist protestors vow to descend *en masse* on the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in August, as the party prepares to crown Biden as its official nominee. This is just what happened in 1968, when Chicago police used "Gestapo tactics" (to quote a liberal senator named Abraham Ribicoff) against protestors opposed to the nomination of another pro-war Democratic candidate - the now-forgotten Hubert Humphrey. Stunned and demoralised, Dems went on to lose the election to Richard Nixon. Party members are now beside themselves with terror that the same thing will happen again.

They may be right, thanks to Donald Trump's strengthening poll numbers. Nationwide, he is up a full point over Biden, while his lead in seven key battleground states ranges as high as 6.5%. These are all states that Trump lost in 2020, in some cases heavily, so his comeback is nothing if not impressive. Dems are meanwhile perplexed. After all, Trump was supposed to be behind bars by now, thanks to the party's 'lawfare' strategy. Yet, even though he is on trial for paying hush money to porn star Stormy Daniels - a nonsense case that amounts to little more than legal harassment - he still meets with enthusiastic crowds whenever he takes time off to campaign. Biden looks frail and infirm in comparison, as he searches for a Gaza ceasefire that somehow never comes.

A *Time Magazine* cover story

last week threw the Democratic predicament into stark relief. Based on interviews with Trump and his associates, it laid out his plans for a second term in shocking detail. Among his promises:

- Use the military to round up more than 11 million illegal immigrants and place them in detention camps before booting them out.
- Allow Republican states to monitor pregnant women and prosecute violations of local abortion bans.
- Order federal prosecutors to go after specific targets and fire them if they refuse.
- Pardon hundreds of January 6 insurrectionists.
- Gut the civil service, send troops to patrol inner cities, and fill the federal government with true-blue believers that the 2020 election was stolen.<sup>11</sup>

In short, it is a blueprint for Mussolini mark 2 that Democrats are unable to resist. Trump has also been hitting the party hard on the anti-Gaza protests. On May 6, he slammed Columbia for cancelling its graduation ceremony, blamed Biden donors for backing the protests, and warned Israel to take notice: "OK, are you listening, Israel? I hope you're listening, Israel. Hope you're getting smart."

A newly-released campaign video lays it all out. In it, Trump declares:

This is my pledge to you. We will confront anti-Semitism, we will stamp out prejudice, we will condemn hatred, we will bear witness, and we will act. When I get back into office, I will put every single university and college president on notice. The American taxpayer will not subsidise the creation of terrorist sympathisers on American soil. I will defend our friend and ally, the state of Israel, like nobody has ever defended it before.<sup>12</sup>

Where Nixon - however phony - at least ran as a peace candidate in 1968, Trump could not be more pro-war.

The political implications are clear: if elected, the result will be stepped-up political repression, as a second Trump administration moves to crush any and all opposition to American policies in the Middle East ●

## Notes

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## GERMANY



Sahra Wagenknecht: claims inspiration from Rosa Luxemburg

# Interview with an opportunist

Sahra Wagenknecht offers no real alternative to global capital, argues Paul Demarty. But moralism is no response

The latest edition of *New Left Review* carries an interview with Sahra Wagenknecht by Thomas Meaney and Joshua Rahtz. (Wagenknecht, of course, heads a German left formation that bears her own name - the Alliance Sahra Wagenknecht - for Reason and Justice).

Since the interview was announced a day or two before publication, there immediately commenced a Twitter-storm of the old school (it is almost cheering to see that ailing platform still capable of driving a cycle of leftwing controversy). The two sides may be readily anticipated: there were those horrified that such an individual should be given space in this strangely invincible journal, and there were those who mocked the outrage as an outburst of exactly the purism that Wagenknecht denounces. At this point, of course, nobody had read the interview; indeed, it was not clear from the announcement that it was even an interview, rather than a kind of op-ed by this strangely divisive figure.

For an example of the kind of outrage on offer, we turn to Daniela Gabor, a leftist activist and Bristol-based economics professor associated with the heterodox economics movement, who declared:

So let's get this straight: at this historical juncture, Perry Anderson is courting red-brown (German) reactionaries, while Adam Tooze is in the street defending students. Who's running with the hare and hunting with the hounds now?<sup>1</sup>

Tooze, readers may be aware, is a left-liberal academic historian with some following outside academe, who teaches at Columbia University and has, as Gabor notes, acquitted himself well in all the recent excitement on his campus. (He was also, in his youth, a Socialist Workers Party member, and spoke at last year's Marxism festival, apparently out of an intellectual debt to Alex Callinicos.) The "running with the hare" quip appears to be a reference to Anderson's critical review of

Tooze's *Crashed*, a history of the 2008 crisis and its aftermath, which used that archaic idiom to question how far Tooze's avowed liberalism could truly get a handle on the events he described.<sup>2</sup>

I think I liked the book more than Anderson did, and heartily recommend it; but Anderson's central criticism - that Tooze fails to really account for US hegemony in his scathing picture of the EU's (and especially Germany's) failures during the crisis - seems fair. Tooze's conclusion is, crudely, that the Germans fucked it up, and the Americans did not, and that this was in the end more a matter of policy choices than the world system.

So far as I can tell, as a moderately observant Tooze-watcher, the sage of Columbia has not yet commented on the strange political career of Wagenknecht, despite his expertise in German politics as a long-time resident of that country. Yet, if he was right that the Germans had essentially the same options available as the Americans in 2008-12, she would be an interesting figure to consider: a popular politician prepared to realign Germany internationally in the interests of a workable industrial policy. Fifteen years later, is she the counterfactual to Merkel come true?

## Pitch

The *NLR* interview allows her to describe her political pitch at length to an Anglophone audience. At the core of it, by her telling, is the fate of the *Mittelstand* (medium-sized enterprises). Germany's industrial power is based on such firms, who often feed the marquee names of German industry with machine tools, parts and so forth. They are to be distinguished from those larger firms, both internationally and domestically headquartered, by

their own sort of business culture, focused on the longer term, the next generation, rather than quarterly returns. They're embedded in their local communities, often doing business-to-business trading. They want to retain their workers, instead of exploiting

every loophole, like the big corporations.<sup>3</sup>

This peculiar *Mittelstand* is under threat in multiple dimensions. In particular, there is the soaring cost of energy, which is slowly bearing fruit in the form of layoffs and business closures. That she blames, fairly, on the costs of the war in Ukraine, which she correctly identifies as a proxy war driven by the United States; but also on the insistence of the Green Party on inflicting the costs of transitioning away from fossil fuels on the lower orders. She gets some pushback from her interviewers on the green question, and replies:

We need extensive public provision for the immediate consequences of climate change, from city planning to forestry, from agriculture to public transport. This will be expensive. We prefer public expenditures for the mitigation of climate change ... [But] nobody now alive will live to see average temperatures going down again, regardless of how much we reduce carbon emissions. First equip homes for the elderly and hospitals and childcare centres with air conditioning at public expense, and make places close to rivers and streams safe against flooding. Make sure that the costs of pursuing ambitious emissions-reduction deadlines are not imposed on ordinary people who already have a hard time making ends meet.

This stuff is familiar from other unorthodox green-sceptical leftist writers (see, for example, Thomas Fazi in an article for *Unherd* last year<sup>4</sup>). But not only writers: see the pinkish-wave government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) in Mexico, with its programme of extending oil drilling as a form of economic stimulus - and for that matter the Scottish government's abandonment of net-zero targets, which occasioned the split between the Nats and the Greens and thereby the fall of Humza Yousaf.

This is not the stuff that Gabor (and innumerable less notable commentators) have in mind when they call Wagenknecht 'red-brown', of course, though admittedly neither of those colours are green. It is, instead, her willingness, on the one hand, to adopt an explicit policy of managed and reduced inward migration and, on the other, her scorn for the particular pieties of identity politics (Gabor, as a migrant in Britain, is more concerned with that question, and links the *NLR*'s "platforming" of Wagenknecht to the follies of the Lexiteers in 2016; other critics are more concerned with the identity issues).

Her answer on the migration question is largely practical: the German welfare state has been ground down by years of government neglect; there is a considerable housing shortage and, so long as this remains the case, it will be necessary to restrict incomers. It simply does not bear analysis that huge waves of immigration stemming from imperialist misadventures can have no effect on the overall pressure on essential services. So it goes. She *does* also hint at "cultural" problems with mass migration, attributing to some of her *Bundestag* colleagues the view that they "are happy to live in a country that has by and large overcome patriarchy and they don't want to see it being reintroduced through the back door" - by Muslims, one assumes (or who else?). She has little enough to say about the identity "discourse", as she puts it, except that it is a fetish of the political class

that is alienating to voters.

Towards the end of the interview, she is given the opportunity to comment on her own political history. We quote her at length:

Rosa Luxemburg has always been an important figure for me, her letters, in particular; I could identify with her. Thomas Mann, of course, certainly influenced and impressed me ... Marx used to be a major influence on me and I still find his analyses of capitalist crises and property relations very useful. I'm not in favour of total nationalisation or central planning, but I'm interested in exploring third options, between private property and state ownership - foundations or stewardships, for example, that prevent a firm from being plundered by shareholders ...

I've held key positions in the [Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus] and Die Linke. I've been a member of the Bundestag since 2009 and was co-chair of Die Linke's parliamentary group from 2015 to 2019. But I would say that I've remained true to the goals for which I entered politics in the first place. We need a different economic system that puts people at the centre, not profit ... I'm on the road a lot and, wherever I go, I sense there are many people who no longer feel represented by any of the parties. There is a huge political void. That leads to people getting angry - it's not good for a democracy.

## Communist University

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This is an oddly partial memoir. After all, she was known in the PDS - the inheritor party of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, which ruled the former German Democratic Republic - as an old-fashioned hardliner. She describes being "changed ... a bit" by encountering real voters on the road, but leaves out of view her conversion from old-line Stalinism to - whatever this is. Perhaps there exist letters of Rosa Luxemburg - one of the communist movement's more astringent critics of nationalism and tailoring one's message to the 'man in the street' - where she says the exact opposite; I am no expert.

## Not alone

The interest of Wagenknecht's comments to Anglophone readers, of course, is that she is hardly alone. In Britain, we have George Galloway's Workers Party, which takes a red, white and blue logo, and pursues much the same programme of national economic rebuilding, coupled to managed migration and law-and-order social policies as Wagenknecht's eponymous party in Germany.

In the US, the two-party system is even more restrictive of alternatives than in Britain, but we have nonetheless got a clutch of Republican politicians - among them senators JD Vance and Josh Hawley - who pursue at least cosmetically pro-labour policies, and a wider intellectual milieu that enables them, encompassing for example publications like *Compact* and *American Affairs* (the American version, typically, is much more overtly rightwing). Third-world state-building is very much of interest to such people, and *Compact* is for example quite enamoured of the AMLO government in Mexico, despite its enthusiasm for punishing border policies in the US.

There is, it seems, a strange complicity between Wagenknecht and her identitarian critics on one point. Extremely vague hand-waves towards Luxemburg are common enough among those who fancy themselves as Marxist-feminists in this day and age; the visceral hostility of Luxemburg and other prominent Marxist women of her day towards, at least, the feminism they knew remains a discreet embarrassment.

For both, Luxemburg barely exists as a *political* figure, with all her strengths and weaknesses and historical peculiarities. She is instead a kind of saint, on which one may project whatever concerns one wishes.

Among both the 'conservative left' and the identitarian left, there is a commonality of origin - at least among those who come upon it from more traditional socialist outlooks, as Wagenknecht did. (The conservatives, and the radical liberals, who meet them halfway, tend to have the virtue of honesty.) There is a search for the path not taken, and an inability to settle accounts with former views. Above all, there is a salutary recognition that conventional socialist leftism has not exactly covered itself in glory, leading to a less than salutary effort to find something to graft onto it that will redeem the package. Among those who turned to identitarianism, there is the view that picking up on particular struggles of identity groups will get us the breakthrough; among the conservatives the exact reverse. Both make their judgments on the basis of what is popular *now*, differing mainly on the particular constituencies in which popularity is to be sought.

In this respect, Wagenknecht is at least true to her recent history in Die Linke, one of the marquee names of the new European left that rose to prominence between, roughly, 2005 and 2015; others include Syriza in Greece, La France Insoumise and Podemos in Spain. (In the interview, Wagenknecht also mentions Italy's Movimento 5 Stelle, or M5S - a more ambiguous case.) In all cases, these movements were characterised by a search for immediate popularity, often couched in the form of pseudo-Gramscian meditations on the pursuit of hegemony.

Podemos was perhaps the paradigmatic case, set up by followers of Ernesto Laclau after spontaneous revolts against the fiscal punishment beatings so ably recounted in Tooze's book. It was clear from day one that for all its jeremiads against *la casta* - 'the caste', Podemos-speak for the political mainstream - it would join any coalition that would have them, as indeed it did in due course. Well-meaning leftists abroad, who would not renege on any of the identitarian commitments now cited against

Wagenknecht, supported such a policy, and indeed all of the above organisations.

The problem was that there was precisely no reason why such a political approach (rabble-rousing populism) should *not* lead to, especially, anti-migrant policy. Indeed, in the case of M5S, it did very rapidly, and this party ended up governing in coalition with the far right in short order. Yet other, less dramatic, examples are available. Bernie Sanders famously called open borders "a Koch brothers policy". Oskar Lafontaine, one of the founders of Die Linke, held to a restrictive immigration policy (and he came from the *other* founding section of the party to Wagenknecht).

After all, the sorts of arguments made by Wagenknecht are not *entirely* meritless: huge movements of people from one place to another are rarely good in themselves, normally betokening some disaster - military, economic or environmental - that has set them on the move. Those who migrate often do end up competing for (artificially) scarce resources. To actually solve these problems would require political action on an international scale; but both identitarian-liberal and 'conservative left' opportunism limit themselves to a national horizon of action. The identitarians can only offer a moral injunction to abjure migration scaremongering, vulnerable to the hard-headed 'realism' of their adversaries.

The 'conservative left' simply joins the adversaries, which tends to exacerbate the problem over time, by leaning into the 'beggar thy neighbour' politics of the state system. Wagenknecht's plan for this is to withdraw from great-power competition and make friends with everyone, but that assumes that 'everyone' will be happy with such an arrangement. As Mike Tyson famously said, "everyone's got a plan until they get punched in the face".

Those who consider the *NLR* interview to cross some important line are, in the end, simply not familiar enough with the journal's history. After all, its *modus operandi* has always been this sub-Gramscian hegemony-mongering in thin air. I remember Alex Callinicos snarkily rejecting the tendency of Anderson to view himself as "*generalissimo* of the class struggle" - in context, it was a disreputable and indirect attack on factional opponents within the Socialist Workers Party, but he had a point. *NLR* has always been composed of *generalissimi* without armies, and its great theoretical inheritance is the hypothesis - the so-called Naim-Anderson thesis, after Anderson and colleague Tom Naim - that the failure to complete the bourgeois revolution in Britain entailed its breakup along national lines, consequently auguring support especially for Scottish nationalism. Why not German nationalism too? Perhaps there is a grand 'Gramscian' theory to tell us why 'this time it's different'.

## Shell game

In any case, the moral argument for open borders is necessary, but not sufficient. There is the more fundamental question of class interests - specifically the interest of the proletariat in the *maximum unity in action* of the whole class. Policies that set native against migrant workers are dangerous, because they appeal to quite real short-term interests on the part of native workers, but cannot in fact deliver the improvements they promise, since it is flatly not the case that legal restrictions prevent the employment of migrant labour, but merely reduce the associated labour costs

and therefore *worsen* downward pressure.

Sanders was wrong to call open borders a Koch brothers policy, and Wagenknecht is wrong to call it "neoliberal" in the *NLR*. The Koch-neoliberal policy is rather to play a shell game - reactionary parties promise atomised native workers immigration restrictions, and 'progressive' bourgeois parties promise migrant workers and their sympathisers free movement. Actually delivered - by the alternation in government of both - is a restricted migration regime that offers the facsimile of cosmopolitanism in the great cities, but fundamentally allows labour costs to be driven down across the board, exacerbating popular resentment and introducing ever greater dysfunction to domestic politics.

To break out of the shell game, however, means abandoning the worship of short-term popularity. There are real common interests between native and migrant workers, but these interests are obscure in a situation where these workers *really are* thrown into competition with each other. The missing ingredient here is deep political organisation. The socialist movement of the early 20th century faced similar challenges from those who wanted to support immigration controls, and successfully fought at congresses of the international movement to take a different course. But it could only do so because there *was* an international movement that represented serious forces in enough countries that the general interest could prevail. It is precisely this which we lack; and the lack of it frames the ease with which Wagenknecht, Galloway and (God help us) JD Vance can argue for their politics.

To take a communist position in such debates means registering that lack, and fighting above all to overcome it - because it is *that* which we lack: an international and internationalist communist movement, not the correct momentary policy to interest atomised voters, as they are presently constituted. Movement towards the desired outcome is no small matter; there is therefore a kind of sense in trying instead to build more just societies within national frameworks, and that is part of communist politics as well, so far as it can be achieved. The record of parties like Die Linke, Syriza, Podemos and the like should immunise us against any fantasy that it is easily done. Reactionary remixes of those more 'progressive' outfits will fail for the same reasons (as did the M5S).

The capitalist class is an international class, and always has been. This is precisely what Tooze fails to truly grapple with in *Crashed*; but it is also what Wagenknecht avoids in her encomia to the *Mittelstand* firms and their stabilising role in German society. She acknowledges, to some extent, that they are subordinated to the great German and international concerns, but fails to draw the conclusion: the bourgeoisie's only viable adversary is the other international class - the proletariat, *insofar as* it understands its position and its destiny.

Nationalist and identitarian forms of sectionalism alike constitute obstacles to this understanding ●

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## Notes

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# What we fight for

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question—ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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## Fighting fund

# Keep it up!

With, as I write, almost a exactly one quarter of the month gone, I can reveal that we are also pretty close to a quarter way to that £2,250 target for the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund!

Let's start with those standing orders/bank transfers. First there was comrade AC with his excellent £100, followed by BO (£35), MM (£31), CG and NH (£30 each), RG, GD, NR and DV, who each came up with their usual £25, plus AM (£15), IS, SM, CP and LG (£10 each).

Then there is comrade SO, who has just set up a brilliant monthly PayPal donation of £50! He writes: "I am a fairly recent new reader of the *Weekly Worker*, but I have been impressed with the level of analysis" and the "pretty much constant debate going on in the letters pages".

He adds: "Given the recent challenges with printing, etc, and the amount of use I have made of the *WW/Leninist* archives, it

felt necessary to make a monthly contribution" to a paper and "its project", which constitute "a vital intervention in the wider left". It's good to know the work we do is so much appreciated, comrade!

Other PayPal donors were SO (£50), GW and MH (£10) and KA (£5), while comrade Hassan handed his usual fiver to one of our team and another appreciative (but unnamed!) comrade gave our editor £3.

All that came to £454, taking our running total up to £580, with just eight days of the month gone. In other words, we are indeed on track, but we need to keep up the momentum and make sure we get there! ●

Robbie Rix

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# weekly worker

## Profitability is being squeezed

## Monetarism and its discontents

Most mainstream economists still imagine that high interest rates are the most effective way to fight inflation. **Michael Roberts** begs to differ. Inflation is less a demand, more a supply issue

Once again the US Federal Reserve is in a quandary. Does it cut its policy interest rate soon, in order to relieve pressure on debt servicing costs for consumers and businesses, and perhaps avoid a 'stagflationary' economy (ie, low or no growth, alongside higher inflation)? Or does it hold its current interest rate for borrowing, in order to make sure inflation falls towards its target of 2% a year?

That is what mainstream economists and investors in financial assets want an answer to. But it is not really the important issue. What the Fed's current quandary really shows is that yet again 'monetary policy' (ie, central banks adjusting interest rates and money supply) has little effect on controlling inflation in the prices of goods and services that households and businesses must pay.

Central bankers and mainstream economists continue to argue that monetary policy *does* make a difference to inflation rates. But the evidence is to the contrary. Monetary policy supposedly manages 'aggregate demand' in an economy by making it more or less expensive to borrow to spend (whether as consumption or investment).

However, the experience of the recent inflationary spike since the end of the pandemic slump in 2020 is clear. Inflation went up because of weakened and blocked supply chains, and the slow recovery in manufacturing production, not because of 'excessive demand', caused by either a government spending binge or 'excessive' wage rises (or both). And inflation started to subside as soon as the energy and food shortages and prices ebbed, global supply chain blockages were reduced and production began to pick up.

I will not go over the past evidence that inflation was supply-driven, not demand-led, which is overwhelming.<sup>1</sup> But this meant that central bank monetary policy could take little credit for reducing inflation rates.<sup>2</sup> And here is the rub: they are beginning to creep back up again - particularly in the US, where core inflation (which actually excludes food and energy prices) is now rising at over 4% a year on a three-month rolling average.

The reasons for this are twofold. First, food and energy prices have started to rise again. Oil prices have picked up, as the Houthis attack shipping in the Red Sea and Israel extends the war in Gaza towards Iran. And a key raw material for industry - copper - is in short supply and now has a record price.

### Quandary

The Fed is in a quandary and mainstream economists have been forced again to reconsider the efficacy of monetarism - the theory that inflation is caused by excessive money supply growth over output. Central banks have been squeezing money supply growth, supposedly to reduce inflation. But mainstream voices are showing uncertainty.



Germany 1920s: worthless banknotes used as wallpaper

On May 1 the *Financial Times* published an article headed 'The limits of what high interest rates can now achieve', in which it commented: "We need to be realistic about what monetary policy can and cannot do."<sup>3</sup> The article admits that

the effectiveness of monetary policy also depends on the structural economic drivers around it. After all, the era of benign inflation before the financial crisis was bolstered by elastic production and energy supplies. Looking ahead, using rates with unreliable lags to influence demand is a recipe for volatility, as supply shocks from regionalisation, geopolitics and less supportive demographics continue - unless there are offsetting productivity gains.

The article concludes that "Fiscal and supply-side policy must get greater emphasis in the price stability debate. After all, a faulty faucet is even more useless if the plumbing has gone awry."

Nevertheless, the article continued to claim that the monetary policy of the Fed and other central banks had helped to get inflation down. It cited various papers for this claim from the Bank for International Settlements and the Bank of England. But, when you go to those sources, the evidence again is to the contrary. Take the Bank of England paper quoted: it concludes:

UK inflation in 2021 is explained by shortages and energy price shocks, and in 2022 and 2023 also by food price shocks and labour market tightness. Inflation expectations have been more well-anchored than predicted by the model. Conditional projections suggest UK inflation will fall sharply in 2023 from disinflationary energy and food price effects, but the decline will slow markedly thereafter.<sup>4</sup>

Not much to do with 'excessive demand' then.

Even the 'home of monetarism', the Bank for International Settlements, is less than convincing in claiming that inflation was due

to excessive money supply or even excessive demand. The BIS paper focuses its attention not on the initial causes of the inflationary spike, but on the likelihood that inflation will be "sticky" and not come down much because of the risk of workers taking advantage of "tight" labour markets to boost wages.<sup>5</sup> The BIS is more worried about the hit to the profitability of companies than the fact that workers' wages are still trying to catch up with a more than 20% rise in average prices since the end of the pandemic: "... in tighter markets, there is a greater likelihood that bargaining power will shift in favour of workers and the 'pass-through' between wages and prices will gain strength." Oh dear. But even the BIS admits that "adverse demographic trends and pandemic-related preference shifts on the supply side can go a long way in explaining these dynamics".

The final mainstream argument concerns inflation expectations. You see, households and even companies expect inflation to accelerate, so households buy more and companies hike prices more, achieving even higher inflation. But the 'expectations theory' is no theory at all. It can only operate if inflation is already rising and so cannot explain the initial spike, which is why expectations theory has been debunked as an explanation for rising inflation.<sup>6</sup> And now, with falling inflation, the evidence for this 'theory' remains weak.

Allianz Research has disaggregated the nine-percentage point drop in America's quarterly annualised inflation since the second quarter of 2022, using regression analysis. It found 5.5 percentage points of the drop was driven by supply-chain snags simply unwinding - around 60% of the decline. But AR reckons that 2.7 percentage points of the 9% fall was "due to the Federal Reserve's signalling, which helped to re-anchor inflation expectations". I leave you to work out what you make of the idea of "signalling". Another 2.2 percentage points came from the impact of higher rates squeezing demand, which was needed to counteract the inflationary impact of supportive fiscal policy and labour

shortages. Even if you accept this analysis, it means that 60%-80% of the decline in US inflation since the middle of 2022 was due to supply-side factors.

And that brings us to the 'stickiness' of inflation. Which components of the inflation index have not fallen despite central bank rate hikes? The answer is housing costs and motor car insurance, which have risen sharply. As the *FT* article admits,

Both are partly a product of pandemic supply shocks - reduced construction and a shortage of vehicle parts - that are still percolating through the supply chain. Indeed, dearer car insurance now is a product of past cost pressures in vehicles. Demand is not the central problem; there is little high rates can do.

The *FT* article concludes:

Either way, monetary policy is a catchall tool. It cannot control demand in a quick, linear or targeted manner. Other measures need to pick up the slack. Estimates suggest supply factors - which rates have little influence over - are now contributing more to US core inflation than demand.

Well, actually throughout this inflation rise and fall, it has been supply that has been the main driver.

### Pessimism

Where to now? The risk is that the US economy could slow down towards stagnation in output, while inflation stays "sticky" because of a new rise in commodity prices. The US economy ended last year growing in real terms (ie, after accounting for inflation) at an annual rate of 3.4%. This was greeted with euphoria by the mainstream and the financial media: "The US economy is performing very well ... We're truly the envy of the world," said one 'econforecaster', James Smith. But then in the first quarter of 2024, that annual rate in gross domestic product growth slowed to 1.6% - the slowest since the first half of 2022.

Moreover, the latest economic activity surveys ('PMIs') for the US make dismal reading. Any level below 50 indicates a contraction, but in April the PMIs for both the US manufacturing and services sectors were below 50 for the first time together.

Also, the jobs market is beginning to look frailer. Sure, the official US unemployment rate is still below 4%, but job hiring by US companies is dropping off, particularly among small firms, as the National Federation of Independent Businesses survey of hiring intentions shows - which seems a good forward indicator of jobs growth.

Indeed employees are now more reluctant to try to switch jobs, in case they do not get another - indeed, over the past two years, most new jobs have been part time, while full-

time employment (that always pays better and with better conditions) has stagnated.

High interest rates, as set by the Fed and other central banks, are not controlling inflation. Instead, they are raising debt servicing costs for particularly small companies, just as corporate revenue growth also slows.<sup>7</sup> Profitability is thus being squeezed - except for the mega 'Magnificent Seven' companies.

The 'excess savings' that households built up during the pandemic lockdowns appear to have been exhausted, while confidence to spend among American households has fallen to its lowest level in almost two years, as Americans become more pessimistic about future economic conditions.

In November 2023 former New York Fed chief William Dudley commented: "Does the unemployment rate have to rise to 4.25%-4.5% for the Fed to achieve their 'final mile' on getting inflation back down to two percent? If you think it does, then a hard landing is highly likely." Claudia Sahm, another former Fed economist, reckons that if the unemployment rate runs some 0.5 percentage points above the bottom for three months, it is a very strong indicator of a recession in output.<sup>8</sup> Currently, this Sahm indicator is now 0.36 percentage points above the lowest such reading for the previous 12 months. So not yet at the 'recession' threshold, but closing in.

Much of the recent growth in the US economy has been achieved by large increases in immigration.<sup>9</sup> But, from here, the US economy will only avoid stagnation if productivity growth picks up. Moreover, what will keep inflation down would be a rise in output per worker per hour: ie, an increase in new value. Up to now, US productivity growth in the 2020s has remained relatively moderate.

The hope is that AI will bring about a 'productivity revolution' - setting the US economy on the road to a roaring 2020s, where real GDP grows faster than the long-term average, while inflation stays low.

At the moment, the *opposite* looks more likely ●

Michael Roberts blogs at [thenextrecession.wordpress.com](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com)

### Notes

1. See my article at [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2023/04/27/inflation-causes-and-solution](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2023/04/27/inflation-causes-and-solution).
2. [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2022/10/28/the-inflation-conundrum](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2022/10/28/the-inflation-conundrum).
3. [www.ft.com/content/a1866907-6b83-4493-91ca-91b04c60d1b7](https://www.ft.com/content/a1866907-6b83-4493-91ca-91b04c60d1b7).
4. [www.bankofengland.co.uk/-/media/boe/files/speech/2023/november/recent-uk-inflation-an-application-of-the-bernanke-blanchard-model-paper.pdf](https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/-/media/boe/files/speech/2023/november/recent-uk-inflation-an-application-of-the-bernanke-blanchard-model-paper.pdf).
5. [www.bis.org/publ/qtrpdf/r\\_qt2312f.pdf](https://www.bis.org/publ/qtrpdf/r_qt2312f.pdf).
6. See [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2022/04/18/the-inflation-debate](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2022/04/18/the-inflation-debate).
7. As previously argued. See [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/03/18/profits-margins-and-rates](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/03/18/profits-margins-and-rates).
8. See [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2023/11/12/from-a-sahm-recession-to-global-downturn](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2023/11/12/from-a-sahm-recession-to-global-downturn).
9. [thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/03/13/us-economy-saved-by-immigrants](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/03/13/us-economy-saved-by-immigrants).